Gendered ritual and performative literacy : Yao Women, goddesses of fertility, and the Chinese imperial state

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Gendered Ritual and Performative Literacy

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Chapter 1. Introduction: Gendering Yao Ritual Tradition

This research presents a number of Yao perspectives, especially those embodied in their ritual tradition, in their historical experiences of encountering the others; above all, a powerful Other, the successive Chinese imperial states.[1] Nowadays the Yao are one of the fifty-six nationalities officially recognized by the communist Chinese state since the 1950s. The majority of their population lives in the mountainous areas of South China.[2] As are many ritual traditions of non-Han Chinese people in South China, Yao ritual tradition has been regarded as a hybrid tradition composed of many Daoist, Buddhist, even Confucian ritual and cultural elements, that have become intermingled with indigenous beliefs and practices.[1] Since the 1980s, their highly Daoism-laden ordination ceremony and their ritual manuscripts written in Chinese have often been singled out to use to support scholarly discussions about Yao sinification.[3] The imperial Chinese state expansion into South China that began in the Song (960-1279 AD) has been argued to have been the major facilitating force in the Yao's conversion to Daoism and their subsequent sinification.[4] In this sense, the Daoist-imperial religious and ritual heritage can be considered to have been a 'civilizing project' whose aim was to bring the Yao closer to the centre of Chinese state civilization.[5] The goal of this research is to make the discourse of Yao

[1] In this research, I use the capitalized Other to specifically refer to the Chinese imperial states.

[2] Yao are also resident in some Southeast Asian countries and in American and European countries. More details see Chapter 2.

[3] Jacques Lemoine, *Yao Ceremonial Paintings* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1982). Hu Qiwang, 'Lun yaochuan daojiao' 論瑤傳道教 (A Discussion of Yao Daoism), *Yunnan shehui kexue* (雲南社會科學 Social Sciences in Yunnan), 1 (1994), 61-69. Guo Dalie *et al*. (eds), *Yao wenhua yanjiu* 瑤文化研究 (A Study of Yao Culture), 100. Guo Wu, *Daojiao yu Yunnan wenhua: Daojiao zai Yunnan de chuanbo, yanbian ji yingxiang* 道教與雲南文化—道教在雲南的傳播、演變及影響 (Daoism and Yunnan Culture: The Diffusion, Transformation and Influence of Daoism in Yunnan), 228-233. Xu Zuxiang, *Yaozu de zongjiao yu shehui: yaozu daojiao jiqiyu Yunnan yaozu guanxi yanjiu* 瑤族的宗教與社會：瑤族道教及其與雲南瑤族關係研究 (The Religion and Society of the Yao: Yao Daoism and its Influence on the Yao in Yunnan).

[4] Michel Strickmann, 'The Tao among the Yao: Taoism and the Sinification of South China', in *Rekishi ni okeru minshû to bunka-Sakai Tadao sensei koki jukuga kinen ronshû* 歷史における民衆と文化 ― 酒井忠夫先生古稀祝賀記念論集 (Peoples and Cultures in Asiatic History: Collected Essays in Honour of Professor Tadao Sakai on His Seventieth Birthday), 23-30 at 27-28.

[5] Here, I adopt Stevan Harrell's definition of a 'civilizing project'. By 'civilizing project', Harrell means 'a kind of interaction between people, in which one group, the civilizing center, interacts with other groups (the peripheral peoples) in terms of a particular kind of inequality', as 'inequality' refers

sinification initially more abstruse but eventually more unambiguous by adding a gender dimension to the understanding of Yao ritual tradition.

Yao Daoist ordination is a ceremony whose performance bestows the qualification of a ritual specialist on a Yao man. There is no equivalent ordination ceremony specifically held for Yao women. Women can only participate in the ordination in which their husbands are the participant ordinands. By undergoing ordination, a Yao man is entitled not only to the privilege of assuming the role of a ritual specialist, he is also able to access both the repertoire of Yao ritual knowledge and Chinese literacy. In other words, Yao men are born with the right to gain access to the ritual world and are also encouraged to acquire Chinese literacy. However, the privileges accruing from ordination can be conferred on women only through marriage and they are not granted accessibility to either the ritual repertoire or Chinese literacy. This palpable gender difference in the Yao people's experience of 'being sinicised' and its social consequences is an issue that has rarely been touched upon in previous discussions of Yao religion. The gendering of Yao ritual tradition elucidates the ways in which the specific gender ideologies are articulated and how male-female relationships are formed in the Yao religious domain. Moreover, it reveals why these are significant to the enrichment of our understanding of the historical experiences the Yao have undergone in their encounter with imperial Chinese state incorporation.

Cogently, the research also highlights the positions of women in the Yao ritual tradition and their importance to the Yao's reactions to their incorporation into the dominant imperial Chinese state and the subsequent Han-Chinese cultural intervention. At face value, the position of Yao women has seemed very marginalized compared with that exercised in other ethnic groups in South China, Han Chinese included; neither a women-centred religious group nor female ritual practitioners are a feature of contemporary Yao communities.[6] The beliefs supporting taboos connected

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to 'the ideological basis in the center's claim to a superior degree of civilization, along with a commitment to raise the peripheral peoples' civilization to the level of the center, or at least closer to that level.' See Stevan Harrell, 'Introduction: Civilizing Projects and the Reaction to Them', in Stevan Harrell (ed.), *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 3-36 at 4.

[6] To name just a few, the three cases compared include a Han Chinese community in southern Taiwan and two non-Han Chinese peoples, the Zhuang in Guangxi and the Bai in Yunnan, respectively. See

to female menstruation, although by no means a culturally-specific phenomenon, have been appropriated to delegitimize Yao women's physicality in assuming leading positions in the religious domain.[7] To examine the way the Yao think about female fertility, apart from the female pollution beliefs, the researcher has undertaken textual analyses of ritual manuscripts referring to female fertility deities and from these sources has interpreted the implications of the ritual performances of female singing related to courtship and marriage.

This examination of the gendering of the Yao ritual tradition has been approached in three ways. Firstly, I illustrate a complex of factors that has contributed to a strong presence of patrilineal ideology and male-domination in Yao religion. This work has revealed how gender has been defined predominantly on a biological basis. Secondly, I have looked into how persons are gendered through the agency of ritual in different phases of their life cycles. This investigation indicates a complementary yet competing relationship between men and women, centered on fertility. Thirdly, I have explored the cultural and ritual significance of 'singing' and its special references to womanhood. These three points have led me to form the premise that, in the past, the Yao constructed a collective reflection of the consequences of imperial Chinese state governance, imposed in the form of patrilineal ideology and a lineage society, through the positions of women.

Cai Pei-ru, *Chuansuo tianren zhiji de nüren: Nütongji de xingbie tezhi yu shenti yihan* 穿梭天人之際的女人：女童乩的性別特質與身體意涵 (The Women Who Shuttle between Heaven and Earth: Gender Characteristics and Physical Implications of Female Mediums) (Taipei: Tangshan, 2001). Kao Ya-ning, 'Chief, God, or National Hero? Representing Nong Zhigao in Chinese Ethnic Minority Society', in David Faure and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing (eds), *Chieftains into Ancestors: Imperial Expansion and Indigenous Society in Southwest China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 42-65. Lian Ruizhi, 'Surviving Conquest in Dali: Chiefs, Deities, and Ancestors', in David Faure and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing (eds), *Chieftains into Ancestors: Imperial Expansion and Indigenous Society in Southwest China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 86-110.

[7] For Buddhism and female body and pollution, see Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 18-19. Diana. Y. Paul, *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahayana Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1979), XV-XVI. For Daoism on the female body and pollution, see Zhang Xun, 'Jizhong daojing zhong dui nüren shenti miaoshu de chutan' 幾種道經中對女人身體描述的初探 (A Preliminary Investigation of the Female Body as Described in the Daoist Canon), in Li Fengmao and Zhu Ronggui (eds), *Xingbie, shenge yu Taiwan zongjiao lunshu* 性別、神格與台灣宗教論述 (Gender, Divinity and Religious Discourses on Religion in Taiwan) (Taipei: Preparatory Office for the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, 1997), 24-47. For an example of religious belief about the female body and pollution among Han Chinese societies in Asia, see Jinhua Emma Teng, 'Religion as a Source of Oppression and Creativity for Chinese Women,' *Journal of Women and Gender Studies*, 1 (1990), 165-194.

By analysing the different ways in which the Yao have perceived and negotiated with the interventions of the others; above all, a powerful Other, the Chinese imperial states, the researcher is able to offer a 'view from below', presenting an original exploration of a gendered dimension in Yao ritual tradition. By gendering Yao ritual tradition, the researcher is able to provide a new perspective from which to detail the dynamics and the presence of human agency in the historical processes of transcultural communication between the Yao and the others.

In establishing a solid foundation for the stated goals of the research, three investigative issues have proved very relevant: 1) Religion, State and Local Reaction; 2) Models for Understanding Cultural and Religious Hybridization; 3) Gender and Women in Ritual and Religion: A Focus on the Yao. As I address each of these three issues in turn, I shall also introduce the theoretical concepts I have utilized to tackle them.

Issues and Theories

As mentioned earlier, the Yao has in many cases been represented as a highly sinicized non-Han Chinese people because of their assimilation of Daoist texts and liturgies and the values of Chinese imperial states that accompanied them. And yet, particularly since the 1950s, the Chinese communist party-led history has described the Yao as a minority people imbued with the spirit of resistance, highlighting the numerous accounts of their previous military actions against pre-communist state regimes.[8] A juxtaposition of these two seemingly conflicting scholarly and official representations, one sinicized, one rebellious, of the ethnic Yao in modern China warrants a deeper exploration of the role religion in general and Daoism in particular has played in Yao history.

An entry about the Daoism practised by the Yao in the Republican-era *Lianshan County Gazetteer* underlines the necessity of a more explicit enquiry. This entry reads as follows: 'The intelligent children are not allowed to learn the Confucian classics;

[8] Yaozu jianshi bianxiezu, *Yaozu jianshi.* Feng Henggao (ed.), *Yaozu tongshi.* Specifically, the history of the resistance of the Yao began in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) with the Great Vine Gorge Event (*datengxia zhiyi*) in the sixteenth century and continued into the period of the Kuomintang (KMT) penetration (1912-1949).

they study only with Yao Daoists. They also have sacraments; the writing is incomprehensible.'[9] If Daoism has indeed led the Yao to embrace the influence of Chinese culture and statecraft more intimately, as the sinification argument has suggested, of which their reading of and acculturation in Confucian classics is the indicator, this entry would seem to suggest otherwise. Quite the opposite in fact, the vernacular Daoism the Yao have practised might have actually provided them precisely with the means by which to keep Confucian teachings at arm's length, thereby enabling them to assume a relative 'position' in their relations with the political patron of Confucian ideologies, the Chinese imperial state.

Although it is uncertain to what extent the case of the Yao in Lianshan, central Guangdong, is applicable to other Yao groups in distinct locations who also practise and follow Daoist rituals and liturgies, it at least sounds a note of caution to the researcher not to assume a one-way, top-down approach when examining the assimilation of Daoism (or other dominant Chinese imperial influences) into the non-Han societies. Moreover, most importantly, it reveals an urgent need to touch upon some questions, such as what roles religion might have played in Chinese state incorporation in different regions of South China or how religion and ritual might have served to act as an expressive form in local reactions to pressures for political and social incorporation into Chinese state system and or those of other Southeast Asian regimes?

1. Religion, State and Local Reaction

1-1. Chinese State Expansion in Southeast China: Lineage Society

Many scholars who study the history of the imperial Chinese state incorporation of South China, Southeast China in particular, would agree that the development of a lineage society has been a vital mechanism in bringing local

[9] The original Chinese text is '兒之聰穎者不與讀儒書，惟從徭道士學，亦有科儀，其文不可曉.' Ling Xihua, Zhan Chengxun, and He Yiluan, *Minguo Lianshan xianzhi* 民國連山縣志 (Republican era Lianshan County Gazetteer), *Zhongguo difangzhi jicheng: Guangdongfu xianzhiji, dishisi juan* 中國地方志集成：廣東府縣誌輯第 14 卷 (The Compilation of Local Gazetteers in China: The Fourteenth Volume of Guangdong Government Gazetteers) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1928).

societies increasingly under Chinese state control.[10] David Faure's *Emperor and Ancestor: State and Lineage in South China* gives an elaborate picture of how many politico-economic and socio-cultural factors intertwined to produce the flourishing development of lineage organizations in Southeast China—the region of the Pearl River Delta in particular.[11] Faure's discussion spans the periods from the pre-Ming (prior to 1368), the Ming (1368-1644), the Qing (1644-1911) and in the Republican era up to the founding of the People's Republic of China (1911-1949). He presents an eloquent description of a dynamic interaction between the development of the economy, the population and, later, land registers, the emergence of lineage organizations and, most importantly, the influence of the neo-Confucian ideology of Zhu Xi that became state orthodoxy and emphasized the right to sacrifice to distant ancestors. Among all these factors, religious practices, such as rites of ancestor worship, have become a significant element in the local cultural conduct that was encouraged by the Chinese state. As John Lagerwey concludes in his review of *Emperor and Ancestor*:

> The collective practice of sacrificing to a distant ancestor, usually the real or imaginary founder of a village or a group of villages, encouraged a sense of linear belonging which transcended space and time, and was thus one of the necessary conditions for the emergence of the vast and wealthy lineages of South China under the Ming and the Qing.[12]

Apart from the sharing of corporate property, a vital force that bolstered the development of lineage society was the collective sense of linear belonging, generated

[10] Above all, a classical study of the development of lineage society and its relationship with Chinese statecraft is Maurice Freeman's *Lineage Organization in South-Eastern China*, 2nd Edition (Berg Publ Inc., 2004).

[11] David Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor: State and Lineage in South China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). Of course, the process of the state incorporation of local societies has continued since the founding of the People's Republic of China; in many ways it has even accelerated. For instance, Huang Shu-Min, *The Spiral Road: Change and Development in a Chinese Village Through the Eyes of a Village Leader* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989) offers a microscopic analysis of this process since the 1950s.

[12] John Lagerwey, 'Review of Emperor and Ancestor: State and Lineage in South China', *China Perspectives*, 3 (2007), 1-4 at 2-3.

by ancestor worship in the family temple and the composition of literati-style genealogies.[13] But, even if the local society welcomed the new cultural policy of sacrificing to their founding ancestors introduced by the Ming and Qing states, its acceptance did not necessarily mean that the transformation of local society was completely in step with the state agenda in its incorporation of local society. For instance, Michael Szonyi argues that the law proposed in the sixteenth century that allowed local elites to offer sacrifices to distant ancestors never really succeeded in transforming the ways in which the ordinary people practised kinship and performed rituals on the village level. Specifically, the practices of local religious cults, usually including offering sacrifices to both ancestors and local gods, actually became increasingly integrated into pre-existing kinship networks between the sixteenth and the nineteenth century.[14] The limitation, or even the absence, of State sanctions in its intervention in local religious and kinship practice is even more obvious among overseas Chinese communities in a cross-border context.[15]

Doubts concerning the success of Chinese state incorporation in Southeast China have produced a critical reflection on the lineage society paradigm, consequently yielding two divergent scholarly approaches. One approach is based on the premise that the Chinese state incorporation of a local society was inevitable and implicitly assumes that it is a good thing. Ultimately such an analysis tries to locate a historical field of negotiation between the two sides.[16] The other approach has

[13] David Faure, 'The Emperor in the Village, Representing the State in South China', in Joseph McDermott (ed.), *State and Court Ritual in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 267-298.

[14] Michael Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[15] Kenneth Dean, 'Overseas Chinese Temple and Trust Networks and Jinmen Island', in Chen Yi-yuan (ed.), *Jinmenxue guoji xueshu yantauhui lunwenji* 金門學國研討會論文集 (Collected Essays from the International Academic Conference on Jinmen Studies) (Jinmen: Jinmen wenhuaju, 2012), 533-578 at 542-546.

[16] Wen Chunlai, *Cong yiyu dao jiujiang: Song zhi Qing Guizhou xibeibu diqu de zhidu kaifa yu rentong* 從異域到舊疆：宋至清貴州西北部地區的制度、開發與認同 (From Foreign Region to Old Territory: The System, Development and Identity in Northwest Guizhou from the Song to the Qing) (Beijing: Sanlian shuju, 2008). He Xi, *Yi shen yi zu: Yuexinan xinyang goujian de shehuishi* 亦神亦祖：粵西南信仰構建的社會史 (A Social History of the Construction of Beliefs in Southwest Guangdong) (Beijing: Sanlian shuju, 2011). Xie Xiaohui, 'Miaojiang de kaifa yu difang shenqi de chongsu: Jianyu Donald Sutton taolun Baidi Tianwang chuanshuo bianqian de lishi qingjing' 苗疆的開發與地方社會神祇的重塑—兼與蘇堂棣討論白帝天王傳説變遷的歷史情境 (The Development of the Miao Frontier and the Recasting of Local Deities: A Debate with Donald Sutton on the Historical Background to Changes in the Legends of the White Emperor Heavenly Kings), *Lishi renleixue xuekan* (歷史人類學學刊 Journal of History and Anthropology), 6/1-2 (2008), 111-146.

involved casting doubts on this basic assumption, pointing out the elusive and heterogeneous aspects of Chinese state incorporation in Southeast China.[17] Below I also show that a closer look at the interaction and negotiation between imperial expansion and an indigenous society in Southwest China indicates that Chinese state governance has never been firmly established in this region.

1-2. Chinese State Expansion in Southwest China: From Chieftains to Ancestors

In Southwest China, military campaigns and civilizing projects have been two major and complementary forces, representing state violence and an ideology to justify the state monopoly over that violence respectively. In terms of administration and bureaucracy, since the Tang dynasty the *jimi* system ([control by] loose rein system) and its successor the *tusi* system (native chieftain system) have been the principal frontier institutions specifically set up to cope with the geographically and ethnically heterogeneous nature of Southwest China.[18] Native chieftains and their troops often played a dual role in the military campaigns waged by dynastic courts to put down ethnic rebellions.[19] However, the hereditary nature of the native chieftain system and its kinship-based organization were in their turn also profoundly transformed by civilizing projects, particularly with respect to Confucian ideology and imperial education.[20] Under the influence of the early Qing frontier policy, 'the transition from native officialdom to circulatory officialdom' (*gaitu guiliu*), the native

[17] Michael Szonyi, 'The Illusion of Standardizing the Gods: The Cult of the Five Emperors in Late Imperial China', *Journal of Asian Studies,* 56/1 (1997), 113-135. Donald S. Sutton, 'Ritual, Cultural Standardization, and Orthopraxy in China: Reconsidering James L. Watson's Ideas', *Modern China: An International Quarterly of History and Social Science,* 33/1 (2007), 3-21. Paul R. Katz, 'Orthopraxy and Heteropraxy Beyond the State: Standardizing Ritual in Chinese Society', *Modern China: An International Quarterly of History and Social Science,* 33/1 (2007), 72-90.

[18] John Herman, 'Empire in the Southwest: Early Qing Reforms to the Native Chieftain System', *The Journal of Asian Studies,* 56/1 (1997), 47-74.

[19] For example, David Faure, 'The Yao Wars in the Mid-Ming and Their Impact on Yao Ethnicity', in Pamela K. Crossley et al. (eds), *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 171-189. Donald S. Sutton, 'Ethnic Revolt in the Qing Empire: The Miao Uprising of 1795-1796 Reexamined', *Asia Major 3rd series,* 17/1 (2005), 105-151. Tang Xiaotao, *Langyao hezai: Mingqing shiqi Guangxi Xunzhoufu de zuqun bianqian* 俍傜何在-明清時期廣西潯州府的族群變遷 (Where Were the Lang and the Yao: Changes in Ethnic Boundaries in Xunzhou Prefecture of Guangxi during Ming and Qing times) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2011).

[20] David Faure and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing (eds), *Chieftains into Ancestors: Imperial Expansion and Indigenous Society in Southwest China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013).

chieftain system increasingly began to absorb selected features of the circulatory officialdom (*liuguan*) form of bureaucracy and this process eventually led to the intrusion of imperial education, ancestor worship and patrilineal ideology.[21] Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the nature and effect of the Chinese state presence in Southwest China is still open to question.

One point this contention raises is state violence and the impact of civilizing projects on local societies in Southwest China, for example, the introduction of Chinese literacy and Confucian ideology. John Herman argues that civilizing the peripheral peoples has never been the main concern of Chinese states in formulating frontier policies. From 1200 to 1700, military colonization was the principal policy of the governance of the Chinese state in Southwest China, and it proved to be relatively successful.[22] On the other hand, C. Patterson Giersch argues that different types of civilizing projects invariably followed Chinese military control in this frontier area, although their impact was not always absolute. For instance, from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, the Qing had to compete for resources and indigenous allies with the other Asian empires, namely the Tai, Burmese and Siamese kingdoms, over the area from southwest Yunnan to northern Southeast Asia.[23]

Whether one agrees with Herman or Giersch, Chinese influence was never the only presence to be found in the religious ideologies and political construction of indigenous societies in Southwest China. Nevertheless, it is also undeniable that the imperial Chinese state was one of the unavoidable 'Others' in the history of making local societies in South China.

The foregoing discussion has revealed that religion could be either a state surrogate that assisted in incorporating local societies into imperial governance, or, conversely, a field of negotiation in which local societies could express their protest

[21] James Wilkerson, 'The Wancheng Native Officialdom: Social Production and Social Reproduction', in David Faure and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing (eds), *Chieftains into Ancestors: Imperial Expansion and Indigenous Society in Southwest China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 187-205.

[22] John Herman, 'The Cant of Conquest: Tusi Officials and China's Political Incorporation of the Southwest Frontier', in Pamela Crossley et al. (eds), *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 135-168. William T. Rowe, 'Education and Empire in Southwest China: Ch'en Hung-mou in Yunnan, 1733-38', in Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside (eds), *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 417-457.

[23] C. Patterson Giersch, *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China's Yunnan Frontier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 97-126.

and struggle for their autonomy.[24] Furthermore, religion could also be the means to keep the state at bay, as eloquently argued by James Scott.

1-3. Religion as a Means to Keep the State Away

The numerous accounts of rebellions displaying millennial characteristics and legends of charismatic rebel leaders prevalent in Zomia[25] (roughly the borderlands of Southwest China and upland Southeast Asia) have led James Scott to explore the possibility of religion being a means used by indigenous communities to keep states away. In his widely praised and critically acclaimed book, *The Art of not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, with special reference to upland Southeast Asia, Scott proposes that rebellion was a religio-political action that provided a mechanism for social renewal by overturning the existing order.[26] In support of his position, and citing the earlier work of Edmund Leach, Scott claims that ideologies of rebellion have played a pivotal role in a cyclical pattern of increasing social hierarchy followed by sudden collapse in local upland Southeast Asia societies. More generally, millennialism in upland Southeast Asia has provided a means of keeping surrounding states, including but not exclusively China, out of this part of the Asian continent. Importantly, Scott cites Buddhism as providing one ideological basis for millennial movements.[27]

Nevertheless, the fit between upland Southeast Asia and China in terms of resistance to the state remains elusive. Two of Scott's other examples within upland

[24] James Robson, 'Manuscripts from the Margins: On the Historical and Religious Dimensions of the Central Human Religion', paper presented at the conference of Frontier Societies and State-making in China 邊陲社會與國家建構, November 25-26, 2012, Hong Kong. Stephan Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor* (Routledge, 2001).

[25] 'Zomia' is a name proposed by James Scott to refer to the geographical range stretching in the west to northwest India, in the east to north Vietnam, including the Yun-Gui plateau (in Sichuan and parts of Guangxi) and upland Southeast Asia. It emerged in James Scott's definition because of its persistent resistance to states. See James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2009), 17. Also see Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, James Wilkerson, and Huang Shuli, 'Lun James Scott gaodi dongnanya xinmingming Zomia de yiyi yu weilai' 論 James Scott 高地東南亞新命名 Zomia 的意義與未來 (A Discussion of the Significance and Future of James Scott's Notion of Calling Highland Southeast Asia 'Zomia'), *Lishi renleixue xuekan* (歷史人類學學刊 Journal of History and Anthropology), 9/1 (2010), 77-100 at 79.

[26] James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, 283-323.

[27] Ibid., 291-295.

Southeast Asia in addition to Buddhism are the Lahu,[28] distributed along the interface between upland Southeast Asia and the Chinese state, and the Hmong,[29] distributed both far into upland Southeast Asia and far inside the boundaries of the Chinese state. In addition, although Scott discusses the Yao in upland Southeast Asia and Panhu, the mythic ancestor of the Yao, in a brief aside about the importance of Chinese bureaucratic control inside China alongside Yao (and even Han) resistance to this control,[30] he omits to mention the continued centrality of Daoism among the Yao, both within China and in upland Southeast Asia.[31]

A crucial point that Scott omits is the debates about whether Daoism is a pro- or an anti-state religion. In her seminal article, 'Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments-Taoist Roots in the *Apocrypha*', Anna Seidel describes the close affinity of Daoist sacraments to the thought in the *Apocrypha* that were largely employed by the imperial court.[32] Her findings led her to oppose the argument that Taoist-inspired rebellions were organized to fight against the emperor. She also points out that, 'there was never a Taoist organization sufficiently unified, strong and well-defined to set up a serious rival to the throne, nor did the officially-established Taoist church ever seek to challenge an emperor on religious grounds.'[33] On the other hand, there are scholars, as among them Zhang Zehong, who consider Daoism to be a religion that emerged from the lives of ordinary people, and was sometimes consciously utilized as an organizing principle in many peasant rebellions across Chinese history.[34] In other words, the political significance of Daoism in China is far from simple, and its

[28] Ibid., 291.
[29] Ibid., 311-312.
[30] Ibid., 125.
[31] Takemura Takuji, *Yaozu de lishi yu wenhua* 瑤族的歷史與文化 (The History and Culture of the Yao), Zhu Guichang and Jin Shaoping (trans.) (Nanning: Guangxi minzu xueyuan minzu yanjiusuo, 1986[1981]), 157-173. Jacob Cawthorne, 'Taoism and Self-Governance: The Yiu Mien of Laos', paper presented at the conference of Asian Borderlands: Enclosure, Interaction and Transformation, 2nd Conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network, Chiang Mai University (RCSD), Thailand, November 5-7, 2010.
[32] Anna Seidel, 'Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments: Taoist Roots in the Apocrypha', in Michel Strickmann (ed.), *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honor of R.A. Stein, Vol. II* (Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1983), 291-371.
[33] Ibid., 369-370.
[34] Zhang Zehong, *Wenhua chuanbo yu yishi xiangzheng: Zhongguo xinan shaoshu minzu zongjiao yu daojiao jisi yishi bijiao yanjiu* 文化傳播與儀式象徵：中國西南少數民族宗教與道教祭祀儀式比較研究 (Cultural Transmission and Ritual Symbolism: A Comparative Study of Religions and Daoist Worship Rituals among Ethnic Minorities in Southwest China) (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2008).

conflicting tendencies should be examined in different ways at different times from different perspectives.[35] This brings us to the question of how better to understand the various dimensions of religious traditions of universal claim and wide dispersal within given space, time, society and context.

2. Models for Understanding Cultural and Religious Hybridization

Whether on a global or local scale, the phenomenon of hybridization associated with religion and ritual is not at all unique. A ready, albeit disputable, concept and term, syncretism, often appears in this sort of discussion. Nevertheless, the major problem with syncretism is that it invites an oppositional set of such value-laden terms as 'purity' and 'impurity', and 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity', particularly in the study of the global process of world religions; for instance, Christianity and Islam. However, in post-modern and post-colonial studies in anthropology and history, the discussion of the 'invention of tradition/culture' has eloquently invalidated the myth of cultural purity and hence ascribed a neutral and positive significance to cultural and religious syncretism.[36]

Still, the conventional concept of syncretism puts an emphasis on the actions of a dominant 'cultural group' (such as the Chinese group/state in the sinification argument) and fails to recognize the contribution of local modes of appropriation to the formation of that cross-cultural interaction and global world.[37] To transcend the limitations entailed in the concept of syncretism, such concepts as 'transculturality,'[38] 'transculturation,'[39] or 'trans-hybridity'[40] are proposed. Hence, the focus of the

[35] Liu Da, *The Tao and Chinese Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1984), 53.
[36] Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart, 'Introduction: Problematizing Syncretism', in Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (eds), *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1-26.
[37] See the criticism of syncretism in a project description 'How does Transculturality come into play in our Research Area?' from the project entitled 'Cluster of Excellence: Asia and Europe in a Global Context' conducted in Heidelberg University [Website document], <http://www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/research/b-public-spheres/overview/what-are-the-key-terms-we-use-and-what-do-we-mean-by-them/transculturality.html>, accessed 24 Feb. 2015.
[38] Wolfgang Welsch, 'Transculturality: The Puzzling form of Cultures Today', in Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash, (eds), *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World* (London: Sage, 1999), 194-213.
[39] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, Second Edition* (Routledge, 2008).
[40] Paul R. Katz, 'Repaying a Nuo Vow in Western Hunan: A Rite of Trans-Hybridity?', *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology*, 11/2 (2013), 1-88.

investigation into the discussion of transcultural studies is placed on the networks, spaces and flow of ideas, goods and the like envisioned in and channelled through the processes of cross-cultural encounters, that might involve the interaction between the pre-existing social order and the newly invented values and ideas.[41] For instance, by bringing ethnicities to the forefront of the discussion, Guido Sprenger unfolds current ideas of indigeneity in upland Southeast Asia against the backdrop of the centre-periphery relation that structures both upland and lowland societies. He has made a comparison between the Yao from southern China across Laos to Thailand and the Rmeet of Laos, examining the effects of transcultural communication, in terms of rituals, the structure of settlements and myths, in the formation of social order. He concludes,

> …various forms of the center-periphery relation offer different points of connectivity for the modern notion of indigeneity and the options for practice that it suggests. Their definition of relationships that create the shape of ethnicities by the new value-idea of indigeneity has to build on these older forms.[42]

As such, it is doubtful 'if a boundary can be drawn between a current age of globalization and the nation-state and an earlier period of premodern relationships.'[43]

In a similar vein to the discussion of 'transculturality', in his study of communal ritual practices among the Miao people in western Hunan, Paul Katz has proposed a term 'trans-hybridity' in order to give equal prominence to the external and internal forces and agents at play in the process of transcultural communication. 'Trans-hybridity' is shorthand for two key mechanisms at work in cultural encounters associated with ritual. 'Translation' features mechanisms generally used by the state or local elites to introduce external cultural traditions (including religious ones) that only gradually gain acceptance among indigenous communities. 'Hybridity' can

[41] Nicholas Mirzoeff (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader, 3rd edition* (Routledge, 2012).
[42] Guido Sprenger, 'Transcultural Communication and Social Order: Comparisons in Upland Southeast Asia', *Asian Ethnology*, 72/2 (2013), 299-319 at 315.
[43] Ibid.

account for unintentional forms of cultural assimilation.[44] Compared with the sometimes contentious concept syncretism, the terms 'transculturality', 'transculturation,' or 'trans-hybridity' are more apposite vehicles to convey the human agency and dynamisms present in the process of cultural-religious interaction.

The method of 'hierarchical opposition,' as articulated by Louis Dumont, is another model that puts emphasis on investigating the different levels of ideological values instead of presuming a given structure of asymmetry in any form of cultural and religious hybridization. Emerging from a critical reflection of Lévi-Strauss' static view of structuralism, Dumont points out the dimension of hierarchy and the different levels of oppositions in many part-whole relations.[45] It is noteworthy that Dumont applies the terms 'hierarchy' or 'opposition' differently.

> [The 'hierarchy' Dumont is talking about is not] in the usually accepted sense of the term….he is not referring to social stratification, nor to any other sort of ranking system, nor to the hierarchy of a scientific taxonomy, nor to mere inequality of status, though these may be expressions of it. It concerns rather the attribution of value that accompanies or occurs in any differentiation.[46]

Examining 'opposition' it becomes clear that 'the two poles of the opposition are not mutually exclusive',[47] and might even be complementary.[48] Therefore, Dumont describes 'wholeness' or 'holism' as different encompassments of ideological values that feature in a hierarchical relation. The ultimate ideological value varies in different cultures, but it is the value of utmost importance that guides people's pursuit of a better life.[49]

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[44] Paul R. Katz, 'Repaying a Nuo Vow in Western Hunan: A Rite of Trans-Hybridity?', *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology*, 11/2 (2013), 1-88 at 6-7. It is noteworthy that in contrast to the 'trans' that generally means 'across' in trans-culturality, the 'trans' used by Paul Katz specifically denotes 'translation' and it is a purposeful action entailing human agency.
[45] Robert Parkin, *Louis Dumont and Hierarchical Opposition* (Berghahn Books, 2009), 3.
[46] Ibid., 41-2.
[47] Ibid., 47.
[48] Ibid., 51.
[49] Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, 'Biandong zhong de qingshu lunli: ershi shiji wanqi zhongguo shanju zaiwaren jiawu renguan de anli' 變動中的親屬倫理：二十世紀晚期中國山居載瓦人家屋人觀的實例

To conclude, the insights provided by the transcultural approach and Dumont's method of 'hierarchical opposition' have the potential to subvert the assumption of sinification argument that predominates in the study of the Yao ritual tradition. That is, the important question raised is not if the Yao have crossed the ethnic boundary and become more Chinese or more subject to Chinese cultural influence, as suggested inexplicitly in the sinification approach. Instead, we should investigate how the modes of cultural exchange on the level of local protagonists have come into play.[50] In other words, what are the Yao perspectives on and reactions to their transcultural communications with the others, in particular, the powerful Other, the Chinese imperial state.

Nevertheless, one dimension is still underrepresented in the above discussion of transcultural approaches, that is, gender in general, and women in particular. The insufficiency of a gendered dimension in transcultural studies is particularly evident in the scholarship of Yao ritual and religion.

3. Gender and Women in Ritual and Religion: A Focus on the Yao

Many factors have hampered a proper exploration of a gendered dimension in the Yao's ritual tradition. One is, as mentioned before, because of the female pollution beliefs there are no female ritual specialists whose work can be observed in contemporary Yao communities. Furthermore, women-centred or women-led religious activities or organizations also do not seem to exist in Yao village life. The other is Yao women's inaccessibility to the Chinese written tradition that exerts such an indispensable significance on the Yao ritual tradition. However, the limited presence of women in the Yao religious domain does not necessarily reflect the Yao women's lack of enthusiasm for and knowledge of religious matters. The essential role of female singers whose participation is required in the performances of certain

(Changing Kinship Ethics for Personhood and Relatedness in a "House Society": The Hill-Dwelling Zaiwa of Late Twentieth Century China), *Taiwan renlei xuekan* (台灣人類學刊 Taiwan Journal of Anthropology) 11/2 (2013), 89-145.

[50] Haejeong Hazel Hahn, 'Puff Marries Advertising: Commercialization of Culture in Jean-Jacques Grandville's *Un Autre Monde* (1844),' in Minsoo Kang and Amy Woodson-Boulton (eds), *Visions of the Industrial Age: Image and Imagery in Nineteenth-Century European Culture* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2008), 295-316.

large-scale rituals clearly underlines the ways in which women are engaged in Yao ritual and religious tradition.

To add a gendered dimension to the exploration of Yao ritual tradition, it is necessary critically to re-examine the factors that resulted in Yao women's marginal positions in ritual and religion against a broader theoretical and regional background. The section begins with a clarification of the concept 'gender' applied in this research. It then moves on to a discussion of female pollution beliefs and women's relationships with the Chinese written tradition.

3-1. The Concept of Gender

The concept of gender is approached differently in distinct disciplines, but it invariably involves discussions of women's situations, especially in opposition to those of men.[51] This research adopts two senses of gender that have been developed by scholars in the fields of sinology and anthropology respectively. In the sinological sense of gender, I closely follow the investigative framework proposed by Dorothy Ko, Jahyun Kim Haboush and Joan R. Piggott.[52] Their framework entails three levels of exploration: 'a focus on women', 'male-female relations' and 'female subjectivity'. The first, a focus on women, 'is to return women to the center of historical analysis.' The second, the exploration of 'male-female relations' on individual and institutional levels, is to ask questions about the contexts of women's lives, revealing the power relations forged in processes of gendered negotiations. The third, the investigation of 'female subjectivity', is to highlight the texts of women's lives. The use of the term 'subjectivity' seeks to 'shift analytic focus from external structures to interior motives, identity formation, and perceptions of the world.'[53] In short, the strength of a sinological sense of gender is its emphasis on textual representations of women and the contexts in which the texts are produced. However, the sinological sense of gender might risk treating the texts and the contexts surrounding the production of the texts as given social facts, and by so doing closes its eyes to the various constructions of

[51] Catherine Lutz, 'The Gender of Theory,' in Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon, (eds), *Women Writing Culture/Culture Writing Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 249-266.
[52] Dorothy Ko et al. (eds), *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
[53] Ibid., 2.

gender and sex in different cultures.[54] Therefore, it is also important to employ an anthropological sense of gender to foreground cultural-specific gender ideologies as a historical process and cultural construct.

A useful way to begin the examination of any society's myths of gender is to look at local notions of the 'person,' that is, of what people in a particular culture think it is to be human.[55] In her study of gender systems in the islands of Southeast Asia, Shelly Errington makes an important differentiation between the concepts of Sex, sex and gender. The capitalized Sex generally indicates the given physicality of a person, especially the physicality defined by a scientific taxonomy, that is popular in Euro-American cultures. The lower-case sex denotes the aspect of cultural-specific thinking of sexual categories that is anything but the western sense of sex. While the definition of gender largely refers to the cultural and social dimension of what people make of sex, even though its variation in representation is still very much based on the physical aspect of sex.[56] On the other hand, Barbara Bodenhorn argues that gender does not necessarily correspond to the natural sex of a person and is defined by what people do.[57]

In short, the sinological sense of gender offers us a lens to look into the various images of women and gender relations in the textual world, while the anthropological sense of gender helps us to scrutinize the cultural-specific dimension of the gender systems in question. By combining the two senses of gender, this research hopes to arrive at some politico-economic and socio-cultural explanations of why and how the differences between the two genders in the Yao religious world have arisen and taken shape.

3-2. Reflections on Female Pollution Beliefs

[54] Helen F. Siu and Wing-hoi Chan, 'Introduction,' in Helen F. Siu (ed.), *Merchants' Daughters: Women, Commerce, and Regional Culture in South China* (Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 1.
[55] Shelly Errington, 'Recasting Sex, Gender, and Power: A Theoretical and Regional Overview,' in Jane Monnig Atkinson and Shelly Errington (eds), *Power and Difference: Gender in Island Southeast Asia* (Stanford University Press, 1990), 1-58.
[56] Ibid., 26-31.
[57] Barbara Bodenhorn, 'I Am Not the Great Hunter, My Wife Is: Iñupiat and Anthropological Models of Gender,' *Études/Inuit/Studies* 14/1/2 (1990), 55-74.

In his 1983 article 'Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and the "Eternal Mother"', Steven Sangren has pointed out the insufficiency in the study of Chinese religion in divining 'the cultural significance of female gender in the realm of divinities'.[58] In the past three decades, the issue of women's roles and ways of participation in religion in general and Chinese religion in particular has been touched upon from various approaches.[59] A prominent approach is that of feminist anthropology. This field not only points out the importance of politics and protest implicated in people's lived religious experience, but also pays more attention to the differences between women.[60] In other words, feminist religious studies attempt to understand the religious experiences of women of different race, class and age in terms of their positions within the religious traditions with which they are faced. Certainly, women's religious experiences and their positions within that given religious tradition should be understood in relation to their roles and statuses in other life domains.

In a Han-Chinese context, the study of women and religion often seeks to discover if religion could serve as a means for women to express their subjectivity in a patriarchal social structure, as women's autonomy in family and married life is often buried in the roles (wife and mother in particular) and responsibilities (such as producing male descendants) the society expects of them to support men.[61] But women's natural fertility like menstruation, gestation and childbirth is often perceived to be an obstacle for them to acquire transcendence.[62] In particular, menstrual blood is considered to contain dangerous power in Chinese belief and the taboos surrounding it have resulted in preventing women from gaining direct access to the power associated with a constant and close relationship to the gods in male cults.[63]

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[58] P. Steven Sangren, 'Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and the "Eternal Mother"', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* 9/1 (1983), 4-25.
[59] Elizabeth A. Castelli (ed.), *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
[60] Rosalind Shaw, 'Feminist Anthropology and the Gendering of Religious Studies', in Ursula King (ed.), *Religion and Gender* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), 65-76.
[61] Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman (eds), *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).
[62] Elena Valussi, 'Blood, Tigers, Dragons: The Physiology of Transcendence for Women', *IASTAM Journal of Asian Medicine,* 4/1 (2008), 46-85.
[63] Jinhua Emma Teng, 'Religion as a Source of Oppression'.

Emily M. Ahern considers three different interpretations for the formation of these female-pollution beliefs: 'The first looks to the emotional significance of death and life, the second to women's social role, and the third to the system of ideas about pollution'.[64] While accepting the first and third, Ahern denies the possibility that women might consciously and deliberately manipulate the power associated with menstrual pollution to subvert the ideals that support a patriarchal society. Yet, by probing the qualities ascribed to Chinese female deities, Sangren argues that the female-pollution beliefs do reflect positive as well as negative qualities associated with women's social role in China. Female deities are unambiguously positive, for they must overcome the stigma of pollution associated with menstruation, sexual intercourse, death and childbirth. Nevertheless, they also simultaneously present negative qualities in a patriarchal society because they must renounce their role as daughter and wife, and take on the role of mother, but do not bear any children themselves.[65]

The discontinuities between the qualities associated with female deities and those associated with women do indeed highlight irresolvable existential dilemmas for Chinese women in religious domain. Deriving her conclusion from a textual comparison between the traditions of Chinese medicine and Daoist female alchemy, Elena Valussi elucidates two opposing goals in similar processes of dealing with women's physiology. In the case of Chinese medicine, the goal is to facilitate women's health, well-being, regularity and the production of children, helping women fulfil their social role and responsibility. While in the case of Daoist female alchemy, the goal is to achieve transcendence by reversing the natural process of female fertility, and in a way severing women's social bonds in family and marital life.[66] On the other hand, although religion might in many cases seem to be a source of the oppression of women because of the taboos on their menstrual blood, it can also offer a source of creativity that enables women to gain power unavailable to them in

[64] Emily M. Ahern, 'The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women', in Margery Wolf and Roxanne Witke (eds), *Women in Chinese Society* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975), 193-214 at 212.
[65] P. Steven Sangren, *op. cit.*
[66] Elena Valussi, *op. cit.*

secular world; for instance, they could turn the power of their pollution around on men, in the form of black magic charms, to destroy the ritual power of male cults.[67]

Although in a non-Han Chinese context, the Han Chinese androcentric ideology is not at all a dominant social organizing principle, yet the female-pollution beliefs are somehow persistently present in religious traditions with an intimate relationship with Chinese culture, such as Daoism and Buddhism, that have been introduced into non-Han Chinese societies. Similar to Yao women's limited access to the power associated with gods and deities in Yao Daoism, De'ang women (the De'ang are a minority nationality resident in the borders of Myanmar and China) appear to assume an inferior status to men in their religious practices that are heavily intertwined with Theravada Buddhist cosmology and liturgy. For instance, it is a taboo for women to sit with, or to speak to, monks. Within the temple, 'while monks and men respectively occupy the highest and the middle levels, women and children can only sit at the lowest level, an area located at the margin of the temple, poorly lit and narrow in space'. [68] At face value, it would seem that, on account of female-pollution beliefs, non-Han Chinese women are being forced to share similar positions in religious traditions external to the community as Han Chinese women in Chinese religion. However, many scholars who study the relationship between gender and religion among Chinese minority nationalities would suggest otherwise.

Against the backdrop of women's subordination in religion that contrasts sharply with their centrality in other life domains, Du Shanshan is studying the different interactions the Mother of Grain, a locally respected goddess of agriculture, has with Gautama Buddha in De'ang religion, as told in myths and oral stories. Du has discovered that, despite the divergence in the details of the plots, different versions invariably privilege the Mother of Grain over Gautama Buddha. Therefore, Du concludes that the marginalization of women in De'ang religion might well be perceived as a consequence of the De'ang people's assimilation of Theravada Buddhism. Nonetheless, the agency of women that is absent from the ethnographic

[67] Jinhua Emma Teng, *op. cit.*

[68] Shanshan Du, 'Divine Compromises: The Mother of Grain and Gautama Buddha in De'ang Religion', in Shanshan Du and Ya-chen Chen (eds), *Women and Gender in Contemporary Chinese Societies: Beyond Han Patriarchy* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 2011), 69-88 at 73.

present is kept and manifested in the narratives surrounding the Mother of Grain and her relationships with Gautama Buddha.[69]

In contrast to the marginalized position De'ang women have assumed in Buddhism, Lian Ruizhi's study of the Nanzhao Dali Kingdom (752-902, 938-1254), a realm built on Buddhist ideology, illustrates the prominent role of female ancestors, who were latter transformed into female deities, in the lineage histories among the Bai people in the present Erhai area. Female fertility power had been considered a positive power in these histories as it was through women's marriage alliances with foreign monks (representing ritual power) and a serpent (representing the power of tribal chieftains) that the kingdom was able to resist the military and cultural colonization of the Chinese Empire.[70]

Returning to the discussion of Daoism among Chinese minority nationalities, although Yao women are largely marginalized in the actual practice of Yao Daoism, such exclusion is not at all the case with women in Zhuang religion, which is also permeated with Daoist-imperial influence. James Wilkerson depicts the agency of female ritual specialists, who represent local traditions, in Zhuang religion, showing how they negotiate for their legitimate position and social space in communal ritual performance with Daoist priests, who are symbolically on intimate terms with Chinese imperial state.[71] In the same vein as the argument made by Wilkerson, Kao Ya-ning's research on the cult of Nong Zhigao, an ethnic hero and a legendary ancestor in Zhuang society, also highlights the position of female specialists (representing the Southeast Asia structure) as being close to the Zhuang local tradition, as opposed to the position of Daoist priests (representatives of the Chinese imperial state) who are distant from the Zhuang.[72] In other words, both Wilkerson's and Kao's findings show that the agency of the female ritual specialist is an important means employed by a minority society to sustain its local tradition and ethnic identity

[69] Ibid.
[70] Lian Ruizhi (Lien Jui-Chih), *Yincang de zuxian: Miaoxiangguo de chuanshuo yu shehui* 隱藏的祖先：妙香國的傳說與社會 (Hidden Ancestors: Legends and Society of the Miaoxiang Country) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2007).
[71] James Wilkerson, 'Negotiating Local Traditions with Taoism: Female ritual specialists in the Zhuang religion', *Religion,* 37/2 (2007), 150-163.
[72] Kao Ya-ning (Gao Ya-ning), 'Singing a Hero in Ritual: Nong Zhigao and His Representation Among the Zhuang People in China', PhD thesis (Melbourne: The University of Melbourne, 2009).

when confronted with religious traditions that have a profound relationship with Chinese imperial state presence. In consideration of the significance of the agency of women and the positive quality associated with female fertility in religion among Chinese minority nationalities, Ho Ts'ui-p'ing suggests viewing local society in the southwest borderland as a 'gendering ritual community', a concept that might reveal the multiple values and representations embodied in women-engaged ritual performance and religious activity, better than those incorporated in the Han Chinese androcentric ideology or in permanent material representations (lineages halls, temples, and genealogies).[73]

To sum up, female-pollution beliefs are a contributing factor in the marginalization of the position of women in religion, both in Han Chinese and non-Han Chinese societies. From what has been discussed above, religion might sometimes be a source of the oppression of women, but in many other scenarios might be a domain in which women obtain access to spiritual power that they can use to proclaim their subjectivity and even subvert the androcentric ideology. In either case, the female-pollution beliefs are hardly the one, sole dimension in understanding women's ritual participation and religious experience. The next section explores another dimension, the written tradition, in Yao religion, and women's relationship to it.

3-3. The Written Tradition and Yao Women's Relationship with It

As present-day as well as past Yao religious practice seems to be dominated by the male gender, Yao men must be ascribed the role of copyists, composing and transmitting the texts, and both the historical and ethnographic evidence has ascertained the truth of this assumption. However, what has received less attention, if not been completely neglected, from scholars in this field is the possibility of looking into Yao women's engagement in that written tradition, even though they were not literate in Chinese, through singing and folksongs.

[73] Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, 'Gendering Community Across the Chinese Southwest Borderland', in David Faure and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing (eds), *Chieftains into Ancestors: Imperial Expansion and Indigenous Society in Southwest China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 206-246.

A general picture of women, examined in the context of pre-modern China, Korea and Japan, indicates the marginality of women to the written tradition.[74] Even though this assertion might hold true in many respects, the picture has tended to be drawn on the basis of the premise that views literacy in its simplest definition—the ability to read and write—an ability sometimes only available in a restricted way to certain classes and groups of people.[75] In a Chinese context, literacy is generally praised and considered a fundamental skill by which a person can achieve higher social status, more wealth and power, and is therefore a facilitator of social mobility.[76] Specifically, the establishment and institutionalization of the civil service examination (*keju zhidu*) in the Tang-Song period (618-1279) served as an important mechanism that sustained and strengthened this sort of ideology and practice constructed around literacy in China.[77] Conversely, 'illiteracy was often equated with inferiority and lack of intelligence'.[78]

However, if we turn our attention to minority societies in the border areas between South China and Southeast Asia, we do find various heterogeneous ideologies and practices pertaining to literacy. James Scott has proposed that many ethnic minorities might have consciously chosen to reject literacy because of its immediate association with state control, therefore they decided to leave texts and writing behind in their flight. These societies, such as the Wa and the Hmong, often had stories of treachery and carelessness to explain their loss of literacy.[79] Or there are minority societies, such as the Yi, who have recognized and accepted the power of literacy and its close association with status, refinement and state bureaucracy, but

[74] Dorothy Ko, Jahyun Kim Haboush, and Joan R. Piggott, 'Introduction', in Dorothy Ko et al. (eds), *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1-24 at 20.
[75] Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
[76] Ho Ping-ti, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility, 1368-1911* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962).
[77] Glen Peterson, 'State Literacy Ideologies and the Transformation of Rural China', *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, 32 (1994), 95-120 at 118.
[78] Liu Fei-Wen, 'Literacy, Gender, and Class: Nüshu and Sisterhood Communities in Southern Rural Hunan', *Nan Nü,* 6/2 (2004), 241-282 at 242.
[79] James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed,* 220-237. Nicholas Tapp, *The Hmong of China: Context, Agency, and the Imaginary* (Brill, 2001), 35-36.

have nevertheless positively privileged the value and employment of orality in social and ritual settings at a village level.[80]

To subvert the stereotypical assumption equating orality with illiteracy and inferiority, James Scott has proposed to define orality as 'a different and potentially positive medium of cultural life'. And, [orality] 'is also to be distinguished from what some have called primary illiteracy: a situation in which a social field confronts literacy for the first time'.[81] Among the different forms of orality, here we are primarily concerned with singing and its gendering and cultural implications.

As an example to illustrate James Scott's postulation, a statement from a version of *The Biography of the Immortal of Singing, Liu Sanmei* (*gexian Liu Sanmei zhuan*) aptly confirms that the people in Guangdong and Guangxi generally consider singing to have the same cultural significance as the ability to read and write. That is, singing is regarded as identical to written literacy, that the difference being that it has to be displayed publicly at a performative interface, such as a ritual setting or singing gatherings.[82] Therefore, I propose to view singing as a form of 'performative literacy', briefly, an enabling knowledge to be displayed in performative acts.[83] Women are often closely associated with the 'performative literacy', the afore-mentioned Immortal of Singing being a strong case in point, and given prominent status in ritual and singing settings.[84]

From a cultural perspective, especially among the Yao, a woman's intelligence is partly judged by how well she sings, taking into account the quality of her voice and the richness of the folksong repertoires she possesses.[85] Leaving aside

[80] Erik Mueggler, *The Age of Wild Ghosts: Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 127-158.
[81] James Scott, *op. cit.* 221.
[82] The original text in Chinese reads, '粵人即唱歌為讀書.' Sun Fanggui and Zhi Xingfu, 'The Biography of the Immortal of Singing, Liu Sanmei' (*Gexian Liu Sanmei zhuan* 歌僊劉三妹傳), in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu bubian* 四庫全書存目叢書補編 (Jinan City: Qilu shushe, 2001 [1689]), 79-380/381 at 381.
[83] David Holm, *Mapping the Old Zhuang Character Script: A Vernacular Writing System from Southern China* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 61-63. With reference to Sheridan Blau, 'Performative Literacy: The Habits of Mind of Highly Literate Readers', *Voices from the Middle,* 10/3 (2003), 18-22 at 19.
[84] See for example, Kao Ya-ning, 'Singing a Hero in Ritual', 103-138.
[85] Wu Ninghua and He Mengmeng, 'Menren nüxing gechang chuantong bianqian yanjiu' 門人女性歌唱傳統變遷研究 (A Study of Transitions Regarding Traditional Mun Female Singing from Shangsi County in Guangxi, China), *Kundu yinyue xuekan* (關渡音樂學刊 Kuandu Music Journal), 20 (2014), 43-66. Zheng Changtian, *Yaozu 'zuogetang' de jiegou yu gongneng: Xiangnan Panyao 'gangjie' huodong yanjiu* 瑤族"坐歌堂"的結構與功能：湘南盤瑤"岡介"活動研究 (The Structure and

the different approaches to the female singing acts and the songs composed for them in either Han or non-Han societies, it is generally agreed that female singing has served as a form of empowerment for voicing women's emotions, memories and life experiences. Most importantly, through its medium women would voice reflections and criticisms of their relationships with others in their roles as daughters, wives and mothers in a patriarchal marriage and society.[86]

Significantly, oral and written traditions are by no means two separate linguistic and cultural spheres, but are constantly in a state of flux of encounter, interaction, selection and hybridization.[87] Conceptually and performatively, as mentioned earlier, in southern China the oral performance of singing is regarded as identical to the ability to read and write. Conversely, even though predominantly viewed as a written tradition, such as the female scripts (*nüshu*) discovered on the border of Hunan and Guangxi, Liu Feiwen convincingly argues that '*nüshu* communication requires performance in the form of singing or chanting instead of silent reading, and this makes it mostly interchangeable with the local women's singing tradition, called *nüge* (female song)'.[88] In short, the interchangeability between singing and written literacy sounds a note of caution to the researcher, warning him or her not to rule out the possibility that Yao women are the authors of ritual texts, especially the texts conserved in the ritual-master tradition and manuscripts, even though they were neither literate in the Chinese sense nor the ritual practitioners of these texts. In other words, the Yao women's probable engagement in the written tradition has pointed to the necessity of introducing a 'gendered'

Function of 'Sitting in the Hall and Singing' among the Yao: A Study of the Pastime of Telling Jokes among Pan Yao in Southern Hunan) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2009), 218. Wu Ninghua, 'Yishi zhong de shishi: "Panwangge" yanjiu' 儀式中的史詩─《盤王歌》研究 (Epic in Ritual: A Study of the 'Song of King Pan'), PhD thesis (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music, 2012), 43-45.

[86] For a Han example, see Rubie S. Watson, 'Chinese Bridal Laments: The Claims of a Dutiful Daughter', in Bell Yung, Evelyn S. Rawski, and Rubie S. Watson (eds), *Harmony and Counterpoint: Ritual Music in Chinese Context* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 107-129. For a Hakka example, see Xu Xiaoying, *Gechang yu jingshen: Cunzheng shiye zhong de kejia funü shenghuo* 歌唱與敬神：村鎮視野中的客家婦女生活 (Singing and Worship: Hakka Women's Life in Village and Township) (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue, 2006). For an example of a group of women with close proximity in origin and geography to the Yao, see Liu Fei-Wen, 'Literacy, Gender, and Class'.

[87] Lien Chinfa, 'Language Adaptation in Taoist Liturgical Texts', in David Johnson (ed.), *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion* (Berkeley, CA: Chinese Popular Culture Project, 1995), 219-246.

[88] Liu Fei-Wen, 'Literacy, Gender, and Class', 246.

perspective in the investigation of Yao ritual tradition, and especially the interpretation of ritual-master texts, such as the texts about female fertility deities.

Mixed Methodologies: Library Survey and Fieldwork Investigation

At the beginning of my study of the narratives about and practices linked to the locally respected female fertility deities, in particular the Mother of Emperors, worshipped by the Yao, one question was constantly gnawing at my mind: what is the significance of the texts about female fertility deities? That is, do these texts entail a wider regional and cross-ethnic cultural and religious significance, despite the fact that the majority has been discovered in the ritual texts conserved by one of the Yao subgroups, the Mun?

As I have delved into the textual analysis and ethnographic investigation of the Mother of Emperors, most of my worries about the applicability of the texts derived from one particular Yao group have gradually faded away. That is, when I realized that, although the knowledge and representation of the Mother of Emperors does indeed pertain to this specific group of people, nevertheless the construct of the knowledge and representation is firmly rooted in the beliefs surrounding the power of female fertility in southern China, that has been called the 'Flower Cultural Sphere' (*huawenhuaquan*) by Guo Wei.[89] The Mother of Emperors is only one of the transformations of the regionally prevalent and inter-ethnically relevant cultural phenomena associated with female fertility. In a sense, the narratives and practices surrounding the Mother of Emperors and her female spiritual subordinates can be regarded as a particular kind of 'knowledge', dominated by a 'series of transformations', whose birth is based on already existing knowledge.[90]

So far, all that has been extracted from Yao ritual manuscripts about the goddesses of fertility are fragmented stories in forms of chants and songs. As the authorship of the Yao ritual manuscripts remains elusive, it is hard to say with any exactitude whether these fragmented textual narratives of the goddesses of fertility

[89] Guo Wei, *Zhongguo Nüshen* 中國女神 (Chinese Goddesses) (Nanning: Guangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000).
[90] With reference to Marilyn Strathern (ed.), *Shifting Contexts: Transformations in Anthropological Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 6.

might represent the folklore of one coherent cultural region and one social group of believers, or whether they are simply a product of the erudite mind of one literate author.[91]

Despite the fragmentation of these textual descriptions, after these contents have been passed under review, this research does suggest that they have 'a fundamental symbolic unity' underlying them.[92] In a manner similar to Brigitte Baptandier's approaches to the stories of the Lady of Linshui, *Linshui Pingyao Chuan*, this research also treats the seemingly unrelated stories of goddesses of fertility as written in Yao ritual manuscripts as a repository of anecdotes (that is, short, amusing stories about real incidents or persons), rather than as a novel (that is, a fictitious prose narrative of book-length). To strengthen this hypothesis, the research compares these textual narratives stories with related local folklore, customs, norms and ritual practices.

This research utilizes mixed methodologies. The first is the library survey. The Yao manuscripts I have employed in making my textual analysis originate from two kinds of sources. The first is my own collection that consists of copies of manuscripts gathered during various field trips to Guangxi and Yunnan between 1999 and 2012 (hereafter the Guangxi and Yunnan Collection). The second manuscript source is composed of collections preserved in different libraries and museums in Europe. I obtained the first group of Yao manuscripts not by purchasing them but by visiting their present owners and asking their permission to make either digital or hard copies of the texts. For my study of the second group of Yao manuscripts, I have undertaken separate research trips to access the collections of Yao manuscripts preserved in the four different locations in Europe.

The second method I have employed is fieldwork investigation. In order to conduct my investigation into Yao manuscripts, I travelled to two Yao villages located in western Guangxi. The first is Weihao 偉好, a Mien hamlet in Fanchang Village 凡昌村, Lizhou Township 利周鄉, Tianlin County 田林縣, Baice City 百色

[91] Barend J. ter Haar, 'Review of La dame-du-bord-de-l'eau (Nanterre, Société d'ethnologie, 1988)', *T'oung Pao,* LXXXVIII (1992), 373-378.
[92] Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult*, Kristin Fryklund (trans.) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 20-22.

市, in northwest Guangxi; the second is Dingcao 丁草, a Mun hamlet in Kujiao Village 枯叫村, Nanping Township 南屏鄉, Shangsi County 上思縣, Fangchenggang City 防城港市, in southwest Guangxi (the area is also known as Shiwan Dashan 十萬大山 [Ten Thousand Big Mountains]). Weihao has been an anthropological fieldwork site of mine since I commenced my MA thesis research in 1999. My familiarity with the Mien language and the people in this particular village made it a natural choice to do research on Yao manuscripts. The reason I went to Dingcao was the connection I had been able to establish there with the help of Deng Wentong and Wang Meigui.

Deng Wentong is a retired teacher of Mun origin and an ordained Daoist priest, who has written widely on many aspects of Yao studies. When Deng learned that I had been researching Yao narratives and practices centring on the goddesses of fertility for my PhD project, he kindly directed my attention to the *Social and Historical Survey of the Yao People in Guangxi, Volume Six* (*Guangxi yaozu shehui lishi diaocha diliuce*).[93] He told me that many manuscripts, including the texts containing stories of goddesses of fertility, had been confiscated in the vicinity of Fangchenggang City during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Fortunately, in the 1980s they were rescued from the police station in Shangsi County by a research team in which Deng Wentong had personally participated, and some of the contents of the manuscript collection were compiled and published in this volume.[94] A compelling desire to reposition the printed contents of the manuscripts in their provenance, including the relevant manuscripts kept in several of the European library collections I had reviewed, spurred me on to grasp any possibility to visit one of these Mun villages in the course of this research.

Wang Meigui's connections with and knowledge of several Mun villages in Shangsi, including Dingcao, strengthened my resolve to go to Dingcao. Wang Meiguan was a secretary at the College of Ethnology and Sociology of Guangxi

[93] Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiqu bianjizu, *Guangxi yaozu shehui lishi diaocha diliuce* 廣西瑤族社會歷史調查第六冊 (The Social and Historical Survey of the Yao People in Guangxi, Volume Six) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1987).

[94] The majority of the members of the research team were teachers and researchers from the present Guangxi University for Nationalities (previously Guangxi College for Nationalities). Apart from Deng Wentong, the team also included the late Zhang Youjun, another well-known Chinese scholar of Yao studies. Deng said it was mainly thanks to Zhang's efforts that the collection of confiscated texts was able to be processed and published.

University for Nationalities when we met in 2012. She has a master's degree in religion and conducted fieldwork for her master's thesis in Shangsi in 2007. When she learned what the purpose of my investigation was, she immediately pinpointed Dingcao for me, stressing the presence of the many skilled ritual specialists resident there. Through her I was able to visit Dingcao and meet the people and collect the data I present in this research.

Introduction to Each Chapter

This introduction has set out the fundamentals of the intended research. Chapter Two situates Yao religious culture and manuscripts in the broader regional and historical context. Chapter Three reveals that religion has been an important interface at which the patrilineal ideology, an ideological basis for the development of lineage society and the facilitation of integration into the Chinese state, had been enforced in Yao society. Nonetheless, it also shows that this is where the Yao have assimilated and transformed the religious-cum-imperial influences in the light of their own cultural schema. Chapter Four addresses the cultural and political significance of the goddesses of fertility among the Yao in a regional context. It elucidates the different forms of gender ideal and gender relationship articulated in Yao cultural norms and religious performance. It also offers a close reading of the narratives surrounding the Mother of Emperors, showing why the construct of the Mother of Emperors could be regarded as a manifestation of the Yao's struggles to claim their autonomy in their encounters with the civilizing value of patrilineal ideology. Chapter Five suggests the concept of 'performative literacy' in order to explore the significance of Yao female singers in a ritual setting. Commencing by viewing the narratives of the twenty-four assistant female fertility deities as the probable product of female singing, the chapter goes on to illustrate the different forms of expression and action assumed by women in the face of the imposed patrilineal ideology channelled through the Yao religious interface. The conclusion recapitulates the highlights of each chapter and proposes potential related topics for future research.

Chapter 2. The Yao Existed Before the Court Appeared: The Yao, the Chinese Imperial State, and Yao Manuscripts

Introduction

I recalled an interview scenario that had remained with me as a vivid memory and fortunately I was still able to find it preserved in my old field notes from when I commenced my fieldwork research on Yao religious culture in 1999. It was an interview with a Mien ritual master and the incumbent village-level 'party clerk' (*shuji*) in Weihao, Li Caiyou, who was in his forties when we met. Before we went into the details of village history, Li opened the discourse by quoting an ancient Yao saying: 'The Yao existed before the court appeared' (*xianyouyao, houyouchao*). I can still remember his vivid facial expression, in which pride and bitterness vied with each other, as he told me this. Li Caiyou was clearly aware of the fact that, in reality, history had not unfolded in a way that had allowed the Yao to claim a superior status over the state. It was and still is the other way around.

The saying that 'the Yao existed before the court appeared' is not restricted to the Mien but is also a widespread adage among many other Yao.[1] It draws a state-free picture of Yao society before it was engulfed by Chinese imperial governance as their shared history unfolded. It also implies the Yao's awareness of and possible encounters with successive interventions, represented either as institutions, policies, military operations, trade and market, or as individual officials and religious representatives of the Chinese imperial courts. The Yao's assimilation of Chinese literacy and the religious traditions laden with Chinese culture are clear indications of such encounters, as are their material manifestation, the ritual manuscripts.

[1] Tang Xiaotao, *Langyao hezai: Mingqing shiqi Guangxi Xunzhoufu de zuqun bianqian* 俍傜何在-明清時期廣西潯州府的族群變遷 (Where were the Lang and the Yao: Changes in Ethnic Boundaries in Xunzhou Prefecture of Guangxi during Ming and Qing Times) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2011), 192-193.

This chapter sets out important preliminaries that place Yao religious culture and manuscripts in their proper context. I begin by explaining who the Yao are before introducing the two specific Yao groups whose manuscripts are most relevant to my study. The chapter then proceeds with a section narrating a mythologized past, recorded in text and song, of the Yao's relationships with the Chinese imperial courts. Having established a preliminary understanding of the dynamisms in the historical interaction between the Yao and the Chinese imperial courts, the chapter moves on to introduce four aspects of Yao religious culture and manuscripts, including their scriptural and ritual practices, dating information, different forms of textualities and linguistic characteristics.

The Yao People: From A Chinese Perspective

As were the terms 'barbarian' (*man*) and 'Miao', Yao was once an umbrella exonym used by the Han Chinese in official records to cover a wide range of southern non-Han Chinese peoples.[2] 'Yao' is an English transliteration of the Mandarin pronunciation of a Chinese character written alternatively as 猺, 徭, 傜 or 瑤.[3] A detailed and critical examination of the changes in Chinese uses and perceptions of

[2] Feng Henggao (ed.), *Yaozu tongshi shangjun* 瑤族通史上卷 (The Detailed History of the Yao, Volume One) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2007), 39-186.

[3] In Chinese official sources, there have been four ways of composing the character. First is the character 猺, composed of a 'dog' radical on the left and a phonetic element on the right. The first appearance of the character might be dated from the year of 1163, and it was used up through early Republican times (1912-1949) (Cushman, 1970, 49-55). The 'dog' radical is believed to have an apparent association with wild beasts, expressing contempt toward non-Han groups (Alberts, 2006, 26). Second is another form of the character 徭, with the radical meaning 'step on the left foot' on the left, or, alternatively the third form of the character 傜, with the 'human' radical on the left (Ibid., 24). The graph 徭 and 傜 means 'corvée'. The character in question has undergone another change after the founding of the PRC (1949-). The forth written form of 'Yao' is 瑤, with the 'jade' radical meaning 'a precious stone'. Following the guiding principle, Mingcong zhuren (named after the original owner), set by Mao Zhedong (1893-1976) in the early 1950s, the Chinese Communist Party used the character with 'jade' radical to avoid the unpleasant associations of the earlier forms, be it 'wild beasts' or 'people subject to corvée'. The modern change in the written form of the character Yao is not only of political significance, but also has cultural impact. In terms of academic circle, especially in China, the cultural impact has been shown in the prevalent modification of the two previous written forms into the present form, even in the reprints of and citations about the official documents and literary works before 1949. The 'presentism', an attitude toward the past dominated by present-day attitudes and experiences, has often caused the loss of the distinctions between and the associations with the three previous written forms. See Richard D. Cushman, 'Rebel Haunts and Lotus Huts: Problems in the Ethnohistory of the Yao', PhD thesis (Department of Anthropology, University of Cornell, 1970). Eli Alberts, *A History of Daoism and the Yao People of South China* (NY and London: Cambria Press, 2006).

the word 'Yao' as a label, entered in written records as early as in the Southern and Northern Dynasties (AC 420-589), can be found in the works of Richard D. Cushman and Eli Alberts.[4] Cushman and Alberts both provide sufficient evidence to show that, in the Chinese official sources available, the term 'Yao' was initially utilized as an administrative (for taxation and corvée labour) and a territorial (for geographical and economic references) category, only later did it become an ethnic marker.[5] To give just one example, in his eleventh-century work, the *Houshan Tancong*, Chen Shidao writes, 'Those dwelling in the mountain valleys of the two Guang and not under the jurisdiction of the administrative districts (prefectures and counties) are called Yao people (*Yaoren*).'[6] Alberts observantly points out about this quotation, 'it uses the appellation *Yaoren* not as an ethnic label, but rather as a geo-administrative category.'[7] It was not until the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), especially during and after the large-scale mid-Ming 'Yao Wars', known as Great Vine Gorge Event (*datengxia zhiyi*), that the term 'Yao' was transformed into a marker of ethnicity. Thereafter 'Yao' was used to refer to a group of people who were not subject to any form of state control. This term marked them out as a group of people who were the opposite of the 'subordinate people' called *min*.[8]

Certainly, both the classification and the emergence of the 'Yao' people have a definite dynamic relationship with the Chinese state governance in South China. Take the Baimiaotu 百苗圖 or Miaoman tuce 苗蠻圖冊 (Miao Album) (r. 1723-35 or r. 1736-96) for example. The Miao Album depicts eighty-two different ethnic groups, the Yao being one of them, residing in Guizhou.[9] Laura Hostetler concludes that the Miao Album was compiled to provide newly appointed officials with information

[4] Feng, *op. cit.*, 7.
[5] Alberts, *op. cit,* 25.
[6] The original Chinese text is '二廣, 居山谷間, 不隸州縣, 謂之傜人.' in Chen Shidao, Houshan Tancong 後山談叢, Siku Quanshu 四庫全書 1037/89b-90a. Cited in Alberts, *op. cit.*, 37.
[7] Alberts, *op. cit.*, 37-38.
[8] David Faure, 'The Yao Wars in the Mid-Ming and Their Impact on Yao Ethnicity', in Pamela K. Crossley et al. (eds), *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 171-189. Interestingly but most likely erroneously, Cushman suggests that, 'any Chinese speaker who tried to elicit the name for the Yao from a native Yao informant would almost certainly assimilate the 'mienb', denoting 'people' to the Chinese 'min' 民 of the identical meaning.' (Cushman, *op. cit.*, 53)
[9] As Miao served as an overarching term back then, Miao Album actually illustrated 82 different ethnic groups, including but not limited to Miao.

about the population they were to govern.[10] Above all, the most significant and recurring criterion in the classification of non-Han people is several dichotomous and paired sets of terms devised to distinguish between 'subordinate people' (*shu*, 'cooked' or 'tamed' people) and 'not subordinate people' (*sheng*, 'raw' or 'untamed' people). Cushman demonstrates that a number of paired terms for the historical naming of the Yao are as follows:

> The most common pair is Shu 熟 and Sheng 生 (i.e. Shu yao 熟猺 and Sheng yao 生猺) and was applied to all, or almost all, of the hill tribes in South China. The most important factor in placing a local group in this classification was whether the group was considered to be subordinate to the local Chinese administration (Shu) or independent thereof (Sheng). Another set of dyadic terms, common only in reference to the Yao, contains a P'ing ti 平地 ("lowlands") and a Kao shan 高山 ("high mountains") dichotomy; occasionally Kao shan is replaced by Kuo shan 過山 ("mountain crossing")….Finally, there are a number of paired names in the literature which seem to be strictly local designations for the Yao. These include Chu 住 ("settled") and Liu 流 ("migrant"), Nei 內 ("internal") and Wai 外 ("external"), Chen 真 ("real") and Yen 贋 ("fake"), and Liang 良 ("settled") and Man 蠻 ("wild"). Despite differences in the basic meaning of the various sets of terms, they all clearly separate the Yao in roughly the same fashion as the Sheng/Shu dichotomy.[11]

The dichotomy shown in these Sheng/Shu paired terms tellingly reflects the different trajectories in the distinct historical experiences of various 'Yao' groups when they encountered the southward expansion of the Chinese state. Roughly speaking, there are three local reactions to state incorporation: to submit to being incorporated into the state; to resist against it, but most likely fail; and/or to escape from the grasp of the state. Throughout the course of Chinese history, especially in the Ming and Qing times, some of the 'Yao' chose to become a part of the state by allowing themselves to be developed into a lineage society. These groups included the She and Hakka in

[10] David Michael Deal and Laura Hostetler, *The Art of Ethnography: A Chinese "Miao Album"* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), xxiv.
[11] Cushman, 1970, 94.

southeast China.[12] In the borderlands of Guangdong and Guangxi, some remained in a constant state of resistance to state control, for example the Yao in central Guangxi, where the Great Vine Gorge Event broke out.[13] In this area, there were some who chose to become *lang bing* or *langjia jun* (literally, 'wolf packs') and supported the military interventions of the state in its suppression of local ethnic uprisings.[14] Finally, some, such as the Yao in upland Southeast Asia, decided to escape the grasp of the Chinese state entirely.[15]

In the Republican Era (1912-1949), the Yao were recognized as an individual group that was included among the seven national nationalities of the Republic of China, including such other major nationalities as the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, Tibetan and Miao. Although they were accorded their national-level recognition, the Yao remained one of the subjects waiting to be civilized.[16] After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, in the early 1950s the communist party carried out a Chinese Ethnic Classification Campaign (*minzu shibie yundong*). The Campaign identified the 'Yao' as an ethnic group principally made up of highland peoples living in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Hunan, Yunnan, Guangdong, Guizhou and Jiangxi.[17] According to a demographic survey published in

[12] Yang Yanjie, 'Minxi dongshan Xiaoshi de zongzu wenhua jiqi tezhi' (The Lineage Culture and its Characteristics of Xiao Lineage in East Mountain of Western Fujian 閩西東山蕭氏的宗族文化及其特質), in Bien Chiang and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing (eds), *Guojia, shichang yu mailuohua de zuqun* 國家、市場與脈絡化的族群 (State, Market and Ethnic Groups Contextualized) (Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 2003), 105-132. Wu Yongzhang, Shezu yu Miao-Yao bijiao yanjiu 畲族與苗瑤比較研究 (A Comparative Study of nationalities of She, Miao and Yao) (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2002).

[13] David Faure, 'The Yao Wars in the Mid-Ming and Their Impact on Yao Ethnicity', in Pamela K. Crossley et al. (eds), Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 171-189. Ralph A. Litzinger, *Other Chinas: The Yao and the Politics of National Belonging* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 138-182.

[14] Tang Xiaotao, *Langyao hezai: Mingqing shiqi Guangxi Xunzhoufu de zuqun bianqian* 狼傜何在-明清時期廣西潯州府的族群變遷 (Where Were the Lang and the Yao: Changes in Ethnic Boundaries in Xunzhou Prefecture of Guangxi during Ming and Qing times) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2011).

[15] James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2009), 127-177.

[16] Zhao Xuexian et al., *Zhongguo guomindang minzu lilun yu minzu zhengce yanjiu* 中國國民黨民族理論與民族政策研究 (A Study of Theory and Policy for Naitonalities of the Chinese Nationalist Party) (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 2010).

[17] Based on the Stalinist concept of nationality that is defined by the sharing of such common characteristics as language, costume, culture, belief and lifestyle, the campaign was carried out by the government in co-operation with academia and eventually produced a count of 56 officially recognized nationalities, including the Han as the major nationality. See Thomas S. Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

2010, the 'Yao' in China number roughly 2.79 million.[18] Currently, the ethnic label 'Yao' actually includes diverse peoples who speak different languages and have distinct cultures. Conversely, it also excludes groups that could be meaningfully included (such as the Miao in Hainan, an omission that is a simple oversight in the classification, and even the She).[19]

The classification of Yao languages and their relationship to Miao languages is still unresolved and widely debated. According to Chinese linguists, Miao-Yao (Hmong-Mien) should be classified as a branch of the Sino-Tibetan language group.[20] However, many western linguists have proposed that they should be seen as a branch of Austro-Asiatic or Austro-Thai languages.[21] Most Hmong-Mien speakers belong to the Miao and Yao 'nationalities' in China, although not all Miao or Yao people speak a Hmong-Mien language; many now speak local varieties of Chinese instead.[22] Linguistically, there are at least four different language groups that are classified as ethnic Yao in modern China. These four groups include such Miao-speaking groups as the Pu nu, such Yao-speaking groups as the Mien, such Dong-Sui–speaking groups as the Lak kja and such Chinese dialect-speaking groups as the Piog tuo jo (autonyms in all cases). Importantly, these four Yao groups cannot communicate with each other using their own languages.[23] The long and the short of it is that classification into the

[18] National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China 中華人民共和國國家統計局, <http://data.stats.gov.cn/search/keywordlist2;jsessionid=BB0BD67C6AAE17277DBA9107507F033A?keyword=2010 年瑤族人口>, accessed 18 Feb. 2014.

[19] Huang Guiquan, *Yaozuzhi, xiangwan: Yunnan yaozu wenhua yu minzu rentong* 瑤族志：香碗—雲南瑤族文化與民族認同 (An Ethnography of the Yao, Incense Bowl: Culture and Ethnic Identity of the Yao in Yunnan) (Kunming: Yunnan daxue chubanshe, 2009), 302-305. Wu Yongzhang, *Shezu yu Miao-Yao bijiao yanjiu* 畲族與苗瑤比較研究 (A Comparative Study of the Nationalities of the She, the Miao and the Yao) (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2002).

[20] For example, Li Fang-Kuei, 'Guangxi Lingyun Yaoyu' 廣西凌雲猺語 (The Yao Language Discovered in Lingyun, Guangxi), *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* (中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 Bulletin of the Institue of History and Philology, Academia Sinica) 1(1930), 419-426. Zhao Yuanren, *Guangxi Yaoge jiyin* 廣西瑤歌記音 (The Recorded Sounds of Yao Songs from Guangxi) (Beiping: Academia Sinica, 1930).

[21] Andre-Georges Haudricourt argues an Austro-Asiatic origin of Miao-Yao language. See Andre-Georges Haudricourt, 'Introduction à la phonologie historique ... miao-yao,' *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 44 (1954), 555-574. P. K. Benedict also disagrees the Sino-Tibetan hypothesis and proposes an Austro-Thai origin of Miao-Yao language. See P. K. Benedict, *Austro-Thai: Language and Culture, with a Glossary of Roots* (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1975).

[22] Stephen A. Wurm et al. (eds), *Language Atlas of China* (Hong Kong: Longman, 1988). See also Martha Ratliff, *Hmong-Mien Language History* (The Australian National University, 2010), 1.

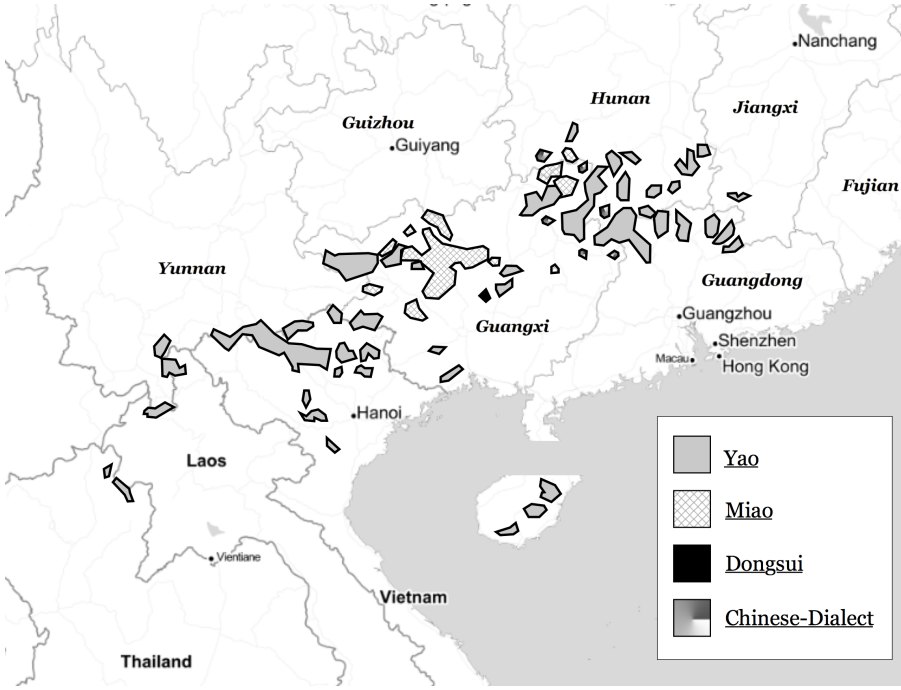
[23] Feng Henggao (ed.), *Yaozu tongshi zhongjun* 瑤族通史中卷 (The Detailed History of the Yao, Volume Two) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2007), 822-826. Robert S. Ramsey, *The Languages of China* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 278-285. For a further understanding of the

same language group does not necessarily indicate mutual intelligibility, for instance, within the Mien (Yao)-speaking group there are at least six different subgroups speaking different languages that are sometimes mutually unintelligible.[24] Very significant differences in cultural practice are also found between some of these subgroups. Although in their adherence to ritual traditions, Daoist beliefs and rituals take precedence in the religious life of most of the Yao-speaking and Dong-Sui-speaking groups, obvious borrowings from the Han Chinese religious culture are less prominent in the Miao-speaking group.[25]

constructed nature of ethnic classification with a focus on the Yao, see Chen Meiwen, 'Constructed History: Ethnic Yao in Modern China', *Leidschrift,* 26/1 (2011), 93-108.

[24] Mao Zongwu, *Yaozu mianyu fangyan yanjiu* 瑤族勉語方言研究 (Research on Dialects in the Mien Language Group) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2004).

[25] Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao rende goucheng yu shengming de laiyuan* 從命名談廣西田林盤古瑤人的構成與生命的來源 (Conceptualizations of Personhood and the Origins of Life as Seen in Naming Traditions among the Pangu Yao of Tianlin, Guangxi) (Taipei: Tangshan, 2003), 11-15.



Map 1. Language Distribution of the 'Yao'[26]

In Vietnam, where they are classified as one of the fifty-four official ethnic groups in that country, the Yao are known as Người Dao. They are just one group of the Yao dispersed throughout upland Southeast Asia who are the descendants of different waves of ethnic migrations that have taken place intermittently within the last 300 to 400 years.[27] The Yao populations in Australia, Canada, France and the United States are the result of more recent migrations in the aftermath of the Indochina Wars (1946-1979).[28] Whether the Yao diaspora was voluntary or forced, all the Yao dispersed outside China can trace their roots back to China.[29] Therefore, the

[26] Based on Robert S. Ramsey, *op. cit.* 278-285.
[27] Takemura Takuji, *Yaozu de lishi yu wenhua* 瑤族的歷史與文化 (The History and Culture of the Yao), Zhu Guichang and Jin Shaoping (trans.) (Nanning: Guangxi minzu xueyuan minzu yanjiusuo, 1986[1981]), 4-5. But, according to Richard Cushman, 'Yao may well have been present throughout their modern range of distribution in South China and Vietnam since the eleventh century'. (Richard Cushman, 'Rebel Haunts and Lotus Huts', 141.)
[28] Ralph A. Litzinger, *Other Chinas: The Yao and the Politics of National Belonging* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), xi-xii.
[29] Huang Yu and Huang Fangping, *Guoji yaozu gaishu* 國際瑤族概述 (Introduction to the Yao Worldwide) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1993). Hjorleifur Jonsson, 'War's Ontogeny: Militias and Ethnic Boundaries in Laos and Exile', *Southeast Asian Studies,* 47 (2009), 125-149.

history of the Yao in China merits special attention, a case I shall argue in the pages that follow.

Map 2. 'Yao' Migration[30]

Two groups of Yao-speaking people, the Mien or Iu-Mien and the Kimdi or Kimmun (autonyms), represent the majority of the Yao outside of China. 'Mien' means 'people,' and 'iu' might represent either a name of Chinese origin, presumably in its Cantonese vocalism, or it might be an indigenous self-designation.[31] There are various exonyms used in Chinese written documents to refer to this Yao subgroup (see Table 1). One of the most commonly used exonyms is Pan Yao, literally meaning 'Plate Yao', or 'the people who believe in the mythic dog-ancestor Panhu'.[32] Kimdi or Kimmun (or simply Mun) means 'the people in the forest'.[33] As among the Mien, a number of different exonyms are used to designate this Yao subgroup (see also Table 1). A commonly used exonym, Landian Yao, literally means 'Indigo Yao', or 'those

[30] Based on Huang Yu and Huang Fangping, *op. cit.* preface 8.
[31] Christopher Anthony Forbes Court, *Fundamentals of IU mien (YAO) Grammar* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1985), 2. Richard Cushman, *op. cit.* 49-55.
[32] Yan Fuli and Shang Chengzu (eds), *Guangxi lingyun yaoren diaocha baogao* 廣西凌雲猺人調查報告 (Survey of the Yao people in Lingyun, Guangxi) (Beiping: Guoli zhongyang yanjiuyuan shenhui kexue yanjiusuo, 1929), 21.
[33] Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiqu bianjizu, *Guangxi yaozu shehui lishi diaocha, diliuce* 廣西瑤族歷史社會調查第六冊 (The Historical and Social Survey of the Yao People in Guangxi, Volume Six) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1987), 129.

who make dye'.[34] In Thailand both 'Yao' and 'Yiu mien' (Iu-mien) are used interchangeably; the Yao in Laos are known by both the exonym Yao and the autonyms Mien and Mun.[35]

Language	Autonyms	Exonyms
Yao-language speaking	Iu-Mien (Mien)	Pangu Yao 盤古瑤, Pan Yao 盤瑤, Panhu Yao 盤瓠瑤, Guoshan Yao 過山瑤, Daban Yao 大板瑤, Xiaoban Yao 小板瑤, Ban Yao 板瑤, Dingban Yao 頂板瑤, Jiantou Yao 尖頭瑤, Pingtou Yao 平頭瑤, Hongtou Yao 紅頭瑤, Jiangan Yao 箭桿瑤 , Niujiao Yao 牛角瑤, Tu Yao 土瑤 (in Hezhou, Guangxi 廣西賀州), Bendi Yao 本地瑤, Hua Yao 花瑤 (in Yangshuo, Guangxi 廣西陽朔), Ao Yao 坳瑤, Zheng Yao 正瑤, Liang Yao 糧瑤
	Kimdi or Kimmun (Mun)	Landian Yao 藍靛瑤, Shanzi Yao 山子瑤, Huatou Yao 花頭瑤, Sha Yao 沙瑤, Pingtou Yao 平頭瑤, Juzi Yao 埧子瑤

Table 1. Exonyms for Mien and Mun[36]

The bulk of the collections of Yao manuscripts from Southeast Asia now kept in various American and European libraries and museums come from these two specific Yao subgroups. In Southeast Asia, since the 1970s multiple factors, among them poverty, political pressure, loss of knowledge and perhaps even market demand, have caused the Yao to renounce their ritual legacy.[37] This is the reason so many Yao ritual manuscripts from Southeast Asia could be collected by purchase by the American and European museums and universities.

Mien and Mun: A 'Society of Escape'

[34] Yan Fuli and Shang Chengzu, *op. cit*, 12.
[35] Jacob Cawthorne, 'Taoism and Self-Governance: The Yiu Mien of Laos', paper presented at the conference of Asian Borderlands: Enclosure, Interaction and Transformation, 2nd Conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network, Chiang Mai University (RCSD), Thailand, November 5-7, 2010.
[36] Mao Zongwu, *Yaozu mianyu fangyan yanjiu,* 3, 6-8.
[37] Jacques Lemoine, *Yao Ceremonial Paintings* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1982), 7.

Before China opened itself up to the outside world in the late 1970s, the migrant Yao, exclusively the Mien and the Mun, outside of China were the only Yao that were accessible to scholarly research. Writing of the origin of the Yao and specifically these two Yao sub-groups, Jess G. Pourret states in his *The Yao: The Mien and Mun Yao in China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand* that,

> The Yao originated in China, possibly in the Yangtse Kiang area. They might have originated as a branch of the Han Chinese whose development took a different course, or they might perhaps derive from a completely different stock, perhaps one close to the Mongols….the two largest groups of Mien- and Mun-speakers…compose two distinct entities. Once they must have constituted a single unit, but over time they drifted apart and migrated into several regions, organising their lives with certain elements in parallel, and with certain differences, which could explain some dialectical variants.[38]

The dialects spoken by the Mien and Mun are both classified as belonging to the Mien (Yao) dialects of which there are more than four that form the Mien (Yao) language derived from the Miao/Yao linguistic family.[39] Herbert C. Purnell has postulated that the divergence between the Mien and the Mun, the two major dialect divisions of Proto-Yao, might have taken place between about 500 to 1,000 years ago.[40] Furthermore, 'both groups include Cantonese influences, while Mun has also Fujian dialects influences. Mien and Mun can understand approximately 60-70% of each others' languages, particulary in China and northern Vietnam where contacts are frequent.'[41] Despite the divergence in language, as will soon be shown and argued below, the religious cultures of the two Yao groups both contain a high degree of Daoist-Buddhist, and even Confucian, religious-cultural elements.[42] When composing their ritual manuscripts they have both utilized the Chinese written language in a

[38] Jess G. Pourret, *The Yao: The Mien and Mun Yao in China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand* (Chicago, 2002), 15.
[39] Martha Ratliff, *Hmong-Mien Language History* (The Australian National University, 2010).
[40] Herbert C. Purnell, 'Toward a Reconstruction of Proto-Miao-Yao', PhD thesis (Cornell University, 1970), cited in Richard Cushman, 'Rebel Haunts and Lotus Huts', 80-82.
[41] Pourret, *op. cit.*
[42] Huang Guiquan, *Yaozuzhi, xiangwan,* 75.

modified form. Most apposite to the argument here, the two Yao groups have also shared similar cosmologies and concomitant ritual practices to do with female fertility that are unquestionably of regional relevance in southern China as a whole (see Chapter 4).

Another significant note is that the forebears of these two Yao groups, often referred to as Banyao and Shanzi Yao in Chinese written historical documents, might have always lived in a historical position that fell outside imperial Chinese administrative control. Tang Xiaotao's research on the diversity of people in the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864) has convincingly shown that the forebears of these two groups of Yao had never been completely integrated into any formal administrative systems, either the *lijia* system, a household registration system established in the fourteenth century by the Chinese imperial courts, or the Stone Tablet System (*shipai zhidu*), a contractual arrangement arguably initiated in the Ming times (1368-1644), organized by the Yao themselves, whose purpose was to exercise a degree of local governance by mutual consensus.[43] Historically, the Chinese imperial courts saw those mobile 'Yao' who were not entered into any registration system and were therefore not subject to taxation and corvée labour as the 'untamed' (*sheng*) Yao, as opposed to the Yao who did conform and were labelled the 'tame' (*shu*) Yao.[44] Importantly, from perspective of state governance, the people who fell into the 'untamed' category were the potential instigators of uprisings and hence the targets for suppression.[45]

However, according to James Scott, the people who were designated as such categories by the state actually intentionally designed their society to avoid being governed by an external state. If we were to agree with James Scott that various forms of subsistence and kinship that are usually taken as given, as ecologically and culturally determined, to be treated largely as political choices consciously made by the people in Zomia, the ways in which the societies of the two Yao groups have been

[43] Caution is of course needed in reading historical accounts in which such ethnonyms appear, for the current classification in modern China cannot be applied uncritically to claim any direct genealogical link with the people of the same ethnonyms. Tang Xiaotao, *Langyao hezai,* 167-198.
[44] Richard Cushman, 'Rebel Haunts and Lotus Huts', 94.
[45] Richard Cushman, ibid.

constructed might indeed characterize a 'society of escape'.[46] One aspect of Yao society to do with the ways the Yao have constantly tried to maintain a high degree of physical mobility is of particular relevance to the intended argument here.

As observed and stated by Takemura Takuji, apart from the Miao (Hmong), the Yao are the only other group of people among many non-Han Chinese groups in southern China who have travelled over a significantly widely ranging space between 20 to 30 degrees north latitude and 102 to 120 degrees east longitude, mostly in west-southwest direction from Southwest China towards upland Southeast Asia, within the last 300 to 400 years.[47] Many hypotheses have been formed to speculate on the reasons and methods by which the Yao undertook these movements, but I agree with Richard Cushman that a 'detailed understanding of the minutiae of village movements is of the utmost importance.'[48] Cushman has aptly concluded,

> The majority of Yao villages are located in the mountains of southern China and northern mainland Southeast Asia and their inhabitants cultivate upland rice and frequently the opium poppy…the size of Yao villages varies enormously, from five or six households with fifty or sixty members to perhaps as many as seven hundred households with a total of two thousand individuals. The size of villages is probably correlated with their stability, with the fertility of adjacent land, and with whether or not the Yao own wet rice fields. Some villages have been in existence for hundreds of years [presumably the case with the Pai Yao village of You Ling, Guangdong]. In contrast, small villages relying on swidden agriculture seem to move fairly frequently, at least until an unusually good location is found….Reasons for the movement of a village to a new site, or for the break-up of a village into factions, all or most of which resettle elsewhere, are tied in with the disruption of local ecological or inter-cultural relationships.[49]

The Mien and Mun villages I have been able to visit in different locations in Hunan, Guangxi and Yunnan on my separate fieldwork trips, including Weihao and Dingcao, are mostly composed of inhabitants not exceeding fifty households, sometimes

[46] James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed,* preface xi.
[47] Takemura Takuji, *Yaozu de lishi yu wenhua,* 4.
[48] Richard Cushman, *op. cit.* 123-125.
[49] Ibid., 119-122.

numbering fewer than 150 members to at most 300 individuals.[50] In the case of Weihao and Dingcao, their migratory histories recounted in local gazetteers and oral village histories indicate that they did not settle down in their current locations until the early twentieth century. Small-scale movements into neighbouring areas have been discovered to have occurred since then. Before their major settlement in their current habitations, the two Yao groups basically relied on swidden agriculture.[51] In other words, the ways in which the Mien and Mun villages are constructed and their way of life make it easier for them to migrate. The design of their villages and economic structures that allow maintaining a high degree of physical mobility are revealed, for instance, in their religious practices. The ephemerality of the incense-burners placed on the household altar is a good example.

The incense-burner is called *xuŋ lou* in Mien daily and religious language, and *huuŋ wan* in Mun daily language, *jaaŋ lu* in Mun religious language.[52] The materials used for making the incense-burner vary from village to village and from place to place. The simplest form of an incense-burner is no more than a plastic bottle filled with incense ashes to hold the incense sticks (see Illustration 1), or it can be fashioned from bamboo.[53] Or people simply buy a ready-made incense-burner, usually made of copper or earthenware, from the market in the vicinity (see Illustration 2).

Symbolically, the establishment of a Yao household is not deemed complete until the incense-burner has been set up on the household altar that is usually built high on a wall facing the main entrance gate of the household. The essentiality of the incense-burner in defining a household is clearly expressed when the contents of a household are divided up between siblings.[54] Although the term *pun piau* (Mien daily language) or *fun piaau* (Mun daily language), which literally means 'separating the house', is used to refer to such a situation, the more exact term is in fact *pun xuŋ lou*

[50] Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao,* 32. Wu Ninghua and He Mengmeng, 'Menren nüxing gechang chuantong bianqian yanjiu' 門人女性歌唱傳統變遷研究 (A Study of Transitions Regarding Traditional Mun Female Singing from Shangsi County in Guangxi, China), *Kundu yinyue xuekan* (關渡音樂學刊 *Kuandu Music Journal*), 20 (2014), 43-66 at 46.
[51] Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao,* 32-39. Wu Ninghua and He Mengmeng, ibid., 46.
[52] Chen Meiwen, ibid., 67-70. Huang Guiquan, *Yaozuzhi, xiangwan,* 18-20.
[53] Huang Guiquan, ibid., 19.
[54] This is also well-attested in Chinese religious practice in general. See Barend ter Haar, 'Teaching With Incense,' *SCEAR,* 11 (1999), 1-14.

(Mien daily and religious language) or *fun huuŋ wan* (Mun daily language), both meaning 'separating the incense bowl'. In other words, the sacred incense-burner defines the founding of a household.[55]

Resembling the 'separating the incense' (*fenxiang*) practice between temples or religious groups among Han-Chinese communities, a handful of incense ashes from the original household will be collected and relocated in the new incense-burner of the new household.[56] The major difference is that neither the original household nor the new household bother to keep the incense-burner, as the temples or religious groups in Han-Chinese society are so careful to do.[57] On the basis of his fieldwork experience in Vietnam during the 1980s, Deng Wentong told me that when a Yao family decides to migrate, they like to travel lightly. Only three things do they trouble to take along with them, namely a motorcycle, a hunting gun and a bundle of ritual manuscripts. When I asked why not take the sacred incense-burner so important to a household settlement along, he replied, 'because it can easily be remade'.[58]

On a symbolic level, just as the setting up of an incense-burner defines the founding of a household, the ephemerality of the material incense-burner therefore suggestively indicates the ephemerality of the material house. The ephemerality of the material house can be of course interpreted as the logical result of the frequent moving from village to village by the Yao, but it can also be regarded as a conscious cultural design representing the political mind-set of the Yao, determined to maintain their high degree of physical mobility so as to be able to avoid being governed by the Chinese imperial state.

The special historical position of these two groups of Yao people, who might have been classified as 'untamed' Yao from the perspective of the Chinese imperial state, might explain why they produced *quasi*-edicts, the Yao Charters, which are predominately owned by these two groups, to legitimate their right to roam across mountains and be exempted from taxation and corvée labour. They claimed these

[55] Huang Guiquan, *op. cit.*
[56] Ting Jen-chieh, *Chongfang Bao'ancun: hanren minjian xinyang de shehuixue yanjiu* 重訪保安村：漢人民間信仰的社會學研究 (Revisiting Bao'an Village: A Sociological Study of Popular Beliefs of Han Chinese) (Taipei: Lianjing, 2013), 199.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Interview notes, 25 Sep. 2012.

charters were bestowed on them by the Chinese emperor. Despite their possession of these documents, their daily experiences have been overwhelmingly permeated with violent military campaigns launched by the Chinese imperial state. The next section illustrates in more detail the bifurcated representation of the Chinese imperial courts, one beneficial, one dangerous, the Yao have revealed in texts and songs.

Yao and the Chinese Imperial Courts: A Mythologized Past

Historically, one of the means used to establish the mutual recognition of political legitimacy between the successive Chinese imperial states and the leaders or headmen of non-Han Chinese societies was by the exchange of accoutrements that played a significant role in rites (*liyi*). Honours such as edicts (*zhaoshu*), official posts (*guangjue*), seals (*yinzhang*) and similar ceremonial acknowledgements were regularly bestowed by the Chinese imperial states on the leaders or headmen of local communities to win over their loyalty. In return, the leaders or headmen would present gifts to the dynastic courts, endorse the appointed local officials and, most importantly, follow the officially sanctioned protocol in swearing their allegiance to successive Chinese imperial states.[59] Generally speaking, this is how the previous *jimi* system ([control by] loose rein system) and the later *tusi* system (native chieftain system) worked in ethnic areas in southern China. Not so in the case of the Yao as the historical sources give the impression that there might not have been any Yao chiefs (*yao qiu*),[60] reported in Han-Chinese official documents, who had assumed the position of a native chieftain (*tusi*), with the benefit of the legitimacy bestowed by the dynastic courts to act as a counterpart for them on a local level.[61]

[59] He Xi, 'Tuqiu guifu de chuanshuo yu huanan zongzu shehui de chuangzao: yi Gaozhou Xianfuren xinyang wei zhongxin de kaocha' 土酋歸附的傳說與華南宗族社會的創造—以高州冼夫人信仰為中心的考察 (Legends of the Allegiances of Indigenous Chiefs and the Creation of Lineage Society in South China: A Study of the Beliefs Surrounding the Lady of Xian in Gaozhou), *Lishi renleixue xuekan* (歷史人類學學刊 Journal of History and Anthropology), 6 (2008), 23-66 at 31-32.

[60] Within the Yao villages, the Yao elect either a chief or a council of elders to settle disputes and mediate, if necessary, with other groups with whom the Yao are in contact. Although village chiefs sometimes extend the effective area of their influence to several neighboring villages, the Yao have never succeeded in creating any kind of permanent supra-village political unity. See Richard Cushman, 'Rebel Haunts and Lotus Huts', 121.

[61] Cushman argues, 'the traditions of a Yao king occasionally mentioned in the literature must be ascribed to the garbled transmission of memories of the *t'u szu* [*tusi*] officials in China, or, more likely,

This supposition is prompted by the fact that the presence of an official seal and the posts of 'Yao officials' (*yaoguan*) are only occasionally reported in official Han Chinese documentation. A rare mention of an official seal relating to the Yao merely reads: 'The seal of the official for the pacification of the Yao in Cengcheng County, Bolo County and Longmen County', referring to three counties in the east and southeast Guangdong. On the basis of this evidence, Richard Cushman infers that, 'The person who held the office (hereditary since late Ming times [1368-1644] in a local Chinese family surnamed Li) was merely a mediator between the Yao and the Chinese in the three counties mentioned on the seal and had no authority whatsoever over internal Yao affairs'.[62]

If any Yao documents do actually signify Chinese imperial recognition, the Yao Charters, the 'Charter of Emperor Ping' (*pinhuang juandie* or variants thereof) or the 'Proclamation [Giving the Yao Permission] to Cross the Mountains' (*guoshan bangwen* or variations thereof), might be counted as *quasi*-edicts.[63] The story recorded in the charters recounts how the heroic Yao ancestor, Panhu, had assisted Emperor Ping in destroying his enemy. Should he do so, his reward would be to wed an imperial daughter and, accordingly, the emperor had married his third daughter to Panhu. More generally, the emperor permitted Panhu and the twelve clans of his descendants to cross the mountains without paying a tax or toll or having to provide corvée labour.[64]

Many Chinese scholars take the Yao Charters at their face value and claim they are valid historical sources illustrating the early relationship between the Yao and the Chinese imperial state.[65] However, Barend ter Haar has pertinently questioned this assumption and pointed out that the Yao Charters, 'Simply do not qualify as valid bureaucratic documents, since they lack any mention of the agencies responsible for

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to references to the P'an hu myth (P'an hu, in some versions at least, is given the rank of King by the emperor)'. See Richard Cushman, ibid., 121-122 footnote 50.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Huang Yu (ed.), *Pinghuang juandie jibian* 評皇券牒集編 (An Annotated Compilation of the Charter of Emperor Ping) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1990).

[64] Eli Alberts, 'Commemorating the Ancestors' Merit: Myth, Schema, and History in the "Charter of Emperor Ping"', *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology,* 9/1 (2011), 19-65.

[65] This sort of literature is voluminous. To give one example, Li Weixin, 'Shilun Yaozu guoshanbang' 試論瑤族過山榜 (Preliminary Discussion of the 'Proclamation [Allowing the Yao] to Cross the Mountains' of the Yao), *Guangxi minzu xueyuan xuebao* (廣西民族學院學報 Journal of Guangxi College for Nationalities), 3 (1984), 29-34.

drawing them up, of the investigative process and of the official evaluation'.[66] Instead, he suggests viewing the Yao Charters as a creative imitation of one type of official document, namely the charters (*die*) in which official titles were bestowed on local deities, especially common since the late-eleventh century, that were composed by the Yao themselves on the basis of orally transmitted mythology. Ter Haar concludes,

> [The Yao charters] entailed some of the [imperial] system's premises, notably the right of a conveniently distant emperor to dispense favours, but at the same time subverted the much closer authority of the local officials, by placing them outside their power to impose taxes and corvée. Therefore, by accepting the imperial system on a higher level, it became possible to maintain full autonomy on an immediate local level.[67]

In a nutshell, the Yao assumed the role of bureaucratic power-wielders in their vicinity by appropriating the authenticities conferred on them by the more distant and higher imperial authority. While seeking political recognition from the higher authority in the Chinese imperial system, the imperial intervention the Yao had experienced above all others was evidently the cruelty of the military presence of the state, an enduring theme in Yao migratory histories. It is particularly brought to life in the origin myth of 'The Ferry Across the Sea' (*piaoyao guohai*), in which the Yao are said to have been forced to take flight from a utopian world, referred to as the Peach Spring Grotto (sometimes Plum Mountain Grotto [*Meishandong*]) or Thousand Household Grotto [*Qianjiadong*]), to escape state military intrusion.[68]

Another genre that vividly records Yao encounters with state violence is that in the *Indication Songs of Migration* (*qianxi xinge*), and their contents often recounts the events that happened during their migration.[69] In these discourses about state

[66] Barend J. ter Haar, 'A New Interpretation of the Yao Charters', in Paul van der Velde and Alex Mckay (eds), *New Developments in Asian Studies*, (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), 3-19 at 4.
[67] Ibid.,13.
[68] There are a considerable number of scholarly works on this particular Yao origin myth. To give one example, Takemura Takuji, *Yaozu de lishi yu wenhua,* 270-295.
[69] The indication song is called *tian* in Mun language. It is written in the genre of folksong and in a context in which the addresser and the addressee cannot see each other easily. By topic, indication songs can be divided into: the *Indication Songs of Migration, the Indication Songs of Looking for Relatives* (*chaqin xinge*)*, and the Indication Songs of Telling Misfortunes* (*kuqing xinge*)*, and the Indication Songs of Love* (*aiqing xinge*)*.* Yuenan Laojiesheng wenhua tiyu lüyou ting (eds), *Yuenan*

military violence, the imperial state is often referred to as 'officials' (*guan*), 'king's soldiers' (*wangbing*) and 'court' or alternately 'dynasty' (*chao*). For instance, the lyrics of the *Song of the Plum Mountain Grotto* state, 'Imperial officials came to seize our land; the Yao were forced to flee to wastelands/the wilderness elsewhere'.[70] Or, a folksong narrating the story of the migration history of the Yao sung in central Guangxi recalls, '…the king's soldiers came to grab the farms; the Yao had no option but to flee into the mountains'.[71] In a version of the *Indication Song of Migration* found in Lào Cai city, Vietnam, the narrative recounts that, 'The Ming dynasty deployed troops numbering one hundred and sixty thousand men…the officials ordered [them] to kill the Yao….'.[72]

To sum up, the textual analysis drawn from different genres implies that the Yao people have a bifurcated perception of the Chinese imperial system. The more distant and the higher the authority, the greater auspiciousness it embodies. Conversely, the nearer the imperial system draws to the everyday experiences of the Yao, the more dangerous it becomes. Consequently, even though the Yao discussed here might have consciously kept a geographical and political distance from the grasping hands of Chinese imperial governance, paradoxically they do seem to have embraced the symbols relating to and radiating from the centre of the Chinese bureaucratic system, the emperors. The Yao's cultural constructions of writing and books, considered to have originated from the emperors, are a positive example of this ideology (see Chapter 3). Nevertheless, at the same time, the Yao have managed to manifest their own agency and autonomy by adopting only selected characteristics of the state control mechanism, the lineage society (see also Chapter 3), and appropriating the potency of female fertility (see Chapter 4) and the tradition of female singing (see Chapter 5), in their negotiations and subsequent remodelling of the imposition of Chinese literacy and Chinese culture-laden religious traditions.

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yaozu minjian guji, yi 越南瑤族民間古籍一 (Yao Ancient Books in Vietnam, Volume One) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2011), 27-35. Guangxi zhuangzu zizhiqu bianxiezu 廣西壯族自治區編寫組 *Guangxi yaozu shehui lishi diaocha diliuce* 廣西瑤族社會歷史調查第六冊 (The Social and Historical Survey of the Yao People in Guangxi, Volume Six) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1987), 240.

[70] The Chinese text is 後來官家佔我地, 瑤人四處把荒逃. Yao Shunan, *Yaozu minsu* 瑤族民俗 (The customs of the Yao) (Jiling: Jiling jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), 179.

[71] The Chinese text is 王兵驅壓耕種地, 瑤家無道走山頭. Ibid., 181.

[72] The Chinese text is 明朝調兵十六萬, 官府下言殺瑤子. Yuenan Laojiesheng wenhua tiyu lüyou ting (eds), *op. cit.* 29.

Having established a preliminary understanding of the dynamisms in the Yao's historical encounters with the Chinese imperial courts, the following sections are devoted to introducing the collections of Yao manuscripts studied for this research, before I proceed to conduct a thematic analysis of Daoist ordination, Chinese literacy and, most relevant, the traditional roles and agency of women.

The Collections of Yao Manuscripts Studied

The 1975 publication edited by Yoshirô Shiratori, *Yao Documents*, revealed to the academic world for the first time the existence of twenty-one manuscripts—handwritten in exquisite Chinese calligraphy—discovered among the Yao tribe in northwest Thailand. As Yoshirô Shiratori states in his preface, 'We did not expect that such marvellous documents in Chinese characters were kept among the Yao…. It was unexpected luck to find that many Yao men could read and write.'[73] Over the last three decades, the unanticipated discovery that a non-Han Chinese people who lived in remote mountainous villages knew how to read and write Chinese has aroused huge scholarly interest.

Apart from the sinification approach that stresses Yao literacy in Chinese as a civilizing consequence of imperial governance, there are also many scholarly works that utilize the contents conserved in Yao manuscripts, in particular a document entitled the 'Charter of Emperor Ping' (*pinhuang juandie*) or the 'Proclamation [Giving the Yao Permission] to Cross the Mountains' (*guoshan bangwen*), a document that helps to probe the provenance of the Yao people, their migratory history and route, and their mythic-political relationships with the Chinese imperial court.[74] Scholarly work has also been carried out on the analysis of Yao ritual practices by consulting the contents of the ritual texts.[75]

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[73] Yoshirô Shiratori (ed.), *Yao Documents* (Yôjin monjo 傜人文書) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1975), 336.
[74] This group of scholarly works is numerous. To give some examples, Barend J. ter Haar, 'A New Interpretation of the Yao Charters', in Paul van der Velde and Alex Mckay (eds), *New Developments in Asian Studies* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), 3-19. Eli Alberts, 'Commemorating the Ancestors' Merit: Myth, Schema, and History in the"Charter of Emperor Ping"', *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology,* 9/1 (2011), 19-65. Hjorleifur Jonsson, *Mien Relations: Mountain People and State Control in Thailand* (Cornell University Press, 2005), 16-43.
[75] For example, Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao.*

However, yet another approach to Yao manuscripts, a recent development that often involves international co-operation and investigation, one that I refer to as the library approach, is derived from a consultation of those manuscripts now in print, those in Western public collections and in collection projects.[76] Its emphasis is heavily biased towards cataloguing and compiling. Therefore, many scholarly works that have been produced under the influence of this library approach involve compilations,[77] catalogues,[78] introductory articles[79] and research on categorization.[80]

At this juncture, the research carried out under the influence of the library approach is still in its initial phase, not yet producing any thematic exploration of the contents conserved in ritual texts. Take, for example, the four European libraries and museums: the Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde (the National Museum of Ethnology) in Leiden (now on loan to the East Asian Library of Leiden University) (hereafter the Leiden Collection), the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (hereafter the Oxford Collection), the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (the Bavarian State Library) in Munich (hereafter the Munich Collection) and the Institut für Sinologie, Universität

[76] There are projects whose specific goal is to collect and preserve endangered Yao manuscripts. For example, Bradley C. Davis, 'A Yao Script Project: "Culture", Texts, and Literacy in Contemporary Vietnam', *IIAS Newsletter* No. 56, Spring 2011. <http://www.iias.nl/the-newsletter/article/yao-script-project-culture-texts-and-literacy-contemporary-vietnam>, accessed 28 Jan. 2014. 'Preservation of Yao manuscripts from South Yunnan: Text, Image, and Religion' was the result of a one-year project awarded in 2012, that included co-operation with Sun Yat-sen University and the Archive of the Yunnan Provincial Administrative Office of Minority Classics, as well as the Endangered Archives Programme (EAP), British Library. <http://eap.bl.uk/database/awards.a4d?award=2012;r=41>, accessed 28 Jan. 2014.

[77] Shiratori (ed.), op. cit. Yuenan Laojiesheng wenhua tiyu lüyou ting (eds), *Yuenan yaozu minjian guji, yi* 越南瑤族民間古籍一 (Ancient Yao Books in Vietnam, Volume One) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2011).

[78] Thomas O Höllmann and Michael Friedrich (eds), Handschriften der Yao (Yao Manuscripts) (München, 2004).

[79] Lucia Obi and Shing Müller, 'Yaozu zhi zongjiao wenxian: Gaishu bafaliya zhouli tushuguan zhi guancang yaozu shouben' 瑤族之宗教文獻：概述巴伐利亞州立圖書館之館藏瑤族手本 (Yao Manuscripts: Introduction to the Collection of Yao Manuscripts in the Bavarian State Library, Religiöse Schriften der Yao. Überblick über den Bestand der Yao-Handschriften in der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek), Chunmei Zhan (trans.), *Min-su ch'ü-i* (民俗曲藝 Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore), 150 (2005 [1996]), 227-279. Guo Wu, 'Guanyu niujin daxue tushuguancang yaozu wenxian de diaocha baogao' 關於牛津大學圖書館藏瑤族文獻的調查報告 (A Survey of the Yao Manuscripts Housed in the Bodleian Library, Oxford), *Daojiao yanjiu xuebao* (道教研究學報 Daoism: Religion, History and Society), 4 (2012), 287-336. He Hongyi, 'The Ancient Magical Books of the Yao People: A Study of the Yao Manuscripts in the Collection of the Library of Congress'. This report is only available online as a PDF file. <http://www.loc.gov/rr/asian/YaoMaterial.pdf>, accessed 28 Jan. 2014.

[80] Zheng Hui, *Yaozu wenshu dang'an yanjiu* 瑤族文書檔案研究 (A Study of Yao Documents and Files) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2011).

Heidelberg (the Institute of Chinese Studies, University of Heidelberg) (hereafter the Heidelberg Collection), of which I have had first-hand visiting experience.[81] There is another Western public collection of 214 Yao manuscripts outside Europe, conserved in the Asian Division Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Unfortunately, I have not been able to make a close reading at this stage.[82]

In his review article that mentions the Munich collection of Yao manuscripts, Hjorleifur Jonsson reveals an on-going international trade network through which these Europe-based collections are obtained:

> By asking traders about these goods, I learned that the German library most likely acquired its collection over a few years from a calligraphy dealer in England, who bought them from a "tribal and primitive art" dealer in Thailand. This specialist in Yao materials in turn makes collecting trips. His scouts in Laos and Vietnam have a sense of what materials attract interest and the kinds of prices paid.[83]

Among the four collections of Yao manuscripts housed in European museums or libraries, the Munich and Oxford Collections have been acquired from the same source, the calligraphy dealer in England, R. W. Stolper.[84] Turning to the Leiden and

[81] I have visited the Leiden Collection on numerous occasions since I began my doctoral research in Leiden in October 2009. I visited the Oxford Collection from December 7-9, 2009, and managed to glance through 122 manuscripts during my short stay. I visited the Heidelberg Collection from July 2-6, 2012, and read through all the 210 copies. From August 13-16, 2012, I made a trip to access the Munich Collection. During my short visit, I was able to make a closer reading of twenty-two ritual manuscripts concerning goddesses of fertility. My visits to these collections were helped by Koos Kuiper and A. J. D. L. Sison at the East Asian Library, Leiden University; David Helliwell at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University; Hanno Lecher at the Institute of Chinese Studies, University of Heidelberg; and Lucia Obi at the Bavarian State Library in Munich. I am very grateful to them for their help.

[82] For a general overview of the collection, see <http://www.loc.gov/rr/asian/yao.html>, accessed 17 Mar. 2015.

[83] See Hjorleifur Jonsson, 'Review Articles', *Journal of the Siam Society,* 88/1-2 (2000), 222-234 at 223.

[84] David Helliwell, a curator of Chinese Collections at the Bodleian Library, told me in an email that the Oxford Collection was purchased between Autumn 1991 and Spring 1993. Likewise, the Munich Collection was acquired in the 1990s. Although Munich has the largest collection of around 2,770 Yao manuscripts, the Bodleian Library was in fact the first European buyer and the manuscripts it obtained are of a better quality. The collection stored in the Library of Congress was also obtained through the same source as these two European collections, See Lucia Obi, 'Yao Manuscripts in Western Collections', paper presented at ヤオ族伝統文献研究国際シンホ゜シ゛ウム (International Symposium on Research of Yao Traditions), November 23, 2010, 神奈川大学横浜 Yokohama, Kanagawa University, 11-24 at 12, 19-21.

Heidelberg Collections, they 'allegedly were acquired together in the same village in Northern Laos from the ritual master and headman of the village.' But judging from the fact that, 'there are more copies of the same texts and manuscripts from different families in the collection, it is unlikely that he was the original owner, but rather a collector or trader.'[85]

The library collection most accessible to me has been the Leiden Collection. So far, the only mention of this collection has been in the chapter entitled 'The Yao Manuscripts' in the book *Catalogue of Chinese and Sino-Western Manuscripts: In the Central Library of Leiden University*.[86] This chapter lists twenty-nine Yao manuscripts, confined to those in the University Library, that were acquired independently of the collection in the museum, annotated with basic cataloguing information. The Oxford Collection has been documented in a report written by Guo Wu, entitled 'A Survey of the Yao Manuscripts Housed in the Bodleian Library, Oxford'. This article is basically a personal note on 289 manuscripts (out of 307), with randomly selected entries extracted from the covers or contents of the manuscripts.[87]

Among the four European collections of Yao manuscripts, the Munich Collection is the largest with 2,776 copies of texts. So far, the research on the Munich Collection has been the most fruitful, resulting in an exhibition held for two months in late 1999, a catalogue book, *Handschriften der Yao* (Yao Manuscripts), published in 2004, and a substantial article, 'Yao Manuscripts: Introduction to the Collection of Yao Manuscripts in the Bavarian State Library', originally published in 1996 and later translated into Chinese and printed in 2005.[88] Nevertheless, the bulk of the

[85] Lucia Obi, *op. cit.* 21.
[86] Koos Kuiper (ed.), *Catalogue of Chinese and Sino-Western Manuscripts: In the Central Library of Leiden University* (Leiden: Legatum Warnerianum, 2005), 42-67.
[87] Guo Wu states that there are over 1,000 Yao manuscripts stored at the Bodleian Library (Guo, *op. cit.* 292, footnote 15). Unfortunately, I cannot verify this information by following the website link he provided. Instead, in one of our email exchanges David Helliwell has mentioned that the total number of Yao manuscripts is 307 (shelf marked Sinica 3241-4547). Lucia Obi states that there are 311 copies of Yao manuscripts in the Oxford Collection. See Lucia Obi, 'Yao Manuscripts in Western Collections', paper presented at ヤオ族伝統文献研究国際シンホ゜シ゛ウ ム (International Symposium on Research of Yao Traditions), November 23, 2010, 神奈川大学横浜 Yokohama, Kanagawa University, 11-24. The website containing information on the Oxford Collection is: <http://www.isca.ox.ac.uk/research/medical-and-ecological-anthropology/eastern-medicines-and-religions/analysing-manuscripts-of-yao-nationality-daoism/>, accessed 16 Mar. 2015.
[88] There is an exhibition catalogue: Thomas O Höllmann and Michael Friedrich (eds), *Botschaften an*

publications relating to the Munich Collection have been for introductory and public display purposes. Last but not least, the Heidelberg Collection, with 210 manuscripts in total, has not yet undergone any processing at this stage.

In my elaboration below of the collections of Yao manuscripts studied, I have based my work on the findings of previous scholarship and have combined library survey, fieldwork data and textual analysis in my investigations, in which I address four aspects of Yao manuscripts: 1) scriptural and ritual practices among the Yao; 2) the temporal aspect; 3) the textual aspect; 4) the linguistic aspect.

1. Scriptural and Ritual Practices among the Yao

In this section, I shall discuss the classifications generated by scholarly work in both Western and Chinese contexts in order to elucidate the different genres of Yao manuscripts. Having done so, I shall provide ethnographic materials to point out that the Yao perspective of the classifications of manuscripts hinges largely on a binary opposition between the 'literary' (*wenyan*) and the 'colloquial' (*baihua*), but adding a caution that arguably there has been a symbiotic relationship between these two scriptural and ritual traditions.

1-1. Genres

Bradley C. Davis has given a general description of the different genres of the texts collected for a Yao script project conducted in Vietnam between 2006 and 2008. He states:

> These texts covered a wide variety of subject matter related to Yao communities. Contents included songs for children, epic poems, lineage stories, guidelines related to customs and cultural practices, traditional handicrafts, weather forecasting according to traditional methods, and animal husbandry. Other books discussed matrimonial customs, descriptions of ceremonies, rites to be performed to ensure a felicitous marriage, family mores, and funerary practices. A specific category of

die Götter. Religiöse Handschriften der Yao. Südchina, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar (Instructions to the Gods: Yao Religious Manuscripts. South China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar) (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999). The exhibition website is <http://willie.itg.uni-muenchen.de:9076/projekte/exhib.htm>, accessed 16 Mar. 2015.

text dealt with disease prevention, remedies for illnesses, and recipes for folk medicines.[89]

Contending with the wide range of diversity in genres contained in the Munich Collection, Lucia Obi and Shing Müller decided to classify the Yao manuscripts into two main groups: manuscripts of a religious nature and manuscripts of a non-religious nature.[90] They have classified the former group of manuscripts into five subgroups as follows: Scriptures (*jing*), Rituals (*ke*), Registers (*biaozou*), Esoteric Words (*miyu*) and Minor Rites (*xiaofa*). They also identify five subcategories in the latter group of manuscripts: Textbooks for Moral Education, Language Acquisition and Dictionaries (*daode jiaohua lei de shu, yuyan jiaoke shu ji cidian*); Epics and Songbooks (*shenhua shishi lei wenben ji geben*); Divination Books (*zanbu wenben*); Documents (*jilu wenjian*, such as charters [*jundie*]); and Medical Texts (*yiliao xing wenben*).

They point out that the Mun have developed two different scriptural and ritual traditions, one for Daoist priests and one for ritual masters, whereas the Mien have only a tradition of ritual masters. The contents of the Daoist priest manuscripts are similar to those in the Daoist canon, consisting of Scriptures and Rituals, that they believe bear the textual traits of the Daoist schools of Lingbao (Numinous Treasure),[91] Zhengyi (the Orthodox Unity)[92] and Tianxin Zhengfa (True Rites of the

[89] Bradley C. Davis, 'A Yao Script Project: "Culture", Texts, and Literacy in Contemporary Vietnam', *IIAS Newsletter* No. 56, Spring 2011, 5. <http://www.iias.nl/the-newsletter/article/yao-script-project-culture-texts-and-literacy-contemporary-vietnam>, accessed 28 Jan. 2014.

[90] Lucia Obi and Shing Müller, 'Yaozu zhi zongjiao wenxian: Gaishu bafaliya zhouli tushuguan zhi guancang yaozu shouben' 瑤族之宗教文獻：概述巴伐利亞州立圖書館之館藏瑤族手本 (Yao Manuscripts: Introduction to the Collection of Yao Manuscripts in the Bavarian State Library, Religiöse Schriften der Yao. Überblick über den Bestand der Yao-Handschriften in der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek), Chunmei Zhan (trans.), *Min-su ch'ü-i* (民俗曲藝 Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore), 150 (2005 [1996]), 227-279.

[91] 'The name Lingbao (Numinous Treasure) was originally a description of a medium or sacred object (*bao*, "treasure") into which a spirit (*ling*) had descended….The Lingbao texts describe an elaborate cosmic bureaucracy and instruct practitioners to approach these celestial powers through ritual and supplication. At the apex of the pantheon is the Celestial Worthy of Original Commencement (*Yuanshi tianzun*)'. See Stephen R. Bokenkamp, 'Lingbao', in Fabrizio Pregadio (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* (Routledge, 2008), 663-669.

[92] 'Together with Quanzhen, the Zhengyi school is one of the two main branches of Taoist religion. It is also known as Way of the Orthodox Unity (*Zhengyi dao*), Teaching of the Orthodox Unity (*Zhengyi jiao*), and Branch of the Orthodox Unity (*Zhengyi pai*)….The teaching was called "orthodox" to distinguish it from the many "false skills" (*weiji*) or unorthodox practices prevalent in the waning years of the Later Han dynasty'. Chen Yaoting, 'Zhengyi', in Fabrizio Pregadio (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* (Routledge, 2008), 1258-60.

Heart of the Heaven).[93] They also draw particular attention to a group of liturgical texts for the ordination of Daoist priest that betray a strong influence of the Quanzhen School (Way of Completeness and Truth).[94] On the other hand, the ritual-master manuscripts are linked to Meishan Daoism.[95] The texts for the funeral ceremony show obvious Buddhist characteristics. Specific manuals containing formularies for petitions to the gods and spirits (*biaozou*) are used by both Daoist priests and ritual masters. The genre of Esoteric Words, that sets out instructions for ritual performances, is found only among the Mun and is absent among the Mien.[96] Turning to the Minor Rites, Strickmann asserts that this genre of Yao religious manuscripts is closely akin to the Minor Rites practised by the Taiwanese Red-head Ritual Masters.[97]

Chinese scholars who study Yao manuscripts have also created different types of classifications, but rarely differentiate between the written texts of the four language groups classified as ethnic Yao in modern China. To give an example, Zhang Youjun proposes grouping Yao manuscripts into six categories: 1) Charters (*guoshan wenshu*), that are more commonly found among the Yao-speaking group; 2) Genealogies (*jiapu*) and Stone Tablet Scripts (*shipaiwen*); the former is often referred to as *jiaxiandan* or *zongzhibu* and tends to be associated most with the Yao-speaking group, whereas the latter is closely linked with the Dong-sui-speaking group and is

[93] 'The Tianxin tradition is the earliest, and one of the most influential, of the new Taoist exorcistic and therapeutic traditions that became important during the Song dynasty. It had already appeared in southeastern China by the tenth century, but the central corpus of texts, which represents its earliest documented form, was compiled only in the beginning of the twelfth century'. Poul Andersen, 'Tianxin zhengfa', in Fabrizio Pregadio (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* (Routledge, 2008), 989-993.

[94] 'Quanzhen is today the main official branch of Taoism in continental China….The appearance around 1170 of Quanzhen, the first Taoist monastic order, whose members could more easily be registered and wore distinctive garments, apparently fit the state's religious policy of segregation between the lay and religious. …Quanzhen has consistently enjoyed official protection since 1197'. Vincent Goossaert, 'Quanzhen', in Fabrizio Pregadio (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* (Routledge, 2008), 814-820.

[95] Such terms as *Meishan daojiao* or *Meishan jiao* (Plum Mountain Teaching), *Meishan wenhua* (Plum Mountain Culture) are coined to refer to a particularly remarkable form of Daoism that mixes up ritual and liturgical elements of indigenous beliefs and different Daoist schools, which is widely found among non-Han Chinese peoples of southern China; for example Yao, Zhuang and Tujia. See David Holm, 'Daoism among Minority Nationalities', in Edward L. Davis (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture* (Routledge, 2005), 136-137.

[96] The exhibition website of the Munich Collection: <http://willie.itg.uni-muenchen.de:9076/projekte/exhib.htm>, accessed 13 Mar. 2014.

[97] Michel Strickmann, 'The Tao among the Yao', 27.

concentrated in eastern Guangxi;[98] 3) Religious Scriptures (*zongjiao jingshu*); 4) Songbooks (*geshu*); 5) Medical Books (*yixueshu*) and 6) Contracts (*qiyueshu*).[99]

For the manuscripts of Mun and Mien origin, Xu Zhuxiang, Huang Guiquan and Pan Jinxiang suggest a classification that contains two main categories: 'books for gods and spirits' (*shenshu*) and 'songbooks' (*geshu*).[100] In the category of 'books for gods and spirits', they simply distinguish three sub-categories as Daoist Priest Manuscripts (*daogongshu*), Ritual-Master Manuscripts (*shigongshu*) and Miscellaneous Books (*zashu*). As does the Munich classification, they claim that Daoist Priest Manuscripts represent the influence of the religious heritage of Chinese Daoist ritual and scriptural traditions; the majority of the texts are written in the prose genre (*sanwen*) and are read in Mandarin (details see below). Ritual-Master Manuscripts, on the other hand, are related to indigenous beliefs and practices; the texts are composed in seven-syllable verses (*qiyan yunwen*) and read in a Cantonese pronunciation (see details below). Miscellaneous Books include all the other texts that are not directly used in ritual performances, but are still significant to the repertoire of ritual specialists, among them books on Divination and Geomancy.

Zhang Zhenzhen, a Mun Daoist priest in his sixties whom I met in Dingcao village, applies an apt analogy to explicate the distinction between the Daoist priest tradition and the ritual-master tradition. He says, 'A ritual master specializes in telling stories; a Daoist priest specializes in dealing with sadness. The former concerns matters that bring laughter; the latter is involved with matters that bring tears' (*shigong zhuanmen jiang gushi, daogong zhuanmen jiang youchou. yige guan xiao, yige guan ku* 師公專門講故事，道公專門講憂愁。一個管笑一個管哭). In other words, the specialization of a ritual master in ritual performance is to invoke the

[98] The stone tablets are not confined to eastern Guangxi. The book edited by Huang Yu includes stone tablets collected from other parts of Guangxi, Guangdong, Hunan and Guizhou. But the stone tablets system in eastern Guangxi is based on a relatively large-scale social organization and is more concentrated geographically. See Huang Yu, *Yaozu shikelu* 瑤族石刻錄 (Stone Inscriptions of the Yao) (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe, 1993).

[99] Zhang Youjun, *Yaozu chuantong wenhua bianqianlun* 瑤族傳統文化變遷論 (Discussion of the Changes in Yao Traditional Culture) (Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, 1992), 71-74.

[100] Xu Zuxiang, *Yaozu wenhua shi* 瑤族文化史 (Cultural History of the Yao) (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe, 2001). Pan Jinxiang, 'Tan Yunnan Honghe fangkuai yaowen guji jiqi fanyi' 談雲南紅河方塊瑤文古籍及其翻譯 (Discussion of Ancient Books Written in Yao Characters and the Issue of Translation in Honghe Prefecture, Yunnan), *Minzu Fanyi* (民族翻譯 Minority Translators Journal), 3 (2009), 56-61.

deities by reciting short epic ballads that describe the attributes of the deities and the events during which he or she demonstrated their divine powers.[101] The short epic ballads of the deities are often spiced with entertaining plots that will make people laugh. Another aspect pertinent to laughing is that the task of a ritual master concerns the living, not the dead. By contrast, a Daoist priest takes charge in matters of death and the afterlife, subjects that are often infused with sadness.

To cover their specialisms, Daoist priests and ritual masters own different sets of manuscripts. To give an example, a Daoist priest possesses a set of ritual manuscripts for the performance of funeral ceremonies, one of which is entitled *Rituals for Harrowing Hell* (*poyuke*). By contrast, a ritual master possesses a particular set of ritual manuscripts that ensure the smooth passage of birth and pregnancy. One example is a text with the title *Ritual of the Red Fertility Building* (*honglouke*). Zhang Zhenzhen also goes on to mention that, if the manuscripts are involved with the Methods of Thunder (*leifa*), they are most likely ritual-master manuscripts.[102] It is noteworthy that the division of ritual labour and the scriptural categories for dealing with life and death employed by Zhang Zhenzhen to distinguish between the Daoist priest tradition and the ritual-master tradition can also be found in other local religious traditions in South China. For example, Gao Ya-ning's study of the Zhuang ritual specialists concludes that the rough classification between Daoist priests and female spirit-mediums, in terms of a division of ritual labour, means that the former take charge of the dead while the latter are concerned with the living. The

[101] With reference to Kristofer Schipper, 'Vernacular and Classical Rituals in Taoism', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 45/1 (1985), 21-57 at 31.

[102] The Thunder Rituals (*leifa*) are said to have emerged in the Tang-Song transition as that era 'saw a relative decline in the importance of court Daoism and the rise of regional groups and popular practices, often in conjunction'. Innovative practices, such as the Thunder Rituals, 'have been tentatively linked to the expansion of Chinese culture into new areas in the south where hostile non-Chinese religious influences were still strong'. (Kohn, ed., 2000, xxiii). And, it was often the 'popular magicians outside of established traditions' who would be 'armed with the Thunder Rituals or other techniques revealed from gods' that 'helped provide a tumultuous world with a sense of divine justice' (Matsumoto, 1979, cited in Kohn, ed., 2000, 418). Turning to the content of the Thunder Ritual, 'at its core is a repertoire of administrative, judicial, and meditative methods that it makes available to adepts interested in harnessing the vitalizing and punitive powers of thunder on a more regular and consistent basis in their ritual practice'. However, 'the sources and forms of this class of ritual remain obscure'. (Lowell Skar in Pregadio (ed.), 2008, 627-629). See Livin Kohn (ed.), *Daoism Handbook* (Brill, 2000). Matsumoto Kōichi 松本浩一, 'Sōdai no raihō' 宋代の雷法 (The Thunder Rites of the Song dynasty), *Shakai bunkashigaku* 社会文化史學, 17 (1979), 45–65. Fabrizio Pregadio (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Taoism, Volume One* (Routledge, 2008).

only difference in the comparison between the Yao and the Zhuang is that the Yao do not have prominent female ritual specialists.[103]

The category of 'songbooks' basically consists of the two categories of Literary-style Songs (*wenyan geyao*) and Colloquial-style Songs (*baihua geyao*). The Literary-style Songs, for instance, *Songs of the Autumn Lotus* (*qiuliange*), are a fairly independent genre of which not too many Yao have the expertise to compose and sing. This situation is quite the opposite with the Colloquial-style Songs, for instance, *Indication Songs* (*xinge*) and *Songs of Bridesmaids* (*yuanguge*), that are much more commonly known and performed. As are the Ritual-Master Manuscripts, 'songbooks' are composed in seven-syllable verses and mostly used for such secular purposes as documenting migratory history, recounting the creation myth or communicating with relatives in distant localities. The Mien also distinguish between Literary-Style Songs and Colloquial-Style Songs. The former are called 'ancient songs' (*guyan geyao*); any songs that narrate the history of ancient times belong to this category. The other songs that do not recount the history of ancient times can be regarded as Colloquial-style Songs.[104]

1-2. Symbiotic Relationship between the Two Religious Traditions

Closely resembling the analogy proposed by Zhang Zhenzhen, the Mun have a series of metaphors that they can use to distinguish between the Daoist priest tradition and ritual-master tradition. The former are labelled literary (*wen*), male (*nan*), big (*da*) and dragon (*long*), whereas the latter are categorized as martial (*wu*), female (*nü*), small (*xiao*) and phoenix (*feng*).[105] Whether or not a male Mun member is chosen to be initiated as a Daoist priest or a ritual master, or often both, varies from place to place. Huang Guiquan reports that in most of the Mun communities in southern China, it is common for a male to be the recipient of both traditions at ordination.

[103] Kao Ya-ning (Gao Ya-ning), 'Singing a Hero in Ritual: Nong Zhigao and His Representation Among the Zhuang People in China', PhD Thesis (Melbourne: The University of Melbourne, 2009).
[104] Personal communication from Pan Meihua on 6 Dec. 2013. Pan Meihua is a linguist who is in her forties and of Mien origin, now a teacher at the Faculty of Arts at Guangxi University for Nationalities.
[105] Liu Guangyuan, 'Cong shiwu tantao zhongguo Guangxi baise Landian Yaoren de zongjiao shijian' 從食物探討中國廣西百色藍靛瑤人的宗教實踐 (A Discussion of Religious Practices of the Landian Yao in Baise, Guangxi from a Dietary Perspective), MA Thesis (Hsinchu: National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan, 2003), 19.

Conversely, in southeast Yunnan, for instance, in Guangnan County and Qiubei County, a male member will be ordained simply either as a Daoist priest or a ritual master.[106] Nevertheless, despite this prevailing dichotomous tradition, they still regard a ritual specialist who can master the two traditions simultaneously the ideal. The symbiotic relationship between and hybridization of these two scriptural and ritual traditions are manifested in many aspects. At this juncture, I shall elaborate on just two examples: one concerns ordination names (*faming*); the other refers to the pantheon of deities.

During an ordination ceremony, a Mun male postulant receives his 'cosmic certificate' (*yinyangju*), stating his newly attained ordination name. A full ordination name contains three Chinese characters, including the surname of the male postulant, a generational name in the middle and a Chinese character of his own choice at the end. The great importance of ordination names is that they entitle a person to a status in the afterlife and the power to communicate with the otherworldly. Among the Mun, the male postulant receives two credentials and two ordination names. On one certificate is written his ordination name in the style of a Daoist priest, and on the other is written his ritual-master ordination name. To clarify this, here are examples of a Daoist-priest-style ordination name and a ritual-master-style ordination name: Li Dao-de 李道德 (Daoist-priest-style) and Li Fa-de 李法德 (ritual-master-style). The Daoist-priest-style ordination names use a set of generational names including Dao 道, Jing 經, Yun 雲, Xuan 玄 and Miao 妙 in sequence for the middle character. In contrast, the ritual-master-ordination name uses another set of generational names, among them Fa 法, Li 利, Ying 應, Xian 顯 and Sheng 勝 sequentially for the middle character.[107] By simply looking at the middle character of the ordination name it is

[106] A male cannot choose into which tradition he would like to be ordained. The principle is that if the boy is a first-born, a third-born and so on, he has to be ordained into the same ritual tradition as that of his father. Conversely, if the boy is the second-born, the fourth-born and so on, he has to be initiated into the ritual tradition to which his father does not belong. See Huang Guiquan, 'Landianyao de hua, dou, renguan—nahongcun Landianyao dansheng, wenghua, shuadou hen dushi liyi de diaocha yu yanjiu' 藍靛瑤的花、斗、人觀—那洪村藍靛瑤誕生、翁花、耍斗和度師禮儀的調查與研究 (The Conceptualizations of Flowers, Constellations and Person: A Survey of Birth Ceremonies, Flower Rites, Rituals for Supplementing Rice and Ordination), *Wenshan shifan gaodeng zhuanke xueyuan xuebao* (文山師範高等專科學院學報 Journal of Wenshan Teachers College), 16/3 (2003), 161-167.

[107] Deng Wentong goes on to explain that the five generational names used in the Daoist priest style ordination names are a legacy of the Dragon Tiger Mountain (*longhushan*) in Jiangxi province, the centre of the orthodox Zhengyi-Tianshi Daoist School, representing the literary tradition. The five

possible to know immediately which religious tradition the manuscript copyist has inherited. It is not uncommon for two ordination names with different middle characters to be mentioned together on the cover of a manuscript or somewhere inside the text. In a few cases, it is of course not out of the question that the copyist might indeed have mastered two religious traditions.

The hybridization of the two religious traditions is expressed above all in Yao manuscripts to distinguish the deities and goddesses the ritual specialists worship and invoke in rituals. In comparison to the Zhuang religion found in southwest Guangxi, in which different categories of ritual specialists have different sets of deities with whom they communicate explicitly, neatly marking the boundary between the Daoist pantheon and local gods, this distinction is by no means as clear-cut in Mun religious practice.[108] An example in point is a text in the Guangxi and Yunnan Collection entitled *Ritual for the Mother of Emperors* (*dimuke*), composed in prose by a Daoist priest named Lu Daode in 1814. The Mother of Emperors is a locally worshipped goddess of fertility who appears nowhere in the Chinese Daoist pantheon. The very existence of the text itself is a strong indication that more than two centuries ago at least, the Mun Daoist priests employed a literary device similar to the Daoist genre and composed a text honouring an indigenous goddess (see more details below and in Chapter 4). It is therefore a logical assumption that the Mother of Emperors, the locally worshipped goddess of fertility, was one of the deities whom the copyist Lu Daode, a Daoist priest, might invoke in rituals.

These two examples demonstrate that a symbiotic relationship between both 'literary' and 'colloquial' traditions is not just the ideal aspired by a Mun ritual specialist, it is also a clue that the process of hybridization in both traditions might have begun centuries ago. In fact, both Zhang Zhenzhen, a Daoist priest, and Zhang Daogui, a ritual master, were trained by the same ritual specialist, Li Yongxiang. Li passed away a decade ago. During his lifetime, he specialized in both Daoist-priest and ritual-master ritual repertoires that placed him in a position to mentor both Daoist

characters used in the ritual-master style ordination names show the influence of Wudang Mountain, another Daoist school based in Hubei province, representing the colloquial tradition. Interview notes, 24 Sep. 2012.

[108] James Wilkerson, 'Negotiating Local Traditions with Taoism: Female ritual specialists in the Zhuang religion', *Religion,* 37/2 (2007), 150-163.

priests and ritual masters. Even now, people still speak glowingly and think highly of Li Yongxiang and continue to refer to him as 'High Priest' (*dashifu*). On a practical level, a trainee might not be able to master both the ritual traditions simultaneously and would need to choose which tradition to follow, but on a symbolic level, there is plenty of evidence of an ideology of pursuing the co-existence of the two scriptural and ritual traditions.

In Mien communities, as mentioned earlier, this sort of distinction cannot be made because there is only one tradition and only one category of religious specialist: the ritual master. Therefore, in Mien society ritual masters take charge of all sorts of rituals and possess various kinds of manuscripts relating to the world of both the dead and that of the living. Compared to the Mun, the most prominent difference is that the Mien do not have a separate genre of Ritual (*ke*).[109] Nevertheless, as in Mun society, female ritual specialists, at least among the Mien in western Guangxi, are conspicuous by their absence.

It should be stressed that the simultaneous mastery of different religious traditions found among the Yao is a common phenomenon, both historically and regionally. As early as the Song dynasty (960-1279), ritual practitioners are recorded as having mastered Daoist and Buddhist ritual repertoires, and having acquired exorcist skills in order to improve their chances of employment in Jiangxi, Fujian and the Lower Yangzi region.[110] In modern Taiwan, a ritual specialist switches between the Daoist-priest (Black-head) and ritual-master (Red-head) traditions simply by changing his ritual vestments (the former wears a crown pinned onto a horsehair wig; the latter a red scarf or turban wrapped around his head).[111]

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[109] Interview notes with Pan Meihua, 10-16 Sep. 2012.

[110] Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

[111] For example, Xu Liling, 'Jibing yu eryun de zhuanyi: Taiwan beibu hongtou fashi dabuyun yishi fengxi' 疾病與厄運的轉移:臺灣北部紅頭法師大補運儀式分析 (Transforming Disease and Ill Fortune: Analysis of the Ritual of Fate-Averting Performed by Red-head Ritual Masters in North Taiwan), in Lin Meirong (ed.), *Xinyang, yishi yu shehui: disanjie guoji hanxue huiyi lunwenji* 信仰、儀式與社會：第三屆國際漢學會議論文集 (Belief, Ritual and Society: Proceedings of Third International Conference on Sinology) (Nangang: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 2003), 339-365. 'Taiwan minjian xinyang zhong de buchunyun yishi: yi beibu zhengyipai daoshi suoxing de fashi yishi weili' 臺灣民間信仰中的補春運儀式：以北部正一派道士所行的法事儀式為例 (Ritual of Spring Fate-Averting in Popular Belief in Taiwan: A Case Study of the Rituals Performed by Zhengyi Daoist Priests in North Taiwan), *Minzuxue yanjiusuo ziliao huibian* (民族學研究所資料彙編 Field Materials, Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica), 13 (1999), 95-129. 'Taiwan beibu hongtou fashi

In a nutshell, this illustration of the scriptural and ritual traditions among the Yao stresses the importance of local perceptions including a series of binary metaphors, in which that of 'literary' versus 'colloquial' is the most prominent, employed to distinguish between the Daoist-priest tradition and the ritual-master tradition. Despite this dichotomy, they still show a strong tendency towards a symbiosis of the two traditions, that is by no means an isolated development from either a historical or a regional perspective.

2. Temporal Aspect

The sinification approach involves making conjectures about the time at which the Yao acquired literacy in Chinese. Michel Strickmann has suggested a Song origin of the Yao Daoist liturgical texts.[112] Yang Minkang and Yang Xiaoxun have traced the Chinese origin of Yao manuscripts even farther back, to the Tang dynasty (618-907).[113] In this section, that investigates the temporal aspect of Yao manuscripts, I shall refrain from any attempt to engage in this sort of debate. Quite simply, there is no substantial evidence, either historical or textual, to draw any firm conclusions about the issue. Instead, my principal source has been the 'colophons' made by the text copyists of Yao manuscripts to reconstruct the dating information of the manuscripts.

The 'colophons' often appear on the cover or the first or last pages of a manuscript. They contain information about the time at which the texts were composed and, in some cases, how the texts were acquired. The temporal information contained is certainly not sufficient to make any firm statements either about the advent of Chinese literacy or about the texts and influences absorbed into Yao society from the dominant Chinese religious-cultural traditions, but it does help to determine a traceable time-frame within which the origins of the practice of writing can be attributed to Yao society.

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buyun yishi' 臺灣北部紅頭法師法場補運儀式 (Ritual of Fate-Averting Performed by Red-head Ritual Masters in North Taiwan), *Min-su ch'ü-i* (民俗曲藝 Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore), 105 (1997), 1-146. Kristofer Schipper, 'Vernacular and Classical Rituals in Taoism', 32.

[112] Michel Strickmann, 'The Tao among the Yao'.

[113] Yang Minkang and Yang Xiaoxun, *Yunnan Yaozu daojia keyi yinyue* 雲南瑤族道教科儀音樂 (The Ritual Music of Daoism among the Yao in Yunnan) (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2000), 1-22.

This strategy compares the earliest dates that appear on the covers or insides of the manuscripts in the collections available for this study (namely, the Guangxi and Yunnan Collections plus the Leiden, Heidelberg, Munich and Oxford Collections). Almost without exception, it has been the custom for a manuscript copyist to write down the date on which he finished the handwritten text. This date is invariably shown by the combination of the imperial Chinese regnal date and the Chinese sexagenary cycle (*tiangan dizhi*) for the year, and the month and day of the Chinese lunar calendar. One example is: 'The transcription was finished on the tenth [day] of the seventh month, in *jiawu* year, the twentieth year of the Guangxu reign' (*taisui Guangxu ershi nian jiawu sui qiyue chushiri chaowan* 太歲光緒二十年甲午歲七月初十日抄完) (UB 2004-15 Folder 25, Leiden Collection).[114] The term *jiawu* refers to a year in the Chinese sexagenary cycle. This is added the twentieth year of the Guangxu period (1875-1908), the year title (*nianhao*) of an emperor during the Qing dynasty, that provides another temporal register. As a whole this information refers to the date on which the copyist finished composing/writing the text as the 10th of August in the year 1894 according to the Western calendar.[115]

When the dates of the transmitted manuscripts are studied in this way, it turns out that most of the extant copies were made in late imperial times, during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). To be more precise, one of the oldest manuscripts, *The Ritual of Ordination for the First Reality of Zhengyi* (*zhenyi chuzhen shoujie ke*) (S3403, Oxford Collection), was composed in the third year of the Yongzheng (1722-1735) period.[116] This finding corresponds to that of Lucia Obi and Shing Müller on the basis of their work with the Munich Collection, that of Guo Wu on the Oxford Collection and that of He Hongyi in the Library of Congress Collection in Washington, DC. The results of this dating suggest that the production and circulation of manuscripts was already a pretty prevalent religious activity among the Yao throughout the Qing

[114] Leiden Collection has not yet been catalogued. I have used the folder number as shelf marks.
[115] The date conversion has been done using the study tool developed by Academia Sinica, Taiwan: Date Conversion for Two Thousand Years between Chinese and Western Calendars (*liangqiannian zhongxili zhuanhuan* 兩千年中西曆轉換): <http://sinocal.sinica.edu.tw/>, accessed 18 Mar. 2015.
[116] Guo Wu, 'Guanyu niujin daxue tushuguancang yaozu wenxian de diaocha baogao' 關於牛津大學圖書館藏瑤族文獻的調查報告 (A Survey of the Yao Manuscripts Housed in the Bodleian Library, Oxford), *Daojiao yanjiu xuebao* (道教研究學報 Daoism: Religion, History and Society), 4 (2012), 287-336 at 309.

dynasty. Bearing this minimum time-frame in mind, it would be safe to trace the Yao's acquisition of Chinese literacy and the influence of the texts of the dominant Chinese religious-cultural traditions back to at least pre-Qing times (before 1644 at the very latest). For instance, Barend ter Haar points out that two extant transcriptions of the Charter genre were first made in 1643 and 1645.[117] Without specifying the source of origin, He Hongyi mentions a rare copy of the *Great Song of King Pan* (*panwang dage*), discovered in eastern Guangxi, that might have been composed during the Xuande reign (1426-1435) in the Ming dynasty.[118] However, most of this is still confined to the realms of speculation. To paint a solid picture of Yao writing practice from the times between the Tang (Yang and Yang's theory) or the Song (Strickmann's hypothesis) and the Qing is a task still waiting to be done—always assuming that these early dates are probable in the first place.

It should be noted that the dates given in most manuscripts have been proved to be accurate. The entries of the dynastic or national titles invariably change with any transition of power, for instance, at the end of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the foundation of the Republic of China (1912-1949) and then of the People's Republic of China (1949-). In a similar fashion, the manuscripts from Southeast Asia alter the temporal entry by noting the name of the country. For instance, the inscription on a manuscript entitled *The Book of Formularies for Petitions* (*zhouqing shuben*) (S3303, Oxford Collection) reads, 'the sixty-sixth year of the Great Laos, the twenty-second of August in the dingsi' (*daliao liaoguo guanxia liushiliu nian dingsi sui ba yue ershi'er ri*) on the last page.[119] Therefore, pertinently the temporal entries indicate that

[117] Barend J. ter Haar, 'A New Interpretation of the Yao Charters,' in Paul van der Velde and Alex Mckay (eds), *New Developments in Asian Studies* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), 3-19, footnote 13. The two texts are mentioned in Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiqu bianjizu, *Guangxi yaozu shehui lishi diaocha dibace* 廣西瑤族社會歷史調查第八冊 (The Social and Historical Survey of the Yao People in Guangxi, Volume Eight) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1987), p. 68 for the copy in 1643; p. 71 for the copy in 1645, and recopied in 1833.

[118] He Hongyi and Wang Ping, 'Meiguo guohui tushuguan guancang yaozu xieben suzi de yanjiu jiazhi' 美國國會圖書館館藏瑤族寫本俗字的研究價值 (The Research Value of Folk Characters in Yao Manuscripts in the US Library of Congress), *Guangxi minzu daxue xuebao* (廣西民族大學學報 Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities), 34/6 (2012), 181-186 at 182.

[119] Guo Wu, *op. cit.* 299. The exact year of the sixty-sixth year of the Great Laos remains elusive.

the Yao have been constantly aware of changes in political power outside their villages.[120]

To sum up, surviving Yao manuscripts indicate that manuscript composition was a relatively prevalent and mature religious activity throughout the Qing dynasty and that it has lasted into the present time. Although roughly 370 years of writing practice among the Yao can be documented, the hypotheses of Tang and Song origins of Yao liturgical texts with Daoist influences have not yet been borne out by the available evidence. Taking the 'colophons' contained in the manuscripts seriously, the dating research shows the Yao's constant recognition and awareness of the external political changes.

3. Textual Aspect

Since the 1980s, the tendency in academia has been to describe Yao religious practices as 'Yao Daoism' (*yaochuan daojia*). This gives a rather distorted picture as Yao texts are by no means limited to Daoist liturgies. As many studies have already shown, besides texts with strong vernacular attributes, there are also texts with Buddhist and Confucian influences.[121] Moreover, apart from the texts obviously influenced by the dominant Chinese religious-cultural traditions, there are a considerable number of folksong lyrics to venerate local deities integrated into written texts (see below).

Until the mid-twentieth century, the one and only way to compose a manuscript was to write it by hand.[122] During the course of copying, even of manuscripts with the same titles, the internal contents of the different manuscripts are hardly identical. Jacques Lemoine explains that textual variations result from the fact that disciples who copied the texts from their masters '…will never be tempted to test

[120] Occasionally, there are mismatches in the reigning dynasties/nations or years. For instance, two texts (S3252, S3254, Oxford Collection) refer to the twelfth year of the Xianfeng reign (*xianfeng shi'er nian*), when in fact the Xianfeng reign lasted for only eleven years.

[121] For example, Xu Zuxiang, 'Yaochuan daojiao zhong de fojiao yu rujia yinsu' 瑤傳道教中的佛教與儒家因素 (On the Factors of Buddhism and the Confucian School in Yao Daoism), *Guizhou minzu yanjiu* (貴州民族研究 National Studies in Guizhou), 2 (2002), 81-86.

[122] In recent years, some of the Yao ritual specialists I met in Guangxi and Yunnan do use printing to multiply texts.

their accuracy by comparing them with similar documents from another source. […] This is because they [the books] are his personal manuals, corresponding exactly to the rituals he has learned to perform. Other books, even on the same subject, have no value for him.'[123] Drawing inspiration from Chinese literary history, an alternative explanation might be that this considerable textual variation suggests an oral transmission, transcription from memory and embellishment. Conversely, when a text is essentially stable, it is a sign that a dominant published version (or an equally manuscript) was in circulation at the time.[124] The upshot is that during the course of copying, the contents are often altered, combined, added to or left out, because of the above-mentioned reasons or simply the mistakes made by the copyists during the course of copying. As will soon be shown, many previous orally transmitted local stories and folksongs have also been written down.

In this section, I use manuscripts from different collections to elucidate three forms of textualities identified in the way the Yao compose a manuscript, by which I mean three ways in which the texts have been written. I refer to the first of these in this study as a 'faithful replication'; the second a 'creative imitation'; and the third a 'textualization of folksongs'. On the premise that the collections of Yao manuscripts contain many texts permeated with influences from diverse Daoist schools, it seemed a reasonable assumption to commence the exercise by comparing Yao Daoist texts with the Daoist canon.[125]

I began my quest by searching the titles and keywords of a specific text in the Leiden Collection, the collection most accessible to me, in the *Index of the Daoist Canon: Five Concordances to the Daoist Canon* (*Daozang suoyin, wu zhong banben daozang tong jian*), to see if there are any correspondences.[126] Having obtained this data, I compared the corresponding titles and the accompanying contents with the

[123] Jacques Lemoine, *Yao Ceremonial Paintings* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1982), 29.
[124] Judith T. Zeitlin, 'Disappearing Verses: Writing on Walls and Anxieties of Loss,' in Judith T. Zeitlin and Lydia H. Liu (eds), *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2003), 73-132 at 88.
[125] I use the fourth and final Daoist Canon complied in 1444 during the Ming dynasty, which consists of approximately 5,300 scrolls. *Daozang* 道藏 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, reprint in 1986).
[126] Works from the Daoist Canon will be referred to by the catalogue numbers given in Shi Zhouren (Kristofer Schipper), designated by 'SS', and also by volume and page number references in the 1986 edition, *Daozang suoyin: wu zhong banben daozang tong jian* 道藏索引：五種版本道藏通檢 (Index of Daoist Canon: Five Concordances to the Daoist Canon) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1996).

Daoist canon. This proved to be a laborious task as Yao ritual specialists often alter, combine or change titles and content, adapting them to ritual needs and personal selection.

Fortunately, in the Leiden Collection I located a ritual manuscript that perfectly characterizes the first form of textuality, a 'faithful replication'. This specific manuscript (UB 2004-15 Folder 2) is entitled *The Middle Chapter of the Jade Emperor* (*Yuhuang zhongjuanjing*), copied by Li Xuanlian and produced in the first year of the Xianfeng reign of the Qing dynasty (1851). When it was compared to *The Middle Chapter of the Original Conduct of the Honorific Jade Emperor* (*Gaoshang yuhuang benxing jijingjuan zhong*) in the Daoist Canon (SS 1-700), it offered unequivocal confirmation that *The Middle Chapter of the Jade Emperor* in the Leiden Collection is a *verbatim* handwritten version of *The Middle Chapter of the Original Conduct of the Honorific Jade Emperor* included in the Daoist Canon. With the exception of a few words that have been rearranged and inserted into *The Middle Chapter of the Jade Emperor*, the two texts read exactly the same.

Another ritual manuscript in the Leiden Collection provides a good illustration of the second form of textuality, namely a 'creative imitation'. The manuscript (UB 2004-15 Folder 23), entitled *Scripture of Miscellaneous Kinds* (*Zhupinjing*), was copied by Deng Xuanhe (year of composition unclear). It also bears the title and content of *The Middle Chapter of the Original Conduct of the Honorific Jade Emperor*. However, on closer reading it became obvious that the Daoist title and content only act as a 'cover'; the underlying theme remains indigenous.[127] After selectively copying only a few lines from the Daoist scripture, the content of the text is soon transformed into a different kind of content. From pages 23 to 28, two titles and the accompanying contents appear to describe the regionally worshipped deities who are closely associated with pregnancy and birth, namely the Deities of Flowers (*huawang*) and the Holy Mother (*shengmu*). The titles read *Wonderful Scriptures of Various Saintly Goddesses and Flower Deities Set Up by the Grand Supreme* (*Taishang she zhushengmu huawang miaojing*) and *Wonderful Scripture Told by*

[127] David Holm, 'The Exemplar of Filial Piety and the End of the Ape-Men Dong Yong in Guangxi and Guizhou Ritual Performance', *T'oung Pao,* 90/1-3 (2004), 32-64 at 63-64.

Grand Supreme for Thanking Flower Deities and of the Way to Expel Six Calamities (*Taishang shuoxie huawang liuhai miaojing*). This manuscript convincingly demonstrates that the act of transcription is not a passive one. The copyist has creatively imitated the Daoist written genre as a rhetorical device to honour the local deities.

The third form of textuality is a 'textualization of folksongs', referring to ritual manuscripts that have obviously absorbed folksong elements. The ritual manuscript in question is also about regionally worshipped deities, Deities of Flower, except that in this case they are referred to as the Flower King (*huahuang*). The manuscript is from the Guangxi and Yunnan Collection, entitled *Inviting the Flower King and the God of Passes to Clear the Road and Let Us Pass by the Dark Mountain and the Water-lily Pond* (*qing huahuang guanshen jie xiaoguan duhua du'anshan*), copied and owned by Li Decai from Weihao village in Tianlin county. Unsurprisingly, I could not find any titles or contents from the Daoist canon corresponding to this ritual manuscript. So instead I searched in a compilation of folksongs and stories of the Yao, *Compilation of Yao Folksongs and Stories in the Big Mountain of the Yao, Guangxi* (*Guangxi dayaoshan yaozu geyao gushiji*).[128] Fortunately, I was able to identify the partial contents of the ritual manuscript about the twelve months of the flowery changes with a folksong entitled the *Song of Flowers* (*gehua*).[129] This ritual manuscript is a very good example of an inter-textual relationship between folksongs and ritual texts.[130] As Kristofer Schipper has also reported a similar textual phenomenon among the ritual-master texts in southern Taiwan, it seems that borrowing folksong elements to describe the four seasons of the agricultural year when referring to beliefs about birth and pregnancy might have been a common textual practice across ethnic boundaries in South China.[131]

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[128] Quanguo renmin daibiao dahui minzu weiyuanhui bangongshi (eds), *Guangxi dayaoshan yaozu geyao gushiji* 廣西大瑤山瑤族歌謠故事集 (Compilation of Yao Folksongs and Stories in the Big Mountain of the Yao, Guangxi) (unspecified publisher, 1958).
[129] Ibid., 38-39.
[130] Zheng Changtian, *Yaozu 'zuogetang' de jiegou yu gongneng: Xiangnan Panyao 'gangjie' huodong yanjiu* 瑤族'坐歌堂'的結構與功能：湘南盤瑤'岡介'活動研究 (The Structure and Function of "Sitting in the Hall and Singing" among the Yao: A Study of the Pastime of Telling Jokes among Pan Yao in Southern Hunan) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2009), 216-234.
[131] Kristofer Schipper, 'Vernacular and Classical Rituals in Taoism', 31.

To sum up, this section describes three identifiable forms of textualities in the Yao manner of composing manuscripts: namely 'faithful replication', 'creative imitation' and 'textualization of folksongs'. It shows that the copyists are by no means passive actors in the course of transcription. Apart from indeed creating a *verbatim* copy of Daoist scripture, the Yao have consciously utilized the Daoist written genre as a rhetorical cover to write down the stories about their own deities. Folksongs are integrated into ritual texts referring to local deities, showing a transition from orality to textuality, that is a characteristic of an enduring inter-textual relationship between folksongs and ritual texts. The last form of textuality also paves the way for Yao women to act as possible authors and opens the likelihood that the folksongs they composed might have been written down and integrated into the ritual texts preserved in ritual-master tradition.

4. Linguistic Aspect

Although the study of Chinese languages has generally been marked by a strong tendency to view the Chinese as a monolithic ethnic and linguistic entity, the practices of Chinese language on the ground often attest a different scenario.[132] One example is localized Daoist liturgical texts. Lien Chinfa convincingly demonstrates that these texts are dynamic rather than static objects. Lien argues that one of the driving forces in their dynamism is the necessity to facilitate the understanding of the texts by a local, non-literate audience. As a result, the hybridization of literary forms and colloquial forms, such as introducing terms and sounds from the native language, has been inevitable in the production of localized Daoist liturgical texts.[133]

A hybridization of the Chinese language and non-Han Chinese languages is also shown in a vernacular writing system from southern China used among the Zhuang in Guangxi:

> The traditional Zhuang character script is an instance of a sinoxenic

[132] Jerry Norman, *Chinese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 16.
[133] Chinfa Lien, 'Language Adaptation in Taoist Liturgical Texts', in David Johnson (ed.), *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion* (Berkeley, CA: Chinese Popular Culture Project, 1995), 219-246.

> script, that is, a script in which the Chinese character script has been borrowed and modified to write a different language, in this case the Tai language now known as Zhuang. [134]

David Holm illustrates the different ways in which the Chinese written language has been used and transformed among the Zhuang people in Guangxi. They have created their own demotic characters (*tusuzi*) by using the principles of 'six [forms of] scripts' (*liushu*) adopted from the Chinese character script.[135] Generally speaking, the creation of Zhuang demotic characters employs two writing strategies: Yindu and Xundu. The Yindu method is to adopt the sound but disregard the meaning of the character; whereas the Xundu method is to adopt both the glyph and the meaning of the character but to bestow a native sound on the character.[136]

A certain degree of hybridization between the Yao and the Chinese languages can be found in Yao manuscripts as well. David Holm's statement about the Chinese used in Yao manuscripts: '…all the Yao manuscripts in Shiratori's collection were in Chinese; none were in the local language spoken by the Yao', is not absolutely accurate.[137] As will be shown in the next section, even though Yao texts are not unintelligible to a Mandarin reader, nevertheless, if the meanings of the texts are to be fully understood, it is absolutely necessary to have knowledge of the Yao language. Like the Zhuang, the Yao have also invented a certain number of demotic characters based on the afore-mentioned Yindu and Xundu principles.

4.1. The Characters

The characters in Yao texts can be divided into two groups: those borrowed from Chinese and those coined by the Yao themselves. The great majority of the characters that appear in Yao manuscripts are the same Chinese characters found

[134] David Holm, *Mapping the Old Zhuang Character Script: A Vernacular Writing System from Southern China* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1.
[135] David Holm, *Recalling Lost Souls: The Baeu Rodo Scriptures Tai Cosmogonic Texts from Guangxi in Southern China* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2004), 31-34. Also see William Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1994), 143-155.
[136] It is noteworthy that these two general writing strategies do not satisfactorily exhaust the ways in which the Zhuang people have forged demotic characters: there are demotic characters that are often used in song texts and that do not resemble any Chinese characters at all (David Holm, ibid.).
[137] David Holm, 'The Exemplar of Filial Piety', 33.

throughout the Chinese cultural region. Apart from miswritten characters, a relatively small number consists of characters especially invented to represent Yao words. In the academic circle of Yao studies in China, the latter are called *Yaosuzi* or *Fangkuai yaowen* (Yao demotic characters) in Chinese. Yao demotic characters frequently appear in the ritual texts of the Mun, but are less frequent in the ritual texts of the Mien.[138]

The characters borrowed from Chinese are used as follows:

a. To Chinese loan words. These words are borrowed for their sounds, meanings and glyphs. represent

b. To represent native Yao words. For example, 牛 (*niu*, cow) in Chinese represents 魚 (*yu*, fish) in the Yao language.[139] In this case 牛 is used purely phonetically, regardless of the glyph and the meaning of the word in Chinese. That is, even though the character is written and pronounced as 牛 (*niu*), it actually means fish.

c. Yao demotic characters. The majority of the newly coined characters are modified Chinese characters that can be related either semantically, namely Xundu, or phonetically, namely Yindu, to the original Chinese character. In her study of the collection of Yao manuscripts preserved in the US Library of Congress, He Hongyi has identified five ways of making Yao demotic characters.[140]

(1) *Zengjian yifu* 增減意符（Adding or reducing radicals). An example of adding radicals is the Chinese character 安 (*an*, pacify, install, etc.). It is sometimes written by adding a 木 (tree) radical on the left (㭎), or 艸 (that for grass) on the above (𡍮). The example of reducing radicals is shown by the Chinese character 救 (*jiu*, save, help, etc.). It sometimes consists of only the left part 求 (*qiu*, beseech), leaving out the right part 攵 (*sui*, rap, tap), but it still means rescue.

(2) *Leihua* 類化 (Influenced by the words around). The writing of a character is influenced by the combination words proceeding or subsequent to it. There are plenty of examples. To give just one: in the term 血湖 (*xiehu*, blood lake), the 血 (*xie*,

[138] Feng Henggao (ed.), *Yaozu tongshi shangjun* 瑤族通史上卷 (The Detailed History of the Yao, Volume One) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2007), 278.
[139] The examples are from the *biau muon,* a subgroup of Yao language speaking people. See Pan Meihua, *'Yuefeng xujiu, yao ge' yizhu* 《粵風續九·瑤歌》譯註 (Annotations of the Folksongs from Guangdong, the Yao Folksongs) (Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, 2013), 159.
[140] He Hongyi and Wang Ping, 'Meiguo guohui tushuguan', 183.

blood) sometimes appears in a form with the 氵 (water) radical added on its left (洫), because it is influenced by 湖 (*hu*, lake).

(3) *Fuhao tidai* 符號替代 (Substitution of components). The principle of this group of demotic characters is to substitute the complex component in a character with a relatively simple component. For instance, 文 (*wen*, culture, writing, etc.) is often used to replace the upper part of such words as 學 (*xue*, learning) and 覺 (*jue* or *jiao*, to awaken from sleep, conscious), and has resulted in the demotic characters 文学 and 文覓 respectively.

(4) *Tong jinyin tidai* 同近音替代 (Substitution of words with the exact same or similar sound). An example for the substitution of word of exact sound is 喬（*qiao*, tall, lofty）as a substation for 橋 (*qiao*, bridge). An example for the substitution of word of similar sound is 娘 (*niang*, woman, mother) for 糧 (*liang*, food, grain).

(5) *Jianyong xiancheng jiegou huo bujian jiangou xinzi* 借用現成結構或部件建構新字 (Using the given structure and component to create new words). For example, the Chinese character 父 (*fu*, father) is used as a radical and the character 上 (*shang*, upper) has been added below the radical 'father' to make a Yao demotic character for father: 父上 (*ye*). To create the Yao demotic character for 'mother', the same Chinese character 父 is again used as a radical, but this time with a Chinese character 下 (*xia*, down) added below to make a Yao demotic character for mother: 父下 (*niang*).[141]

d. There is yet another group of characters, though relatively small in number, that have been created by local scribes and are not officially recognized. Nevertheless, they can be found in *A Glossary of Popular Chinese Characters Since Song and Yuan Dynasties* (*Song Yuan yilai suzipu*), which includes 6,240 commonly-used Chinese characters selected from twelve block-printed editions of popular literature of the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911)

[141] This example comes from the Mun. Feng Henggao (ed.), *op. cit.* 829. It is worth mentioning that two or more modified Chinese characters can be used to refer to the same semantic field. For instance, the radical 爫 (*bo*, legs) with the character 娘 (*niang*, mother) underneath it also means 'mother': 爫娘 (*niang*).

dynasties.[142] Some of these common Chinese characters are also often used in Daoist scriptures and liturgical texts.[143]

To sum up, the great majority of the characters used by the Yao are standard Chinese characters. These Chinese characters have either been adopted to represent the original meaning of the word in Chinese or are used either phonetically, morphologically or semantically to represent native Yao words. Furthermore, there is also a small number of Yao words called *yaosuzi* or *fangkuai yaowen* in Chinese, which are mostly modified Chinese characters coined by the Yao themselves. The last group represents words that have been in use in the Sinitic language area since Song times.

4-2. The Sounds

The spoken languages that the Yao use include three sorts of languages dependent on different settings. In scholarship on the Yao language, the first type of language is referred to as 'everyday language' (*richangyu*), used in daily interactions. The second type is 'folksong language' (*geyaoyu*), used during folksong performances.[144] The last type is 'religious language' (*zongjiaoyu*), used exclusively in religious settings.[145] The languages used to perform the texts from the manuscripts are 'folksong language', mainly employed by both female and male singers and 'religious language', exclusively used by religious specialists (more details see

[142] Liu Fu and Li Jiarui (eds), *Song Yuan yilai suzipu* 宋元以来俗字谱 (A Glossary of Popular Chinese Characters since Song and Yuan Dynasties) (Beiping: The Institute of History and Philology, reprint in 1930). Yu Yang, ""Panwangge" yu "Song Yuan yilai suzipu" suzi bijiao chutan' 《盤王歌》與《宋元以來俗字譜》俗字比較初探 (The Preliminary Investigation into the Popular Chinese Characters in the "Song of King Pan" and "A Glossary of Popular Chinese Characters since Song and Yuan Dynasties"), *Wenxue Jiaoyu* (文學教育 Literature Education), 10 (2009), 144-145.

[143] He Hongyi and Wang Ping, *op. cit*.

[144] Herbert C. Purnell, ""Youmian" Yao minjian geyao de yunlv jiegou' 「優勉」瑤民間歌謠的韻律結構 (Prosodic Structure of the Folksongs of the Mien), in Qiao Jian et al. (eds), *Yaozu yanjiu lunwenji* 瑤族研究論文集 (Selected Research Papers on the Yao) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1988), 143-155. It is noteworthy that the Yao religious language contains significant characteristics of the medieval Chinese language of the Song and Yuan dynasties (Feng Henggao (ed.), *op. cit.* 282-285).

[145] Pan Meihua, 'Shilun Iu-Mien zongjiao yishi de chuancheng meijie "zongjiao yuyan"—yi huan panwangyuan weili' 試論優勉宗教儀式的傳承媒介「宗教語言」—以還盤王願為例 (A Preliminary Discussion of the Religious Language in Iu-Mien's Ritual Performance: A Case Study of the Ritual of 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan'), in Tang Yunshu and Feng Haifeng (eds), *Yaoxue yanjiu: Fei wuzhi wenhua yizhan baohu yu chuancheng* (*diliuji*) 瑤學研究：非物質文化遺產保護與傳承（第六輯） (Yao Studies: Protection and Inheritance of Intangible Cultural Heritage, Volume Six) (Hong Kong: Zhanwang chubanshe, 2008), 158-176.

Chapter 5). According to Huang Guiquan, both the Yao folksong language and their religious language are a 'hybrid language' (*hunheyu*) made up of Yao and medieval Chinese, but a divergence in pronunciation has occurred between them so the sound attached to the same word is not the same in these two contexts. Nevertheless, their Chinese pronunciations bear some resemblance to the Cantonese and other southern Han-Chinese dialects.[146] To give an example of these three different languages spoken by the Yao, the Yao term meaning 'no' is pronounced *ma* in everyday language, *jam* in folksong language and *pat* in religious language (all pronunciations are in Mun).[147]

Taking another tack, Pan Meihua argues that the religious language is a completely different language from both the everyday language and the folksong language. She reports four different ways in which how the Yao perceive and name it. Some people in Lao Cai, northern Vietnam, say it is called *tsie wa* 斜話; some people in Hezhou, northeast Guangxi call it *lin tsieu siŋ* 連州聲; some other people in Hezhou say it is neither a Yao language nor a Han-Chinese language, but *mien*^{53} *wa* 鬼話, a language spoken to ghosts (all three terms are given in Mien); some people in Baice, western Guangxi say it is *wuzhou hua* (Wuzhou language). Moreover, even though the Chinese pronunciations of the Yao religious language bear a great similarity to Cantonese (called *Baihua* in Guangxi), they display more of the linguistic characteristics of medieval Chinese than that does modern Cantonese.[148] In other words, the issue about from which Han-Chinese languages the Yao religious language has been formed is still open to debate. Cogently, the linguistic interaction between these three sorts of Yao languages, particularly the folksong language and religious language, has still more to be explored.

Conclusion

[146] Huang Guiquan, *Diancun yaozu: Nahongcun landianyao wenhua de diaocha yu yanjiu* 靛村瑤族—那洪村藍靛瑤文化的調查與研究 (The Landian Yao Village: The Research on the Landian Culture of Nahong Village) (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe), 57-61.
[147] Huang Guiquan, *Yaozuzhi, xiangwan*, 7.
[148] Pan Meihua, 'Pangu Yao yuyanwenzi' 盤古瑤語言文字 (The Language and Writing among Pangu Yao) (unpublished article).

This chapter situates Yao religious culture and manuscripts in a broader regional and historical context. The creation of the 'Yao' as an ethnic marker has undoubtedly been a gradual historical process facilitated by the imperial Chinese states and the communist Chinese government in their governance of South China. In the diverse historical reactions by the people known as the 'Yao' to state governance, the two specific groups of Yao, the Mien and Mun, have shared a relatively similar geographical and political position, constantly placing themselves outside the administrative control of the state. Should this be accepted, adopting James Scott's theory, the societies of these two Yao groups can be seen as a 'society of escape' (from state governance). Even though state military violence must have been a recurring issue in the Yao's everyday experiences, the invention of the Yao Charters would seem to indicate that the Yao have regarded the symbols pertaining to the centre of the Chinese statecraft, the emperors, as a positive presence in Yao society. Meanwhile, as will be argued and demonstrated in the following chapters, the Yao have shown that they are able to maintain their agency and autonomy by deploying different cultural strategies in their negotiations to counteract the imposition of Chinese literacy and the Chinese-culture-laden religious traditions.

Before delving into a thematic analysis of Yao religious culture and manuscripts, the latter half of this chapter has been devoted to an introduction to the collections of Yao manuscripts employed in this research, examining the scriptural and ritual traditions, temporal information, the ways in which the texts have been written and the linguistic features of the texts, so as to give an overview of the characteristics of Yao religion and written tradition.

The next chapter will show that the patrilineal ideology, a cultural marker of Chinese culture and way of descent, has been particularly reinforced through the concept of the sacredness of literacy and the manuscripts that are its outward and visible form. Eventually, with the passing of time, a male-privileged gender ideal and an androcentric religious domain have been constructed in Yao society.

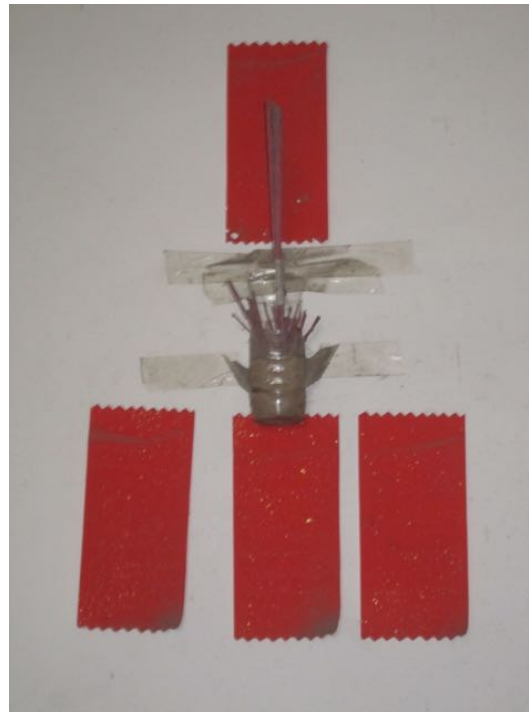

Illustration 1. Incense-burner in Dingcao, Guangxi. Photo by Chen Meiwen.

Illustration 2 Incense-burner in Jinping County 金平縣, Yunnan. Photo by Chen Meiwen.

Chapter 3. The Civilizing Project and Its Social Consequences: Ordination, the Manuscript as an Object of Value, and the Male-Female Relations in Religious Domain

Many pieces of ethnographical evidence collected in Southeast Asia during the mid-twentieth century confirm that a Yao define his or her Yao-ness through the performance of ritual rather than by any biological relationship.[1] In the Chinese context, ritual practices have also continued to play an integral role in the formation of Yao ethnicity, even in the post-Maoist era (1980s--) in which the discourses of and the plans for modernization have dominated every aspect of Chinese society.[2] Among all the rituals the Yao practice, ordination, the ritual that bestows the qualification of a ritual specialist upon a Yao man, is undoubtedly the most significant in defining Yao ethnicity. The Yao practise a form of ordination that appears to be a distant mirror of the earliest days of Daoism—namely: the Heavenly Masters' Church of the second century AD—a time at which communal ordination was popular.[3] Jacques Lemoine uses the term 'collective priesthood' to contrast Yao ordination with the contemporary Chinese Daoist system, because Chinese ordination singles out the candidates for ordination individually, and the members of this elected elite act out their spiritual roles on behalf of a community of laymen.[4]

Yao Daoist ordination has also overshadowed a great part of what is called Yao Daoism. Importantly the term 'Daoism' has entailed different meanings at different historical times and in divergent regional contexts.[5] It is generally accepted that, in contrast to the other religions with far wider international dimensions such as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, Daoism is one of the indigenous religions of

[1] For example, Simon Halliday, 'From An Unfinished Notebook: Preliminary Research on Yao in Chiang Rai', *JSS* 66/1 (1978), 112-125.
[2] Ralph A. Litzinger, *Other Chinas: The Yao and the Politics of National Belonging* (Duke University Press, 2000).
[3] David Holm, 'The Exemplar of Filial Piety and the End of the Ape-Men Dong Yong in Guangxi and Guizhou Ritual Performance', *T'oung Pao*, 90/1-3 (2004), 32-64 at 33. Kristofer Schipper, 'Vernacular and Classical Rituals in Taoism', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 45/1 (1985), 21-57 at 24.
[4] Jacques Lemoine, *op. cit.* 33.
[5] Liu Da, *The Tao and Chinese Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1981[1979]).

China.[6] Although the indigeniety of Daoism is attributed ethnically to Han Chinese people, many scholars argue that it is highly probable the southern non-Han Chinese people made a large contribution to it, above all to its esotericism including talismans and incantation.[7] During the course of Chinese history, at times Daoist doctrines and sacraments were employed by commoners in their rebellions against the ruling powers, for instance, the Yellow Turban Rebellion that was launched by large numbers of members of the Taiping Dao in the Later Han (AD 25-220); but there were also times at which they were utilized by the emperors to legitimize their sovereignty; for instance, the Orthodox Unity School in the Tang dynasty (AD 618-907). Despite its changing roles in different societal spectrums and in different time periods, the establishment of Daoist doctrines and sacraments has proven to have had an admittedly close relationship with the governmental ideology propounded by the state and its outward materialistic expression, the imperial treasure.[8] Therefore, even though Max Weber defines Daoism as a popular religion as opposed to Confucianism as the state cult, the Daoist liturgical framework and cosmological construct are often perceived to be representatives of state governance on a local level.[9] In many local societies in South China in imperial times, inclusive Han and non-Han Chinese societies, Daoist priests were therefore often assumed to be the symbolic representatives of the Chinese imperial state, particularly because of their competence in Chinese literacy and ritual language.[10]

Nevertheless, the transmission of Daoist doctrines and sacraments on a local level was never carried out systematically.[11] Consequently, as has happened among many other non-Han Chinese people who adopted Daoist ideologies and rituals, Yao

[6] Max Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* (Free Press, 1968[1951]).
[7] Zhang Zehong, *Wenhua chuanbo yu yishi xiangzheng: Zhongguo xinan shaoshu minzu zongjiao yu daojiao jisi yishi bijiao yanjiu* 文化傳播與儀式象徵：中國西南少數民族宗教與道教祭祀儀式比較研究 (Cultural transmission and ritual symbolism: A comparative study of religions and Daoist worship rituals among ethnic minorities in Southwest China) (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2008).
[8] Anna Seidel, 'Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments: Taoist Roots in the Apocrypha', in Michel Strickmann (ed.), *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honor of R.A. Stein, Vol. II* (Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1983), 291-371.
[9] Weber, *op. cit.*, Stephan Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor* (Routledge, 2001).
[10] Kristofer Schipper, 'Vernacular and Classical Rituals in Taoism', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 45/1 (1985), 21-57.
[11] Yang Minkang and Yang Xiaoxun, *Yunnan Yaozu daojia keyi yinyue* 雲南瑤族道教科儀音樂 (The Ritual Music of Daoism among the Yao in Yunnan) (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2000), 1-22.

Daoism has developed a form of 'syncretism', or to use a more neutral term, 'trans-hybridity'. Moreover, as the following discussion will reveal, Yao Daoism also indicates the existence of a 'hierarchical opposition', a model that 'stresses value instead of asymmetry, ideological levels instead of contexts, and the encompassment of levels instead of the equivalence of contexts', as articulated by Louis Dumont.[12] Therefore, the Yao on the village level do not perceive the difference between local ritual tradition and the religious elements which arguably came from the outside worlds as asymmetry. Instead, they use the interface of ritual practice to include diverse religious ideologies and elements introduced in various forms of contexts. The contexts in which the foreign religious ideologies and elements were transmitted into the Yao communities are not so relevant. Far more relevant are the consequent forms of encompassments of different levels of value systems, including Daoism-laden, Buddhism-laden, Confucianism-laden and indigenous-laden ideologies and cosmologies. To elaborate in more detail on the ways in which different value systems are at play and intertwined in Yao ritual practice and manuscript culture, and their social consequences, this chapter addresses two dimensions of the 'hierarchical opposition' present in Yao ritual tradition, and their social consequences from the viewpoint of gender.

The first point to be addressed is an encompassment of the values of androcentrism and filial piety in Yao ritual practice. The chapter begins by discussing various aspects of the androcentrism that are heavily present in Yao ordination. It argues that the practice of ordination might be seen as a 'civilizing project' imbued with a Chinese imperial metaphor and a strong patrilineal orientation. A comparison between the different forms of ordination among the Yao, She and Hakka also reveals the extent to which this ceremony has become intertwined with Chinese ancestor worship and the development of a lineage society, both essential mechanisms in connecting local society to the Chinese imperial state.[13] Cogently, the ideological basis of filial piety (*xiaoshun*), an important Chinese cultural value that underpins the

[12] Robert Parkin, *Louis Dumont and Hierarchical Opposition* (Berghahn Books, 2009), 3.
[13] Zheng Zhenman, *Ming Qing Fujian jiazu zuzhi yu shehui bianqia*n 明清福建家族組織與社會變遷 (Lineage Organization and Social Change in Fujian during the Ming and Qing) (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992).

performance of the rites of ancestor worship, has also been employed on an individual level to sustain the practices of Yao ordination.

The second point concerns an encompassment of the values of manuscript-as-object-of-value and the making of a ritual Yao household. Besides the discussion of the strong Chinese imperial metaphor and the patrilineal ideology pertaining to the performance of Yao ordination, this chapter also investigates how the Yao have projected their diverse perceptions of the value of the 'civilizing' power of the state to be part of the cultural value attached to writing, and the object-hood embodied in ritual manuscripts. This discussion leads to the way in which the transmission of manuscript-as-object-of-value is again intertwined with the androcentric ideology that makes the continuation of a ritual Yao household possible.

These two points are followed by a discussion of the social consequences induced by the encompassments of Chinese imperial and patrilineal values on Yao gender ideologies and performances. This section looks at the different forms of male-female relations in the Yao religious domain. It reveals that the beliefs surrounding the taboos on female menstruation, although an ancient and universal phenomenon, have been the cause of Yao women's auxiliary standing in religious domain. By combining textual and field-work data, the section points out the reflexive voice of the Yao through the positions of wives and wives' parents when faced with the imposed male-privileged gender ideology that was accompanied with the civilizing force of the Chinese imperial state.

Encompassment of the Values of Androcentrism and Filial Piety

The performance of an ordination ceremony can be witnessed among many of the different groups now labelled ethnic 'Yao' in China. Apart from the Mien and Mun, the *Lak kja* (Chashan Yao), *Kjɔŋ nai* (Hualan Yao), *Dzau min* (Pai Yao) and *Piog tuo jo* (Pingdi Yao) also practise ordination.[14] Only the Mun and *Lak kja*

[14] The group names are given in their autonyms, with the exonyms in brackets. Zhang Zehong, *Wenhua chuanbo yu yishi xiangzheng: Zhongguo xinan shaoshu minzu zongjiao yu daojiao jisi yishi bijiao yanjiu* 文化傳播與儀式象徵：中國西南少數民族宗教與道教祭祀儀式比較研究 (Cultural Transmission and Ritual Symbolism: A comparative study of religions and Daoist worship rituals among ethnic minorities in Southwest China) (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2008), 35-71.

differentiate between the two extant ritual traditions and hold separate ordinations for Daoist priests and for ritual masters. The She and Hakka, two ethnicities which originate from the same geographical area and share a close proximity in origin with the Yao, once also held ordinations for male members, although these rituals have either been largely transformed into ancestor worship rituals (among the She) or have fallen into a decline (among the Hakka), as will be discussed below.[15]

The terms for ordination and the regulations governing it have varied over time and between different ethnic groups.[16] The general terms for ordination in the Chinese language, and also used by the Yao, are *dujie* or *chuandu*.[17] The Mun refer to the ordination of a Daoist priest as [Mu] *dou taau* (*dou*: transfer; *taau*: the Way) and the ordination of ritual masters as [Mu] *dou θai* (*θai*: master).[18] This modest number is surpassed by the Mien who have at least four levels of ordination in their clerical hierarchy. In order of sequence they are: [Mi] *kwa dang* (hanging the lamps), [Mi] *tou sai* (ordination of the master), [Mi] *chia tse* (additional duties) and [Mi] *pwang ko* (or [Mi] *chia tai*) (enfeoffing liturgies).[19] The She refer to ordination as [Ch] *zuojiao* (performing the *jiao* [ritual]), [Ch] *dushen* (ordination) or [Ch] *rulu* (entering the

[15] Jiang Bingzhao, 'Shezu de panhu chongbai jiqi zongjiao xisu' 畲族的盤瓠崇拜及其宗教習俗 (Panhu Worship and Religious Practices among the She), in Song En-Chang (ed.), *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu zongjiao chubian* 中國少數民族宗教初編 (First Compilation of the Religions of Chinese Ethnic Minorities) (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe), 408-417. Chan Wing-Hoi, 'Ordination Names in Hakka Genealogies: A Religious Practice and Its Decline', in David Faure and Helen F. Siu (eds), *Down to Earth: The Territorial Bond in South China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 65-82.

[16] Liu Guangyuan, 'Cong shiwu tantao zhongguo Guangxi baise Landian yaoren de zongjiao shijian' 從食物探討中國廣西百色藍靛瑤人的宗教實踐 (A Discussion of the Religious Practices of the Landian Yao in Baise, Guangxi from a Dietary Perspective), MA Thesis (Hsinchu: National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan, 2003), 19.

[17] Other Names in Chinese that are used by the Yao are *guofa*, *zhaidao* and *dadaolu*. See Chen Bin, *Yaozu wenhua* 瑤族文化 (Yao Culture) (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1993), 104. Also see Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao rende goucheng yu shengming de laiyuan* 從命名談廣西田林盤古瑤人的構成與生命的來源 (Conceptualizations of Personhood and the Origins of Life as Seen in Naming Traditions among the Pangu Yao of Tianlin, Guangxi) (Taipei: Tangshan, 2003), 111.

[18] Liu Guangyuan, *op. cit.* 19. Huang Guiquan, 'Landianyao de hua, dou, renguan—Nahongcun Landianyao dansheng, wenghua, shuadou hen dushi liyi de diaocha yu yanjiu' 藍靛瑤的花、斗、人觀—那洪村藍靛瑤誕生、翁花、耍斗和度師禮儀的調查與研究 (The Conceptualizations of Flowers, Constellations and Person: A Survey of Birth Ceremonies, Flower Rites, Rituals for Supplementing Rice and Ordination), *Wenshan shifan gaodeng zhuanke xueyuan xuebao* (文山師範高等專科學院學報 Journal of Wenshan Teachers College), 16/3 (2003), 161-167.

[19] Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao*, 117-120. Jacques Lemoine, *Yao Ceremonial Paintings* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1982), 24-27. David Holm, 'Daoism among Minority Nationalities', in Edward L. Davis, ed., *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture* (Routledge, 2005), 136-137.

[Daoist] register) and [Ch] *jizu* (worshipping the ancestors). In a reference to the Hakka, the *Xinning County Gazetteer* of 1552 indicates that the ordination ceremony was then designated [Ch] *shoufa* (receiving the *fa* [method]) or [Ch] *dushui*.[20]

In the following, I first explain how the practice of Daoist ordination among the Yao, the Mien in particular, projects the Yao's yearning for a honourable afterlife, rank and status in a Daoist hierarchical pantheon that mirrored the Chinese state bureaucratic system. Then I point out the ways in which the strong patrilineal ideology is revealed in the practice of Yao Daoist ordination and how the ritual can very easily and surreptitiously be connected with the rite of patrilineal ancestor worship, that is a facilitator in the building of a lineage society. Having established this, for a comparison I elaborate on the transformation of and decline in ordination practised by the She and Hakka, showing the Yao's resistance to being forced into a complete transformation into a patrilineal-dominant lineage society. Nevertheless, both as an important Chinese value and as an ideological basis that sustains the practice of ancestor worship, filial piety has been encompassed within the Yao cultural value system. The value of filial piety sometimes even overrides ritual reasons for certain Yao individuals to carry on the ritual legacy on a household level. The next section reveals how the discourse of filial piety has been employed to justify the transmission of ritual manuscripts and the practice of ordination.

1. A Ritual Imbued with a Chinese Imperial Metaphor

The meaning and hence the functionality of an ordination ceremony are multifaceted. Among the Yao, it consists of an initiation rite for males that permits the postulants to enter the priesthood.[21] All male Yao have to be initiated in this ritual, because 'the Yao ordination is the only way to salvation and consequently must be extended to the whole community'. Yao ordination also acts as a local educational mechanism through which its initiates are given the chance to acquire Chinese literacy, as they are expected to have a grounding in Chinese norms and values as

[20] Cited in Chan Wing-Hoi, 'Ordination Names in Hakka Genealogies', 68-69. A similar pursuit of higher social status via ordination (*jizu*, ancestor worship) can also be found among the She. See Jiang Bingzhao, 'Shezu de panhu chongbai'.
[21] Jacques Lemoine, *op. cit.* 21-33.

well as being able to master the ritual skills required to communicate with gods, ghosts and ancestors.[22] Previous Chinese scholarship once perceived the ceremony as a 'rite of passage' (*chengnianli*) in which males were initiated into adulthood.[23] Nevertheless, in reality, the age of the postulants can range from as young as five to into the sixties.[24] Another important dimension of ordination is that it also attributes the initiates an ethnic identity. Should he undergo a Yao Daoist ordination, a non-Yao male will be accepted as a Yao.[25]

Most importantly, the clerical hierarchy that ordination opens up (among the Mien) affords gifted families and talented individual males a means by which to attain social status.[26] One very good example of this ambition for achieving higher social status is an entry in the earlier-mentioned *Xinning Country Gazetteer* describing a *dushui* ceremony that shares many similarities with the *dujie* practised by the Yao (the Mien in particular). The account clearly records that, 'Those who are eager for swift promotion have the rite performed three or four times a year, being raised to a higher rank each time. One or two members of the literati (*shiren*) are also known to have shamelessly knelt below such altars and received ordination in this manner'.[27]

It is important to remember that what the Yao are seeking to achieve through the practice of ordination is not rank and status in this world but honour in the world of the afterlife.[28] Once ordained, a Mun male who has undergone the ordination of a Daoist priest will receive the title 'the perfected/genuine disciple who studied under the celestial masters of Shangqing school' (*shangqing tianshi menxia chuzhen dizi*),

[22] Deng Hua, 'Yunnan Wenshan landianyao dujie yishi jiaoyu guocheng de yanjiu' 雲南文山藍靛瑤度戒儀式教育過程的研究 (Research on the Educational Process of the *dujie* Ceremony of the Wenshan Indigo Yao Nationality in Yunnan), PhD Thesis (Southwest University, 2011).
[23] Zhang Youjun, 'Shiwan dashan yaozu daojiao xinyang qianshi' 十萬大山瑤族道教信仰淺釋 (A Preliminary Discussion of Daoist Belief among the Yao in Ten Thousand Mountain), in *Yaozu zongjiao lunji* 瑤族宗教論集 (A Compilation of Studies on Yao Religion) (Nanning: Guangxi yaozu yanjiu xuehui, 1986), 1-27.
[24] Jacques Lemoine, *op. cit.* 24. Huang Guiquan, 'Landianyao de hua, dou, renguan'.
[25] Peter Kandre, 'Autonomy and Integration of Social Systems: The Iu Mien ("Yao" or "Man") Mountain Population and Their Neighbors', in Peter Kunstadter (ed.), *Southeast Asian Tribes, Minorities, and Nations* (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), 583-638 at 584-585. Takemura Takuji, *Yaozu de lishi yu wenhua* 瑤族的歷史與文化 (The History and Culture of the Yao), Zhu Guichang and Jin Shaoping (trans.) (Nanning: Guangxi minzu xueyuan minzu yanjiusuo, 1986[1981]).
[26] Jacques Lemoine, *op. cit.* 21-33. Chen Meiwen, *op. cit.* 117-120.
[27] Cited in Chan Wing-Hoi, 'Ordination Names in Hakka Genealogies', 69.
[28] Takemura Takuji, *op. cit.* 160.

and a man who has experienced the ordination of a ritual master is entitled to claim himself 'the newly-ordained/genuine disciple of Sanyuan school' (*sanyuan menxia xinen/xiuzhen dizi*). They also receive their ordination names, written on a 'cosmic certificate' (*yinyangju*), that paves the way for them to be worshipped by their descendants as well as to be able to enter a propitious next life without any regrets.[29] Among the Mien, once a male has proceeded to the higher level of ordination, *chia tse* in this case, he is entitled to claim himself 'the grand supreme disciple with extra duties who has studied the teachings of both the Lüshan and Meishan Schools and followed the three commandments at the North Polar Office for Expelling Demons' (*taishang fengxing beiji quxieyuan chuantong lümei erjiao sanjie shengming jiazhi dizi*). In contrast to the Mun's longing for a good life in the world to come, the Mien believe that, once ordained, they will no longer be caught up in the circle of reincarnation and will assume an official post with its concomitant rank in the Daoist hierarchical pantheon. Hence, they will be worshipped by their offspring as both ancestors and deities.[30] Having reached the level of *chia tse*, a male will have an honorable afterlife post bestowed on him as 'the officer whose title is five characters, enjoyed longevity and summoned thunder to govern ghosts and the deities in the world at a certain office in a certain prefecture' (*xx dao xx fu zhengren zhifu zhiguan tianxia guishen changsheng leileng lingying wuzi weihao*). The ordination names they receive in the ceremony are the all important credentials that allow them to claim a respectable status in this otherworldly world.

The places to which his soul can be sent and the post he can assume will vary in accordance with the levels of ordination a man has attained. Among the Mien, the world of the afterlife is represented in a similar fashion to a Daoist hierarchical pantheon, that was created in imitation of the Chinese state bureaucratic system.[31]

> The souls of a couple who have attained chia tse will go to the 'twelve streets and doors governed by the Grand Supreme Elderly Lord (Laojun shi'er jiemen) to take up the official posts bestowed upon them. Deities from the celestial domain will welcome them on their

[29] Liu Guangyuan, 'Cong shiwu tantao zhongguo Guangxi baise Landian yaoren', 190.
[30] Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao*, 115-118.
[31] Ma Xiao Hong, 'The First Taoist Pantheon: T'ao Hung-Ching (456-536 CE) and His Chen-Ling-Wei-Yeh-T'u', PhD thesis. (Department of Philosophy, Temple University, 1998).

> way to assume their honourable statuses The ostentation and extravagance of the welcome will run parallel to those accorded an official of high rank in this world….Whereas, the souls of a couple who have attained tou sai, one level lower than chia tse, will go to the 'thirty-six grottos in the Plum Mountain' (Meishan sanshiliu dong) to become a cultivated deity. They will also be welcomed by deities from the heavenly domain; only this welcome is of a smaller scale….And, the souls of the couple who have attained only kwa dang, the lowest level of ordination, will also go to the 'thirty-six grottos in the Plum Mountain' so as to be able to cultivate themselves. Only the officials from the otherworldly office come to greet them on their way. Their welcome is without any ostentation or extravagance at all. …The worst scenario for a couple is not to have attained even the rite of kwa dang. Such couples will be called 'people wearing white clothes' (baiyiren) and their souls will be sent back to the Peach Spring Grotto from which their souls originally came to await rebirth. There are only insects, monkeys and chickens to see them off on their way to the Peach Spring Grotto.[32]

The hierarchical world of the dead vividly envisioned in the Mien afterlife cosmology is obviously a strong imitation of the Chinese imperial state system. It also tellingly points to the Yao's desire to obtain honourable official posts in the imperial system. Although there might not be a large number of Yao who could or can actually claim high-ranking official posts in either the Chinese imperial bureaucracy or the modern Chinese administrative system, the Yao can nonetheless enjoy a respected status after death as a consequence of the practice of ordination. On a symbolic level, the agency of ordination has in a way acted as a 'civilizing project' that has transformed the Yao into civilized subjects governed by the Chinese imperial state and the modern Chinese state system in their afterlife world.

The next section contains a discussion of another dimension of the Chinese imperial presence in particular and the influence of Chinese cultural rites and values found in Yao ordination in general, namely ancestor worship and patrilineal ideology.

2. A Rite of Patrilineal Ancestor Worship

[32] Chen Meiwen, *op. cit.* 115-118.

In the context of the present discussion, one aspect of ordination particularly relevant to the argument is, as Yoshino Akira aptly puts it, that, 'It acts as a ritual re-affirmation of the patrilineal kinship system'.[33] Yoshino illustrates three aspects of patrilineal ideology vividly expressed in Mien ordination, with a special focus on *kwa dang* (written as *kwaa taang* in the original) in North Thailand. The first aspect is the importance of fathers and close agnates in the master-disciple relationship.

> In *kwaa taang*, an initiate establishes a relation with three *say-tie* (masters). Amongst the *say-tie*, the first master, *tsu pun say*, should be his father, or a close elder agnate if the father is dead, and the second, *khoy gyaaw say*, should be his close agnate. It indicates that the father-son relation and patrilineal kinship relation are re-affirmed in this ritual process as the master-disciple relation. In particular, the ritual segments of blowing rice grains into an initiate's mouth and of the provision of guardian spirits mean that magical power and guardian spirits are symbolically transmitted through the patrilineal line….[34]

Although in reality, '…an actual instructor in ritual knowledge might be an expert priest other than one's father', the evidence seems to show that having one's father or a close agnate as one's *tsu pun say* is considered the most ideal situation.[35] Very significantly, this ties in with the traditional belief that magical power and guardian spirits can only be inherited by male descendants.

The second aspect of ordination that reaffirms the patrilineal ideology is the heavy emphasis on surname identity. As Yoshino reports, 'The second master *khoy gyaaw say* should be at least a male with the same surname as the initiate'.[36] The third dimension of patrilineality in the *kwa dang* concerns ancestor worship. Yoshino explains that the Mien people use the concept of *dzip tsow* or *dzip tsong-tsey* to explain the implication of *kwa dang*.

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[33] Yoshino Akira, 'Father and Son, Master and Disciple: The Patrilineal Ideology of the Mien Yao of Northern Thailand', in Suenari Michio, J. S. Eades and Christian Daniels (eds), *Perspectives on Chinese Society: Anthropological Views from Japan* (Canterbury: University of Kent, 1995), 265-273 at 266.
[34] Ibid., 270.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

> *Dzip* means 'to succeed' or 'to join to'; *tsow* means 'ancestors'; and *tsong-tsey* means 'the patrilineal line from the ancestors'. So the combined meaning of the words is 'to join the ancestors or to succeed to patrilineal ancestor worship'.[37]

It is noteworthy that having a person's own father or a close agnate, or at the very least a man with the same family name in the role of a postulant's master, does not seem to be required among the Mien in Weihao or the Mun in Dingcao. Nevertheless, despite such divergences in detail, the patrilineal ideology of ordination, particularly its affiliation with ancestor worship, can still easily be ascertained.

One ultimate expression of the patrilineal ideology behind ordination is that ancestors and descendants can affect each other's status and rank reciprocally during ordination. That is to say, if the ancestors have not been ordained or have not submitted themselves to a higher-level ordination ceremony, their descendants cannot contemplate their own ordination until the ancestors have been ordained or elevated to the level to which they are aspiring themselves. As Jacques Lemoine states, 'If nobody has ever been ordained in the postulant's family, he is enjoined by tradition to invite the souls of his grandfather and great-grandfather to be ordained with him and thus to benefit from the same privileges'.[38] Should this indeed be the case, a postulant will carry a pentagonal piece of red cardboard with the Han Chinese style names or the previous ordination names of his ancestors written on it, a gesture that will ensure that they can be accepted as participants in a joint ordination.[39] Conversely, if the ancestors of the household have been ordained into a particular rank, the male offspring are expected to follow in their footsteps and achieve the same level of ordination.[40]

Given this male-centred orientation, it should come as no surprise that having male descendants is an essential requirement if a family is to carry on the practice of ordination. Of course, it is always possible that a family might not produce male descendants. In such cases, the strict demand for male descendants will be met by the pre-existing marital practices and kinship network in Yao society.

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[37] Ibid., 271.
[38] Jacques Lemoine, *Yao Ceremonial Paintings,* 33.
[39] Chen Meiwen, *op. cit.* 116.
[40] Takemura Takuji, *Yaozu de lishi yu wenhua,* 165.

The Yao practise three types of marriage, including [Mi] *sa sie* (women marrying out; virilocal residence), [Mi] *mai taŋ* (men marrying out; permanent uxorilocal residence) and [Mi] *i puŋ tiŋ* (men marrying out; first uxorilocal residence, then virilocal residence). Among the three types of marital practice, the latter two exemplify an idea of gender equality that places the female gender on the same footing as its male counterpart in terms of inheriting land, property, houses and in being able to pass on a woman's family name identity to her children.[41] These two types of marriage practice can also be used to meet the demands of the patrilineal inheritance of ordination, presumably meaning that an uxorilocal son-in-law substitutes for a son if there are no sons in the family into which the son-in-law marries. As Yoshino concludes,

> A male who has not undergone *kwaa taang*, can become a permanent uxorilocal husband. After marriage, he has to be initiated in *kwaa taang* with his wife's agnates and affirm his relationship with his wife's ancestors. However, in the case of a temporary uxorilocal husband, he will only hold a ritual to get a permission from his wife's household's ancestors to stay in the house temporarily.[42]

To sum up, it is evident that the practice of Yao Daoist ordination strictly follows a patrilineal principle, and is a reaffirmation of the patrilineal kinship system. Nevertheless, in actual practice the Yao employ marriage patterns other than patrilineal descent and virilocal residence to meet the demand for male descendants. Favouring a patrilineal descent system characterizes one aspect of Chinese imperial state governance, namely, its introduction of lineage society into South China.[43] The following section compares the Yao with the She and Hakka who had historically practised a similar sort of ordination to the Yao, but among whom the ritual had either been completely replaced by patrilineal ancestor worship or was in decline.

3. Yao, She and Hakka: Ordination and Lineage Society

[41] Chen Meiwen, *op. cit.* 46-55.
[42] Yoshino Akira, *op. cit.* 271-272.
[43] David Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor: State and Lineage in South China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 125-135.

The androcentric ordination structure means that the practice of ordination is more easily linked to, or even completely replaced by, the rites of patrilineal ancestor worship and the written genealogies compiled in the literati style, two distinguishing features of Chinese lineage society. The transformation of the ordination ceremony among the She and Hakka, two groups that have been more thoroughly engulfed by Chinese state expansion and consequently have developed into lineage societies more explicitly than the Yao, offers a glimpse of this sort of transition.

Among the She, apart from still being called *zuojiao*, *dushen* or *rulu*, ordination is primarily considered a rite of ancestor worship, *jizu*. Two aspects of ancestor worship are emphasized in it: one is the importance of male descendants; the other is the Chinese cultural norm and value of filial piety. The *Sheminshi* (Poetry about the She People) written by Zhou Yingmei says: 'The most important thing to the nine clans is ancestor worship; the most important thing to a family is to have male descendants'.[44] As in the case of Yao Daoist ordination, if the father has undergone ordination, the sons are likewise expected to submit themselves as candidates for the ceremony. A male descendant who has not undergone the *jizu* ceremony cannot be regarded as a filial son and take charge of his father's funeral.[45]

The external threats they faced, the decline in ordination and their susceptibility to being incorporated into a male-centred literati tradition are attested to in the ways in which the Hakka have written the names of the ancestors in their genealogies.[46] Chan Wing-Hoi points out, 'Many Hakka genealogies contain names of ancestors described as *langming*, *faming* or *duming*', that are unquestionably ordination names.[47] The two forms of the names discovered in Hakka genealogies are:

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[44] From 'The Customs of the She People' (*Fengsu: Shemin fu* 風俗：畲民附) in Zhu Huang (revised) 朱煌 修 and Zheng Peichun (redacted) 鄭培椿 編, *Suichang xianzhi* 遂昌縣誌（清道光刻本）卷一 (First Volume of the Gazetteer of Suichang County, Qing Daoguang Edition), in *Xijian Zhongguo difangzhi huikan, di shijiu ce* 稀見中國地方志匯刊第十九冊 (Compilation of Rare Chinese Gazetteers, the Nineteeth Volume) (Zhongguo shudian, 1992), 773. The text in Chinese reads '九族推尊緣祭祖, 一家珍重是生孩'.

[45] Hu Xiansu, 'Zhejian Wenzhou Chuzhou jian tumin sheke shulue' 浙江溫州處州間土民畲客述略 (A Brief Description of the Tu, She and Hakka People in Wenzhou and Chuzhou, Zhejiang Province), Kexue (科學 *Science*), 7/2 (1922), 280-281.

[46] Chan Wing-Hoi, 'Ordination Names in Hakka Genealogies: A Religious Practice and Its Decline', in David Faure and Helen F. Siu (eds), *Down to Earth: The Territorial Bond in South China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 65-82.

[47] Ibid., 65.

> The first has the character *fa* [method] as the first of two characters [after the family name]. The other consists of a nonnumeric character followed by a numeral and then the character *lang* [a respected title for men, gentlemen, husband],… a variant of the *lang* form found in earlier generations consists of only a numeral followed by the character *lang*.[48]

Women can receive ordination names courtesy of their husbands. The form of the female ordination name among the Hakka is:

> …similar names are given in the form of either a numeric character followed by the character *niang* [women, wives] or a two-character given name beginning with the character *miao* [excellent, wonderful, mysterious, subtle].[49]

Although the rules seem straightforward, it is obvious that the forms of ordination names have gradually been corrupted. For instance, in later genealogies the numeral element was disposed of. During the seventeenth century and later, the custom of writing of ordination names disappeared altogether. Chan explains the changes in the names of the ancestors from the perspective of social transformation. Highlighting the connection between ordination names and the ancestors set up in the ritual performance of *fengchao*, Chan chooses to define the use of *langming, faming*, and *duming* in Hakka genealogies as, '…elements of the lineage before the written genealogy became popular.' The disappearance of these names and the dominance of written genealogies in the literati style, '…represented the acknowledgement of the supremacy of a new tradition', a step that brought the Hakka much closer to becoming a Chinese lineage society.[50] The examples of the She and Hakka show that ordination, or the espousal of a patrilineal ideology by a local society, signifies that the society is on the way to being more easily transformed into a lineage society subject to Chinese state governance.

[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 82.

In contrast to the She and Hakka, the contemporary Yao still practise communal ordination and retain ordination names composed in a similar fashion to those that used be written in Hakka genealogies. However, the most significant difference between the Yao and the She and the Hakka is that the Yao, at least the Mien and Mun discussed here, did not seem to bother about putting any emphasis on compiling genealogies, elaborate both in content and in form, written in Chinese literati style.[51]

A Yao genealogy is interchangeably called *jiapu*, *jiaxiandan*, or *zongzibu* in Chinese.[52] The simplest form of a Yao genealogy might contain no more than the ordination names of both the male and female ancestors of the household up to three or five preceding generations, without stating any other information about their lives. The material representations in the genealogy are also by no means elaborate. The names of the ancestors might just be jotted down on several pieces of rice paper (see Illustration 3). There are more elaborate forms of Yao genealogy in which information about the migratory routes taken by the ancestors, the places at which they were buried and how many offerings they deserve in rituals might be recorded (see Illustration 4). In other words, Yao Daoist ordination displays only select characteristics of a lineage society, those that emphasize father-son relations, family-name identity, patrilineal descent and, especially, the Chinese cultural norm and value of filial piety.

The illustrations given leave no room to doubt that the Yao religious interface is the place at which the state has attempted to implement its "civilizing" influence by reinforcing the ideology of patrilineal descent and privileging the male gender. Yet, as far as can be ascertained, unlike the She and the Hakka communities that have been more profoundly integrated into Chinese state expansion in Southeast China, the Yao discussed here do not appear to have been completely transformed into a lineage society.

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[51] With reference to Taga Akigoro, *Zhongguo zongpu de yanjiu shangxia juan* 中國宗譜の研究，上、下卷 (Studies of Chinese Genealogies, Volumes One and Two) (Tokyo: Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, 1981).

[52] Huang Guiquan, 'Landianyao de hua, dou, renguan', 162. Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao,* 77-79.

At this point, it might be useful to recap the above-mentioned comparisons between the She, Hakka and Yao in ordination by looking at ordination name, genealogy and the extent to which they have been transformed into a lineage society in the table as below:

	She	Hakka	Yao
Ordination	ancestor worship	ancestor worship	ordination
Ordination names	non-existent	non-existent	existent
Genealogy	Chinese-literati style[53]	Chinese-literati style	non-Chinese-literati style
Lineage Organization	more elaborate[54]	more elaborate	select characteristics

Table 2: A Comparison of the She, Hakka and Yao on Ordination

4. Filial Piety as a Motivating Force

In most cases, the ownership of Yao ritual manuscripts projects the owner's mastery of Chinese literacy as well as his ability to communicate with the otherworldly domain. His literary and religious capacities have helped raise the social reputation of the owner, as Hjorleifur Jonsson has shown in his study of the Mien headmen in Thailand.[55] In this sense, both the possession of ritual manuscripts and the attainment of ordination names have been important means by which males are able to acquire 'symbolic capital'.[56] In the Yao case, 'symbolic capital' denotes social recognition, social status and a better material life, as ritual specialists receive meat

[53] See Zhou Nai 周耐 and Guo Zhichao 郭志超, Shezu pudie zhong de huaxia renting—yi Zhangpu zhongyutang Lanxing Shezu weili 畲族譜牒中的華夏認同—以漳浦種玉堂藍姓畲族為例 (The Chinese Identity in She Genealogy: A Case Study of the Lan Surname among the She people at the Zhongyutang in Zhangpu) [Web Document], <http://www.pdwh.cn/html/c8/2010-12/145.htm>, accessed 29 Dec. 2015.

[54] See Li Lingying 李凌瑩, *Jiangou zongzu de shehui yinsu tanxi: yi Zhangpu Lanshi Shezu de zongzu jiangou weili* 建構宗族的社會因素探析—以漳浦藍氏畲族的宗族建構為例 (An Investigation of Social Factors on the Construction of Lineage Society: A Case Study of the Lan Surname among the She People in Zhangpu), *Chifeng xueyuan xuebao* (赤峰學院學報 Journal of Chifeng University) 11 (2015), 136-138.

[55] Hjorleifur Jonsson, 'Dead Headmen: Histories and Communities in the Southeast Asian Hinterland', in Ing-Britt Trankell and Laura Summers (eds), *Facets of Power and its Limitations: Political Culture in Southeast Asia* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, 1998), 191-212.

[56] Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

and, sometimes, money, for their services. In other words, Yao men's pursuit of 'symbolic capital' has been a driving force that has ensured the continuous composition of ritual manuscripts and the practice of ordination ceremonies.

Apart from the allure of 'social capital', filial piety that stresses loyalty to their male ancestors by male descendants has also served as an ideological basis to legitimate the continuity of Yao ritual legacy on the household level. When I asked Li Decai, a Mien ritual master in his sixties in Weihao, why he wishes to pass the ritual manuscripts down to his children, he said it is so that, in their turn, his descendants will understand how to demonstrate their filial piety to their elders. Li Decai himself has no sons but he does have six daughters and two of them have married-in husbands who have taken up permanent uxorilocal residence. One of the married-in sons-in-law has learned how to perform rituals by working alongside Li Decai; the other, who was uninterested, has not. However, neither is the ideal candidate to whom Li Decai would like to transfer his collection of ritual manuscripts, made up of nearly sixty books. Li implicitly hints that these two married-in sons-in-law are remiss in their expressions of filial piety towards him. Therefore Li would like to pass the manuscripts on to either his first grandson, who respects and admires him, or to another daughter for whom he cares very deeply, if this daughter should eventually choose to remain at home when she takes a husband.

Showing filial respect to the elders and ancestors, rather than the mastery of Chinese literacy, seems to have been one of the major motivating forces in the reproduction of ritual manuscripts, not to mention the on-going observance of ordination ceremonies. A similar explanation was given to me when I asked Deng Wentong why he had been ordained a Daoist priest, even though he is not interested in actually practising this role. Deng said that the main reason he underwent the ordination ceremony was to make his mother happy. As the wife of a prestigious ritual specialist, Deng's mother did not wish him to continue to be known by his childhood name (*xiaoming*). As an ordination ceremony is the only means by which a Yao male can obtain an ordination name that will give him a ritual identity and an afterlife status, and can be used in rituals after that person dies, Deng Wentong's response indicates that his agreement to undergo the ordination ceremony was more

than just his aspiration to a cultural ideal and an outward expression of religious performance. In his case, it was also an emotional choice, the outward and visible sign of showing his filial respect by preserving a family's ritual identity.

Besides its reaffirmation of the patrilineal ideology, the Yao cultural construction of the value attached to Chinese literacy has revealed yet another important dimension that sustains the performance of Yao ordination and the practice of writing. It is my contention that Yao ritual manuscripts cannot be regarded simply as 'textual artefacts' that represent the ritual knowledge transmitted through ordination. Their intrinsic value surpasses this and therefore they should also be viewed as 'objects of value' that are imbued with talismanic power and symbolize distant authorities.

Encompassment of the Values of Manuscript-as-Object-of-Value and the Making of a Yao Ritual Household

1. The Origin of Literacy

Unlike many societies along the borders of southwestern China and dispersed across the uplands of Southeast Asia that have stories or myths to explain either the origin or the loss of literacy,[57] the Yao have no such story of their own. When asked where the manuscripts came from originally, Li Decai told me they were obtained by Xuanzang, a fictional character modelled on the historical Tang dynasty Buddhist monk of the same name in the novel, *The Journey to the West* (circa 1592). Zhang Zhenzhen, a Mun Daoist priest in his sixties from Dingcao, suggested the texts might perhaps have been passed down from Confucius.[58] Whereas Li Decai's answer might

[57] James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 220-237.

[58] Very interestingly, even if Yao religion has been considered to be a vernacular form of Daoism, labelled 'Yao Daoism' by scholars, neither Li Decai nor Zhang Zhenzhen has mentioned any Daoist origins of the manuscripts. However, I did find textual evidence associating scriptures (*jingshu*) with the mythical founder of Daoism, the Grand Supreme Elderly Lord (*Laojun*). The story is recorded in the 'Song of Laojun' (*laojunchang*) from a Mun ritual-master manuscript entitled *Book that Solves Mysteries (Xiuzhai jiexun)*, owned by Pan Yuanji, discovered in Guangnan County, Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan (Guangxi and Yunnan Collection). The story tells of how, with the help of a rat, the Grand Supreme Elderly Lord was able to steal all the scriptures back from Maitreya, regarded as a future Buddha in this world, after Maitreya had pillaged the sun, the moon, the stars and all the wealth of the world.

also betray influences from the popular story of *The Journey to the West,* of which he might have heard at some point in his life, Zhang Zhenzhen's attribution of Chinese literacy to Confucius might have its roots in the ritual texts sung among Yao-speaking groups, in this case, the Ao Yao in Jinxiu Yao Autonomous County in Laibin City, central Guangxi.

One of the songs sung to entertain the deities in vow-honouring (*huanyuan*) rituals is 'The Song for King Pan' (*Panhuang shenchang*).[59] In essence, the song narrates the origins of everything in the world: humankind, households, fire and, of most relevant here, literacy. One sentence states, 'The Emperor [only a title of respect] Yan Hui had created writing (or a book) and characters; writing and the characters were devised to teach the commoners'.[60] As Yan Hui was one of the disciples of Confucius, the lyrics reveal a clear association of literacy with the Confucian schools that have long been the philosophical pillar of Chinese statecraft. Moreover, in a song devised to entertain King Pan, 'Heaven and Earth Move' (*tiandidong*), the lyrics explicitly correlate writing or books with the Son of Heaven (*tianzi*, namely the Chinese emperor).[61] Judging from the context in which they are mentioned, writing or books might be a particular reference to the Registers (*biaozou*), a genre ritual masters consult to send petitions to the deities. They read, 'The Chinese Emperor had created the Registers to be sent back to the capital….the Chinese Emperor had created the Registers to be sent back to the prefecture'.[62] The Daoist pantheon and ritual practices have run parallel to the Chinese hierarchical bureaucratic system, and the deities inhabiting them are equated with imperial officials.[63] Therefore it is unsurprising to see that the Chinese emperor was projected even more explicitly as the creator of a bureaucratic system in which the sending of registers was one of the means of communication. The creation of Chinese literacy and the registers used for ritual

[59] The ritual text is possessed by an Ao Yao ritual master, Pan Dalan, in Luoyun village, Luoxiang township in Jinxiu. See Quanguo renmin daibiao dahui minzu weiyuanhui bangongshi (eds), *Guangxi dayaoshan yaozu geyao gushiji* 廣西大瑤山瑤族歌謠故事集 (Compilation of Yao Folksongs and Stories in the Big Mountain of the Yao, Guangxi) (unspecified publisher, 1958), 79.
[60] The sentences in Chinese read '顏回皇帝造書字，造成書字教人民'.
[61] The song is sung to a melody called 'Huang Tiao Sha' (literally, Strip of Yellow Sand) by the Mien on the Big Mountain of the Yao, Laibin, Jinxiu.
[62] The sentences in Chinese are '天子造書歸報京。…天子造書歸報州'. See Quanguo renmin daibiao dahui minzu weiyuanhui bangongshi (eds), *op. cit.* 65.
[63] Stephan Feuchtwang, *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor* (Routledge, 2001).

communication were symbolically associated with emperors and Confucian statecraft. In other words, Chinese literacy and its material manifestations, namely, ritual manuscripts, are perceived to be something that originated from a powerful Other, the Chinese imperial state.

As in many other cultures, the Yao respect writing.[64] In their daily lives, they are forbidden to burn papers on which characters are written. They believe that, if a person aspires to be able to write beautiful Chinese characters, he/she should not eat chicken's feet or chicken giblets. Should he/she do so, the characters they write will be all askew, resembling the shape of the chicken's feet and giblets. Most importantly, they view ritual manuscripts, the material manifestation of Chinese literacy, as 'magical property'. Huang Guiquan, a scholar of Mun origin who is currently a researcher at Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences (*Yunnan sheng shehui kexue yuan*) as well as a Daoist priest, told me that the first thing his grandfather's sister, a woman who could neither read nor write, rescued when her husband's house caught fire was the collections of ritual manuscripts he owned.[65]

Even though the Yao now seem to have wholeheartedly embraced the historical consequences of the civilizing projects that revolved around the symbols pertaining to emperors, it would not be unfair to postulate that the initial intrusion of state power must inevitably have caused an abrupt disturbance in Yao village life. The following instance indicates that the Yao men were taken away to faraway places to be educated in Chinese literacy, leaving behind the women worried that they would never return. This fear is encapsulated in a song entitled 'The Time Has Come to Sing the Song of Taoyuan [Peach Spring Grotto] Again' (*youdao taoyuan ge yiduanci*), from a manuscript entitled *The Song of King Pan* (*Panwang ge*) (330 Cod. Sin. 500 in the Munich Collection):

> There were seven roads at the mouth of the Peach Spring Grotto.
> Three roads were made and four unmade. The three made roads led to

[64]A point of comparison is the way in which the Hakka respect writing. See The Digital Taiwan Hakka Villages, 'Hakka's respect for writing—the belief of writing in Liu Dui (Wu Yang-Ho)', the Digital Taiwan Hakka Villages [web page] (2008-2013) <http://archives.hakka.gov.tw/eng/contentListAction.do?method=doViewDetail&contentId=MTQwNg==&menuId=MzQ=>, accessed 21 Jul. 2014.

[65] Fieldwork notes, 26 Oct. 2012.

the Peach Spring Grotto; the four unmade roads were still to be constructed and would lead to Mount Lü.

[Upon seeing how hurriedly the men went on their way,] their wives and sisters asked why they had to leave so early. [The men answered,] they were hurrying to see the study hall (and the students) on the Mount Lü.

The study hall had been built by Lu Ban. Teachers who [happened to] pass by were kept there to teach. Three hundred students sat together on the benches; a teacher taught them in all earnestness.

The study hall was built by Lu Ban. The teachers were placed there to teach day and night. [The students] went to the Great Province to buy Changsha paper; students were asked to continue to remain [in the study hall] and transcribe the classics and books.

[The men were] studying at Liandong [a place far away from home]; that was why [the women were] sending meals to Lianzhou (or Liantang). [The men] were sent to Lianzhou (or Liantang) and never seen to return; the women cried and their tears flowed in a green river (or like the frost) in the tenth month of the year.

桃源岤口七條路。三條修劃四條慌。
三條修劃桃源路。四條修劃上閭山。

娘姐問郎去樣早。早上閭山看學堂／生。

閭山學堂魯班造。留把先生過路居。
三百學生共凳坐。一個先生教導真。

閭山學堂魯班造。定把先生日夜居／亭。
大州買得長沙紙。留把學生寫細經／書。

讀書在連洞。因何送飯到連州／塘。
送上連州／塘不見回。眼淚共青水[illegible]流／十月霜。

Between the lines of these lyrics is revealed a world of 'Others' that is experientially distant to that of the Yao and is projected as a study hall (*xuetang*) on Mount Lü (*lüshan*)—which is a major centre of shamanism closely associated with the stratum of the ritual-master tradition [66] —connected with the Peach Spring Grotto

[66] With reference to Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult*, Kristin Fryklund (trans.) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008[1988]), 15.

(*taoyuandong*), a symbolic, imaginary flower garden of Yao origin. What is most striking in these lyrics is the constant reference to far-off places. For instance, the men needed to go to the Great Province (*dazhou*), a location clearly associated with a place outside of village, to buy Changsha paper (Changsha, the capital of present-day Hunan); the men had to continue to remain in the study hall, that is later referred to as being located in Lianzhou, today a county-level city in northern Guangdong, that Yao frequented and still frequent. Bereft by the men's absence from the village, never to return, the tears of women flowed like the green river or the frost in the tenth month of the year. In other words, these lyrics clearly indicate that Chinese literacy and the scriptures are something from a world external to everyday Yao life, because Yao men had to experience bodily dislocation in order to acquire them. Although Yao men seem to embrace the politically and culturally powerful 'Others', Yao women implicitly display their anxieties about the consequences of Chinese state control by shedding their tears.

2. Literacy as Something Foreign

That Chinese literacy is not something native to the Yao is made very apparent in the Mien words for 'reading', 'writing', 'book' and 'character', which are all Chinese in origin. It should be reiterated that the spoken languages the Yao use consist of three sorts, dependent on different settings. The first type of language is referred to as 'everyday language', used in daily interactions. The second type is 'folksong language', used during folksong performances. The last type is 'religious language', used exclusively in religious settings. To give an example of these three types of language, the Mien term for 'ground' is *dau* in everyday language, *tei* in folksong language and *ti* in religious language.[67] Although the four words obviously associated with written literacy as they are used in different types of linguistic discourse are juxtaposed, it appears that their pronunciations are almost the same, with the exception of a slight modification in the vowels in the words for

[67] Pan Meihua, 'Pangu Yao yuyanwenzi' 盤古瑤語言文字 (Language and writing among Pamgu Yao) (unpublished article), 22.

'book/writing' and 'character' (plus the dropping of the last consonant) when spoken in a religious setting. See Table 3.[68]

	Daily language	Folksong language	Religious language
Reading	$tu^{ʔ22}$	$tu^{ʔ22}$	$tu^{ʔ22}$
Writing	$fiɛ^{53}$	$fiɛ^{53}$	$fiɛ^{53}$
Book / writing	sou^{33}	sou^{33}	si^{33}
Character	$dzaŋ^{22}$	$dzaŋ^{22}$	dzi^{22}

Table 3. Syllables for 'reading', 'writing', 'book/writing' and 'character' in the Mien Language

Undoubtedly, the reason for these similarities is that the four words were borrowed from the Chinese language. In the following table, I use proto-forms of Old Chinese (OC),[69] Middle Chinese (MC)[70] and Mandarin Pinyin (MP) as points of comparison to indicate the proximity as well as the modifications in the vowels and consonants of these four specific words. See Table 4.

	Old Chinese (OC)	Middle Chinese (MC)	Mandarin Pinyin (MP)
Reading	*C.lˤok	duwk	du^{35}
Writing	*s-qʰAʔ	sjæX	xie^{214}
Book / writing	*s-ta	syo	shu^{55}
Character	*Cə-[dz]ə-s	dziH	zi^{51}

Table 4. Syllables for 'reading', 'writing', 'book/writing' and 'character' in OC, MC and MP

Since the pronunciation of the Yao terms is closest to the Middle Chinese and modern Mandarin pronunciations, it seems likely that the loans were not made at an early date when, for instance, final consonants were still in use. Judging from the fact

[68] The IPA has been transcribed by Pan Meihua.

[69] William H. Baxter and Laurent Sagart, *The Baxter-Sagart Reconstruction of Old Chinese* (Personal Communication, 2009), cited in Martha Ratliff, *Hmong-Mien Language History* (Canberra: Australian National University, 2010), 272. Also see Appendix: Baxter-Sagart Old Chinese reconstruction < http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Baxter-Sagart_Old_Chinese_reconstruction>, accessed 6 April 2014.

[70] William H. Baxter, *A Etymological Dictionary of Common Chinese Characters* (2000). The dictionary is only available in PDF. < http://www-personal.umich.edu/~wbaxter/pdf/d001-020.pdf >, accessed 8 April 2014. Cited in Martha Ratliff, *op. cit.* 272.

that reading and writing in Chinese are especially common in a Yao religious context, it seems probable that these terms were first adopted in that context and later redeployed in the languages of daily use and folksongs. In other words, originally the Yao did not have words for these four semantic fields in their language, but adopted these new ones in the processes of cross-cultural interactions.

The written and colloquial forms of Chinese predominate in the Yao religious domain and have therefore been regarded as a communicative resource. Nevertheless, the following two instances suggest that the Yao have considered Chinese literacy and its material manifestation as more than simply a communicative tool. Both are thought to be imbued with talismanic properties.

One instance that supports this assertion was given by Zhang Zhenzhen. Zhang has a manuscript in his collection that contains all of the knowledge essential to a Daoist priest. This manuscript is entitled *The Golden Book for Daoist Priests: A Universal Handbook* (*daogong jinshu yiben zainei*, hereafter *Golden Book for Daoist Priests*). Every Mun Daoist priest owns a copy of this book. Zhang himself has two copies. One version is written in black ballpoint in an ordinary notebook; the other has been written with a calligraphy brush on bound rice paper and includes three paintings of the 'Three Pure Ones' (*sanqing*) at the beginning of the book. The contents of the two books are the same. Needless to say, the appearance of the version with the three paintings of the 'Three Pure Ones' is much more striking and attractive from an aesthetic point of view. It is also this version of the *Golden Book for Daoist Priests* that unmistakably reveals all the outward and visible signs of the talismanic attributes of a book.

When I was first shown the ballpoint pen version, it did not cross my mind that one owner might have two copies of the same book. It was only at the very end of our interview, when Zhang must have felt more comfortable with me and was prepared to trust me, that he voluntarily displayed the decorative version that had been rolled up and wrapped in a thick plastic covering. He unrolled the manuscript with great care, telling me, 'I would never sell this book, even if the buyer offered to give me 3,000 RMB'. (3,000 RMB is the equivalent of about 482 US dollars). When I viewed a video of a Mun ordination ceremony in which Zhang Zhenzhen had

participated in 2007, I saw this aesthetically appealing version of the *Golden Book for Daoist Priests* still in its rolled up, carefully wrapped form, held in the hands of the other ritual master who was leading the postulants in their dancing and chanting.[71] The logical conclusion has to be that, in this particular case, it was not the contents but the physical presence of the book itself that had the power of ensuring ritual efficacy.

Another example that reveals the Yao perception of books as talismanic is the way childhood names (*xiaoming*) are bestowed. Generally, a Yao, whether male or female, has three names given at different stages of his or her life: a childhood name, customarily bestowed on the third day after birth; a name in the Han Chinese style (*shuming*), traditionally acquired upon attending school (only the men had this style of name in the past); and, as noted before, an ordination name (*faming*), received during their ordination ceremony (women are accorded ordination names along with their husbands).[72] For the sake of argument, at this juncture it is enough to focus on childhood names. In a description of Mien naming practice, I have argued that one of the most significant aspects of a childhood name is its perceived power to act as a talisman that protects children. The bestowal of a childhood name is a task assigned to a ritual master and is ritually confirmed by the child's ancestors (*jiaxian*). In the name pool of the limited number of names for selection, the Han Chinese loanword 'book' ([Mi] *sou*) is one of the sources from which a ritual master can choose an auspicious name that will ensure a child's well-being.[73]

These examples underline the point that Chinese literacy and its material manifestations have entailed a positive dimension of the power of the 'Other' in the eyes of the Yao, although perhaps not from a female point of view. Yao cultural constructions of the value surrounding Chinese literacy as something imbued with talismanic power seems to infuse ritual manuscripts with an additional dimension, transforming them into 'objects of value' rather than mere 'textual artefacts.' Having stated this hypothesis, I shall endeavour to show that there are at least two dimensions

[71] The film was shot by Wang Meigui in 2007 and is kept at the College of Ethnology and Sociology of Guangxi University for Nationalities.
[72] The Mien still retain the *xiaoming* naming practice, but the system has collapsed among the Mun in Dingcao.
[73] Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao,* 83-105.

to Yao ritual manuscripts as 'objects of value': as an heirloom and as a commodity. I shall also show that defining Yao ritual manuscripts as 'objects of value' again demonstrates the dominance of the patrilineal ideology in the Yao religious domain.

3. Ritual Manuscript as 'Object of Value'

In one of our conversations, Huang Guiquan used precisely the Chinese term 'property' (*caichan*) to indicate the significance of ritual manuscripts to the household of a ritual specialist. He said, 'Ritual manuscripts are identical to household property. An owner who puts ritual manuscripts up for sale is not one jot different from a ruined landowner who sells his land. Unless the heirs to the ritual manuscripts no longer have the knowledge of how the ritual manuscripts should be used or the financial situation of the household should decline drastically, a Yao would never sell his ritual manuscripts'.[74] Huang's statement indicates the very important dimension of Yao ritual manuscripts as heirlooms (*chuanjiabao*).[75] Naturally, as Yao ordination is the manifestation of an androcentric ideology, it is not surprising that the inheritance of ritual manuscripts is exclusively patrilineal.

A description in the *Gazetteer of Maguan County* during the Republican Era (1911-1949) states: 'The Yao…have books. The books are studied and passed from the fathers to sons.' (*yaoren youshu….fuzi zixiang chuanxi*).[76] This still aptly describes the present situation. On either the front cover or last page of a ritual manuscript, a copyist not only writes down his own ordination name to claim merit for transcribing the text, he also states that the books are to be passed down to male descendants, sons and grandsons. Examples of this are numerous. For instance, a manuscripts entitled *Ritual for Bowing a Hundred Times Facing Heaven to Remove Sins* (*chaotian baibai ke xiaozui*) (UB 2004-15 Folder 216, Leiden Collection) by Pan

[74] Interview notes. 26 Oct. 2012.
[75] Also see manuscript S3523 in Oxford Collection. The manuscript has the exact wording: *chuanjia guibao* (precious heirloom). See Guo Wu, 'Guanyu niujin daxue tushuguancang yaozu wenxian de diaocha baogao' 關於牛津大學圖書館藏瑤族文獻的調查報告 (A Survey of the Yao Manuscripts Housed in the Bodleian Library, Oxford), *Daojiao yanjiu xuebao* (道教研究學報 Daoism: Religion, History and Society), 4 (2012), 287-336 at 330.
[76] Zhang Ziming and Wang Fuchen, *Minquo Maguan xianzhi* 民國馬關縣誌 (The Gazetteer of Maguan County during the Republican Era) (Fenghuang chubanshe, reprint in 1932). The sentence in Chinese reads, '徭人…有書，父子自相傳習'.

Chaozheng (year of composition unclear) has, 'This book is preserved for the sons and grandsons' (*cunben yu erzisun*), inscribed on the last page. Of course, it can sometimes happen that there are no male descendants to inherit Yao ritual manuscripts. In this case, the alternative is to pass the books on to a son-in-law married to the book-owner's daughter. As noted earlier, to qualify for the honour, he must have taken up permanent uxorilocal residence and have had his surname changed to that of the book-owner.

Another scenario that also cannot be excluded is that there are no ritual manuscripts to be inherited. Even though it is culturally mandatory that every Yao male should undergo the ordination and reach literary proficiency, many males simply do not have any real interest in religious practice and hence do not bother to have their manuscripts copied.[77] Many ritual specialists I interviewed told me that their families had not left them any ritual manuscripts. Most of the manuscripts they had acquired were obtained by copying books from other ritual specialists, particularly those who had performed the ordination ceremony for them. For example, the father of Li Decai had not owned any manuscripts himself, let alone passed any down. Now Li has roughly sixty manuscripts in total, all of which he has personally transcribed. He told me that he had gone to two masters to copy their books: one was one of his ordination masters and the other was not.[78] When I asked Li Decai if he had been given any manuscripts by the masters who had performed the ordination for him, his answer was a definite no.

It is a different story among the Mun, among whom the disciple will receive a copy of the Esoteric Words (*miyu*) transcribed by his ordination master. One example from the Leiden collection is *A Book of Esoteric Words for Ordination, Given by the Master of Ordination Jiang Xuanhong to the Disciple Deng Xian/Xuan-Cai to Apply Extensively to Attain the Way* (*yiben shoujie miyu jiedushi Jiang Xuanhong geifu dizi Deng Xian/Xuan-Cai yongying shifang shangdao*) (UB 2004-15 Folder 116, Leiden Collection). In this instance, the colophon states the ordination names of both the master and the disciple. However, Huang Guiquan told me that the Esoteric Words is

[77] Chen Meiwen, *op. cit.* 105-118.
[78] Interview notes. 19-23 Sep. 2012.

the only manuscript that will be transcribed by a master to be given to his disciple. In the majority of cases it seems that disciples have to replicate the books themselves. In other words, the collection of ritual manuscripts remains the heirloom of the household of a ritual specialist to be guarded and used by his male descendants, not his disciples.

The description above indicates that the Yao religious interface clearly manifests a strong male dominance, either in the ways of and the ideologies attached to ritual practice, or in the cultural constructions and value surrounding Chinese literacy and ritual manuscripts. How women have been positioned and represented in this patrilineally biased interface is the focus of next section.

Social Consequences of the Imperial-Patrilineal Values on Male-Female Relations in the Religious Domain

Although female subordination by no means characterizes all aspects of gender relations in Yao society, a rigid gender hierarchy in favour of men is still very much in evidence in Yao religion. The construction of this gender hierarchy is deeply influenced by Yao Daoist ordinations. Fulfilment of priestly duties not only requires a man's competence to perform large-scale rituals, such as vow-honouring rituals, when he is alive but also requires having male descendants to worship him as a deified ancestor and carry on the ritual legacy after he dies.[79] In the Yao men's collective pursuit of becoming prestigious ritual specialists, Yao women are expected to fulfil their roles of wife and mother in ways that complement their husbands as ritual specialists. That is, marriage is a prerequisite if a Yao woman is to obtain her afterlife status by which she will later also be worshipped as a deified ancestor. Moreover, producing male descendants is another important step in realizing the ideal personhood for both genders.

When asked why women cannot assume their priesthood independently, the men in Weihao subtly hinted to me it is because women have 'it' (*nage*, menstruation) so that they are unclean and cannot invoke masters (*shifu*). Women also share this sort of discourse. In Dingcao, Zhao Chun, the second daughter-in-law of a ritual master

[79] Chen Meiwen, *op. cit.* 113-118.

who is in his fifties named Zhang Daogui, told me very seriously that it is a taboo (*jihui*) for men to see anything that can be related to women's menstruation. As noted in the introduction, there are many prohibitions surrounding female pollution. In particular, women who are menstruating or in the first month after giving birth are not allowed to approach the altar, a sacred place that is usually built high on a wall inside the house.[80] In the past, with the exception of the female singers invited to grace a performance, women and girls were forbidden to go anywhere near the sites where the large-scale ritual of 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan' was being performed.[81]

The beliefs surrounding the taboos on women's 'pollution' are not only ancient, they are also fairly universal. In his study of stove cult, Robert L. Chard points out '…the taboos [involving women's impurity] are something that appear at least from the fourth century AD in the esoteric tradition'.[82] In her classical essay 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture', Sherry Ortner shows that the beliefs about the impurity of women's menstruation might have been one of the reasons that resulted in the universality of female subordination.[83] Unquestionably therefore taboos surrounding women's 'pollution' are one of the contributing factors to their auxiliary position in Yao religion. With the exception of the role of the 'mother of singing' (*gemu/geniang*) and the different kinds of goddesses and female fertility deities narrated and worshipped in ritual texts and in actual performances, for the most part the female gender has to be content with an auxiliary position in the Yao religious domain.

A good example of Yao women's auxiliary position in the religious domain can be found in the customs surrounding the assigning of ordination names. As noted before, only after marriage can a woman undergo the ordination ceremony together with her husband and obtain an ordination name that guarantees her an afterlife status

[80] Ibid., 73.
[81] Gu Jia-rong, 'Jidian yu kuanghuan: Guangxi Jinxiu dayaoshan yaozu shigong tiaopanwang yanjiu 祭典與狂歡—廣西金秀大瑤山瑤族師公跳盤王研究 (Fiesta and Carnival: Survey of [Ritual] Master's Tiaopanwang [Dancing to Entertain King Pan] of the Yao People in Guangxi, Jinxiu, Dayao Mountain), *Nei menggu daxue yishu xueyuan xuebao* (內蒙古大學藝術學院學報 Journal of Art College of Inner Mongolia University), 7/3 (2010), 24-29 at 28.
[82] Robert L. Chard, 'Rituals and Scriptures of the Stove Cult', in David Johnson (ed.), *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion: Five Studies* (Berkeley, Ca: Chinese Popular Culture Project, 1995), 3-54 at 51.
[83] Sherry B. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?' in M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds), *Women, Culture, and Society* (Standford, CA: Standford University Press), 68-87.

allowing her to be worshipped by later generations. A Yao woman's ordination name will be written alongside her husband's ordination name in the registers for ritual use. In a similar way to the traditional Han Chinese fashion of addressing women in legal cases, the simplest form of a female's ordination name is made up of only two Chinese characters: one is her natal family name, that might be either her mother's or father's because of the Yao practice of bilateral descent, and the term *shi* (clan, family), a functional equivalent in this context of *nei* (inside, interior or domestic); for example, *Deng shi* 鄧氏.[84] In the case of the Mien, as a woman's husband progresses into the higher ranks by receiving an advanced level of ordination ceremony called *chia tse* in Mien language, her ordination name will change accordingly. The advanced form of a female's ordination name comprises four Chinese characters: her natal family name, the term *shi*, her birth order among the female siblings in her natal family and *niang* (woman, mother, wife or young girl); for example, *Deng shi san niang* 鄧氏三娘 (the third-born woman from Deng family).[85] As can be seen, in both cases female ordination names contain an indexical vocabulary: the *shi* of women's spiritual names, that indicates the female characteristics of being inside (the household), inferior (to her husband) and domestic (as opposed to public and wild).

Women's subordination in the religious domain does not necessarily mean that women cannot make comments and produce reflections on these religiously regulated gender ideals. In the ethnographic present, the women I interviewed are perfectly able to tell which ritual masters or Daoist priests are better trained and more dedicated to their religious posts. That is, becoming a ritual specialist is culturally mandatory for every Yao man, and ideally every Yao man should be able to perform the large-scale rituals that are usually held in winter as the agricultural season draws to its end, although in reality not every man is competent enough to perform large-scale rituals. This might be because of his lack of interest or enthusiasm or simply his sheer incompetence.

The lyrics in the song entitled 'Here we come to the song of the headband of the god again, perform the head words' (*youdao shentoudai ge zhi touhua yong*) in the

[84] With reference to Janet M. Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), xiii.
[85] Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao,* 106-113.

Big Book of Songs (call number 177 Cod. Sin 347, the Munich Collection) clearly illustrate the religiously regulated gender roles of both sexes and the social roles of men as ritual masters and women in their wifehood as 'embroiderers'.[86] Women's embroidery sometimes entails an important agency that affects their husbands' performance in social spheres culturally regarded as the sphere of the male.[87] Unfortunately, the implication of Yao women's embroidery skills in the embellishment of religious vestments is still an issue awaiting more exploration.[88] The most interesting aspect about the lyrics to be discussed below is therefore not as relevant to the agency of Yao women's embroidery but to the *position* women hold in relation to the religiously regulated gender role. That is, through the voices of the wives of ritual masters, the lyrics criticize men's incompetence in living up to the gender role imposed on them and describe the women's dilemma when faced with their husbands' failure. The text reads:

> Craftsmen originally painted the headband of the god. Women originally sewed the satin band of the headband of the god. Women embroidered the pattern of the eyes of the dragon and the phoenix. Each branch and flower was paired in red.
>
> If no rituals were held, the headband of the god would remain in the basket. If invitations for a ritual were sent out, it would be hung on the altar. The headband of the god was hung on the wall as soon as the ceremonial site had been set up. As long as the rituals continued to be held, the headband of the god would continue to be used by the ritual masters.
>
> Every winter, ritual masters have to perform rituals. Every winter the headband of the god is required to be used. The backs of

[86] 'The Headband of the God' (*shentoudai*) is an accessory vestment a ritual master will use to warp around a ritual hat, called 'Hat of Five Buddhas (*wufomao*), that they will only wear when performing large-scale rituals. Traditionally, the 'Headband of the God', as well as all the other vestments, was embroidered by a ritual master's wife. Interview notes with Li Decai, 19-23 Sep. 2012. Also see Wu Ninghua, 'Yishi zhong de shishi: "Panwangge" yanjiu' 儀式中的史詩ー《盤王歌》研究 (Epic in Ritual: A Study of the 'Song of King Pan'), PhD thesis (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music, 2012), 29 footnote 2.

[87] Barbara Bodenhorn, 'I Am Not the Great Hunter, My Wife Is: Iñupiat and Anthropological Models of Gender,' *Études/Inuit/Studies* 14/1/2 (1990), 55-74.

[88] Li Yan 李彦, Chen Jingsheng 陳敬勝, Ouyang Luyi 歐陽露禕, 'Cong Huiyuan Guoshan Yao huanjiayuan yishizhong "huanzhuang" kan xinyang de shuaichongxing' 從匯源過山瑤還家願儀式中"換裝"看信仰的雙重性 (The Double Nature of Faith as Seen in the Act of 'Changing Clothes' in the Rite of 'Hounouring the King Pang' among the Yao in Huiyuan), *Minsu minyi* (民俗民藝 Folk Art and Culture), 116-118 is one of the very few articles that touches upon Yao ritual costumes. However, this short essay also fails to mention anything about the female role as embroiderer and its cultural significance.

'the men dancing with ghosts' [i.e. ritual masters] are all [clothed] in red. But for men who do not know how to perform rituals, the headband of the god remains in the basket.

Throughout their entire lifetime, the husbands who do not know how to perform rituals will not be able to don the red headband of the god. Their wives' laborious embroidery work will have been in vain. These husbands just keep the satin band [in the box] for the entire winter [without performing any rituals]. There are plenty of right words [to teach these incompetent men], but only two sentences from them are sung. It is because the women whose husbands cannot perform ritual master's rituals are afraid of provoking anger in their husbands' hearts.

神頭原來匠人畫。羅帶原來女人縫。
女人綉得龍虎眼。枝枝朵朵對花紅。

無事卻在匱箱內。有事帖出掛壇中。
道場初起掛壁上。事月到邊執手中。

年年冬季做師公。年年冬季要使用。
跳鬼之人背後紅。不會做師箱匱在。

一世之人頭不紅。枉費女人手腳做。
空收羅帶過年冬。正話多多唱兩句。
人眷又怕怒心中。

Why is becoming a ritual specialist so important to a man in the Yao cultural perception? The importance of a competent ritual specialist is that, armed with his knowledge of Chinese literacy and the ritual repertoires of Chinese cultural influences, he can mediate between the worlds of the living and the dead as well as between the inside and the outside. In previous times, and even today, as the Yao people deal with the many potential dangers lurking in the natural environment, the supernatural world and the state, ritual specialists occupied and still do a significant position in the Yao's encounters and dealings with the outside/unknown worlds and unfamiliar yet unavoidable 'Others'. Here lies the crux. This is exactly why the role of ritual specialist is vulnerable to the influences from outside/unknown worlds and beings, and embodies both advantages and disadvantages in the eyes of the parents of their potential wives.

In a manuscript that takes its title from the first sentence on the first page

(because the cover page is lost), *Received in the first generation, the lad was in Hunan and not in the prefecture* (*chushishou, lang zai Hunan wei zai zhou*) (call number 291 Cod. Sin. 461 in Munich Collection), a discussion about the ambiguous quality of ritual masters is expressed through the voices of parents. The more competent a ritual master becomes, the better he is able to live up to the gender role expected of him, but his progression also means that be becomes more vulnerable as he might invoke unwelcome influences from outside/unknown worlds and beings. Therefore, the lyrics describe the contradictory considerations involved in women's marriages to ritual masters. One dimension of the lyrics deals explicitly with the advantages of marrying women to ritual masters, for they can bring their wives merit:

> If you have daughters you should let them marry into the households of ritual masters. If your daughter marries a ritual master she will have a lengthy life. A ritual master serves Guanyin Buddha. When his wife is ill, he is capable of saving her life.
>
> 有女留嫁師人屋。嫁落師人得命長。
> 師人伏事觀音佛。得病三朝得救娘。

The other dimension of the same lyrics describes the disadvantages to women of being the wives of ritual masters. These women might have to lead a hard life, and the vocation of their husbands might incur unknown dangers that could harm the family:

> If you have daughters you should not let them marry into the households of ritual masters. If your daughter marries a ritual master, her life will be one of toil. A ritual master serves Guanyin Buddha. If people (in the village) fall ill for three days, he can save their lives.
>
> If you have daughters you should not let them marry into the households of ritual masters. Marrying a ritual master is like [marrying] a spirit. The household of a ritual master is full of spirits. This is unavoidable, as the ritual master needs to deal with spirits every night.
>
> 有女莫嫁師人屋。嫁落師人得命勞。
> 師人伏事觀音佛。得病三朝得救人。
> 有女莫嫁師人屋。嫁落師人若鬼灵。
> 師人家中灵若鬼。一夜修神不奈何。

The life of Zhao Meirong, a kind Mien woman aged sixty-six whom I interviewed in 2012, is a vivid example of the dilemma faced in being the wife of a competent ritual specialist. Zhao Meirong's husband, Li Decai, the Mien ritual master I have mentioned before, is a well-known ritual specialist. When I asked Zhao Meirong what were the pros and cons of being married to a ritual master, Zhao's answer was very similar to the lyrics above, 'since women do not have "spiritual masters and guides", we cannot perform rituals. Therefore, it is good to have married a ritual master. Should a family member fall ill, I do not have to ask for another's help. It is easier to cure the sick person when I have a ritual master in my family. However, there are so many people who come to request his services every day. He is too busy to take care of any routine household chores, such as collecting firewood. So, sometimes life is very arduous (*xinku*)'.[89] Indeed, during my stay with the couple, Li Decai was often occupied with his fellow villagers, even Zhuang and Han people came to him for ritual advice and services. Zhao Meirong was usually the one who prepared meals for guests and took care of household chores and the grandchildren.

Both the songs and Zhao Meirong's example highlight the highly androcentric inclination of the compulsory gender roles constructed in Yao Daoist ordinations. Women do not seem to have been able to challenge or subvert the imposed gender hierarchy that favours the men. The image of women acting in the role of wives as 'embroiderers' has even reinforced and reproduced these gender ideals. Nevertheless, while recognizing the importance of men's role as ritual specialists, women, represented by their parents, have produced a reflexive voice to ponder the pros and cons of women's marriage to the mediators between the inside and outside, the living and the dead. By extension, women's reflections on the religiously regulated gender roles can also be understood as the Yao's acute awareness of the powers as well as the dangers entailed in contact with the worlds and beings of 'Others'.

Conclusion

[89] Interview notes, 19 Sep. 2012.

This chapter has proposed that Yao Daoist ordination be regarded as a form of 'civilizing project' in which the imperial ideologies, particularly those of patrilineality, filial piety and manuscript-as-object-of-value serve as organizing values. The chapter explores two dimensions of the encompassments of the imperial ideologies and local cultural logic, examining their social consequences for gender relations at the religious interface. Although what is called Yao Daoism can certainly be seen as a ritual tradition of 'trans-hybridity', the theory of 'hierarchical opposition' helps to strengthen this assertion by demonstrating the human agency and dynamisms in the processes of hybridization.

The chapter commenced by showing how the ordination, a pivotal ritual in the bestowal of the qualification of priesthood on a Yao male, might be interpreted as a 'civilizing project' to transform the Yao into subjects under Chinese imperial and cultural influence, at least in ritual and religious terms. The heavy emphasis on the patrilineal descent system and ancestor worship in the practice of the Yao Daoist ordination is very characteristic of one of the Chinese imperial state's incorporation techniques to facilitate the development of a lineage society, as has been witnessed in South China in general and in southeastern China in particular. The transformation of and decline in ordination found among the Hakka and She, two groups of people more engulfed by Chinese imperial state governance, indicates an intimate connection between ordination and ancestor worship, and suggests how the former might be partially or completely absorbed into the latter in the course of history. Nevertheless, as far as can be observed, the Yao still retain the communal practice of ordination and do not seem to favour the compiling of genealogies in the style of the Chinese literati. Despite this dearth of genealogical interest, the ideological basis of ancestor worship, filial piety, has nevertheless been a strong motivating force encouraging the Yao to sustain both the practice of ordination and the transmission of Chinese literacy.

While pointing out the religious domain might be an interface in which the Yao are confronted with pressures for their cultural and ideological incorporation into Chinese imperial state governance, the chapter also showed a local mode of appropriation of the state civilizing power. The Yao generally perceive Chinese literacy to be something representative of distant state authorities but also, closer to

home, as a talismanic object. This discovery about Yao perceptions of Chinese literacy has underlined to me the necessity of viewing ritual manuscripts as 'objects of value'. I have therefore been able to identify two kinds of object-hood pertaining to Yao ritual manuscripts—as an heirloom and as a commodity.

Finally, the chapter illustrated 'male-female relations' in the Yao religious domain. The ancient taboos of women being 'polluted' are appropriated to argue that females are unfit to assume the role of a ritual specialist. Women usually take auxiliary positions to complement men as ritual specialists by fulfilling their given roles in wifehood (for instance, as embroiders) and motherhood (for instance, by producing male descendants). Be that as it may, on the basis of a discussion of expressions of Yao women's dilemma arising from the pros and cons of marrying a ritual master, and indications of their sorrow when facing the intrusion of Chinese education, I suggested that the Yao might well have reflected upon the social consequences of state intervention via the position of women.

The examples given made it perfectly clear that the Yao religious interface is the symbolic space in which the state has attempted to implement its 'civilizing' influence by reinforcing the ideology of patrilineal descent and privileging the male gender. If we understand the andro-centric ideology that prevails in the Yao religious domain to be the result of efforts by the Chinese imperial state to subject the Yao to Chinese state governance in general, and enforce a cultural pattern of patrilineal descent in particular, the native ideology concerning the importance of female gender appears to have become completely incorporated into supporting the civilizing project. However, this is only one side of the story. The following chapter analyses the local narratives and practices surrounding birth and pregnancy, and their interactions and negotiations with the Daoist ideology of personhood. It illustrates that the process of becoming a person, or of being transformed into a civilized subject under Chinese imperial state governance, is in fact imbued with Yao's struggles to claim their autonomy.

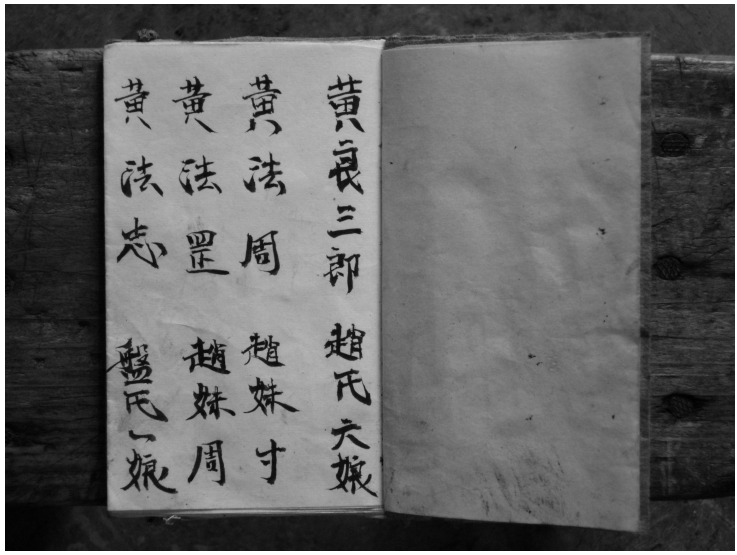

Illustration 3. *Jiaxiandan* of Huang Jingui, Jinping County, Yunnan. Photo by Chen Meiwen.

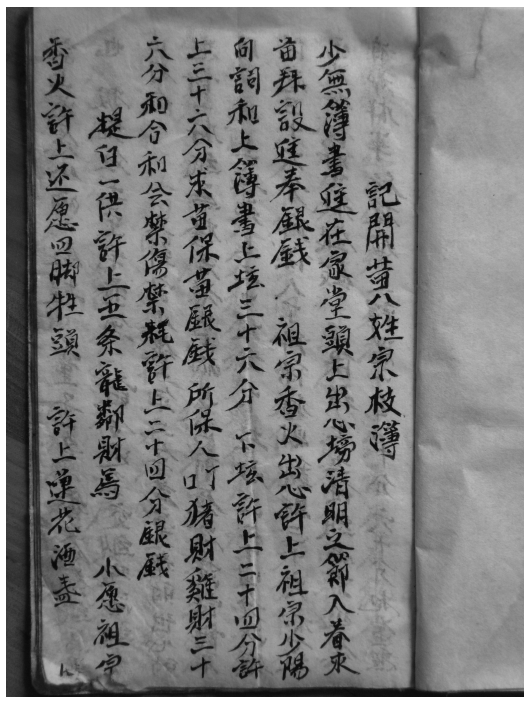

Illustration 4. *Zongzhibu* of Huang Jingui, Jinping County, Yunnan. Photo by Chen Meiwen.

Chapter 4. Local Negotiations with the Civilizing Project: A Focus on Goddesses of Fertility

This chapter addresses the diverse ritual constructions of female fertility that reveal the Yao's reception of and negotiation with the civilizing project, the patrilineal Daoist ordination, and one of its social consequences, the naturalization of female fertility. Sherry Ortner argues that the emergence of the state has had a profound and dynamic relationship with the regulation of women's social role and sexual behaviour. In particular, the regulation has often revolved around the idealization and symbolization of female fertility, in which a paired concept of purity and pollution is the most relevant.[1] Different cultures and societies have their own distinct ways of ritualistically constructing gender relations and female fertility.[2] In the Chinese context, it is fairly common to find that purity is often associated with the value of female chastity;[3] whereas pollution is symbolically related to menstrual blood and childbirth.[4] As will be argued in the pages to follow, the contrast between purity and pollution might be an important key in enlightening our understanding of the gender qualities ascribed to Chinese female deities and the goddesses of fertility popular among non-Han Chinese societies in South China.

Steven Sangren's study of the three Chinese female deities, Guanyin or Miao-shan, Mazu or Tian Hou (the Queen of Heaven) and the Eternal Mother[5] shows that purity is an integral virtue in the deification of these female deities. In other words, 'female deities must overcome the stigma of pollution associated with menstruation, sexual intercourse, death, and childbirth.'[6] The Chinese female deities have retained

[1] Sherry B. Ortner, 'The Virgin and The State', *Feminist Studies* 4/3 (1978), 19-35.
[2] For example, Stephan Sparkes, *Spirits and Souls: Gender and Cosmology in an Isan Village in Northeast Thailand* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2005). Gilbert Lewis, *Day of Shining Red: An Essay on Understanding Ritual* (Cambridge University Press, 1980).
[3] Janet M. Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).
[4] Emily M. Ahern, 'The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women,' in Margery Wolf and Roxanne Witke (eds), Women in Chinese Society (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975), 193-214.
[5] The Eternal Mother is known by a variety of names, Wu Sheng Sheng Mu, Yao Chi Jin Mu, or Wang Mu Niang Niang, among others (Sangren 1983, 9)
[6] Ibid., 11.

virginal purity by avoiding the socially prescribed but ritually polluting role of wife, and hence the pollution associated with sex and childbirth (Guanyin and Mazu). Or, perhaps they do not have an earthly incarnation and therefore possess an intrinsic purity (the Eternal Mother).[7] The Lady of Linshui, whose worship is popular in Southeast China, is another famous Chinese female cult that sketched rejection of marriage and the performance of a ritual abortion (*tuotai*, a ritual act of emerging from the womb). Most importantly, besides possessing the female virtue of purity, these female deities have also received state recognition and official titles, and have ultimately been depicted as saviours or miraculous healers.[8] In other words, successive Chinese imperial states encouraged making the female virtue of purity integral to these female cults, because the practices have been beneficial to the enforcements of civilizing values into local societies.

A civilizing force to 'naturalize' the ritual construction of conceptive procreative goddesses locally respected by many southern non-Han Chinese people was also found coexisting alongside such state incorporation techniques as veneration, scriptures and texts.[9] Through the agency of ritual, the imposition of a state-favoured andro-centric ideology has changed the social appreciation of women and created new gender ideals for both men and women.[10] Yet, as the andro-centric ideology is by no means the dominant organizing principle in non-Han Chinese societies, the introduction of such a civilizing estimation has instigated different forms of negotiations between various sets of gender ideals.[11] Local negotiations with the consequences of the naturalization of female fertility power can be manifested in longer social processes, either in the span of one's lifetime or centuries long, and embodied either in ritual performance or in the ways in which kinship and marriage are organized.[12]

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[7] Ibid, 10-14.
[8] Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, 'Gendering Ritual Community,' 232.
[9] Ibid., 206.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Shanshan Du and Ya-chen Chen, *Women and Gender in Contemporary Chinese Societies: Beyond Han Patriarchy* (Lexington Books, 2011).
[12] James Wilkerson, 'Negotiating Local Tradition with Taoism: Female Ritual Specialists in the Zhuang Religion', *Religion*, 37/2 (2007), 150-163. Also see Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, 'Gendering Ritual Community across the Chinese Southwest Borderland', in David Faure and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing (eds), *Chieftains into Ancestors: Imperial Expansion and Indigenous Society in Southwest China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 206-246 at 231.

To uncover the ways in which the Yao have negotiated with the impact of the civilizing project, that is, the naturalization of female fertility power, with a focus on gender relations and female fertility deities, this chapter begins by relocating this phenomenon in a regional context. It commences with an illustration of the prevalent flower symbolism appropriated to fertility beliefs in the Flower Cultural Sphere in southern China. It then proceeds to address the different sources of potency found among Chinese female deities and goddesses of fertility venerated in non-Han Chinese societies. This analysis is followed by an overview of the Yao cultural constructions of gender relations and shows how male-privileged ordination has ritualistically usurped the importance of female fertility. The final section is devoted to arguing why and how the practices and narratives linked to the Mother of Emperors (*dimu*), an anthromorphized form of female fertility, might be regarded as a manifestation of the Yao's struggles to claim their autonomy in their encounters with the civilizing value of patrilineal ideology.

Flower Symbolism in the Flower Cultural Sphere

This section analyses the nexus of practices and narratives surrounding goddesses of fertility and a particular mythical landscape configured as the source of life. It is important to differentiate between two sets of beliefs pertaining to these goddesses of fertility, who are generally believed to be the protectors of women and children: one is a fairly localized myth of the goddess of fertility venerated by different ethnicities in distinct locations; the other a much more widespread complex of beliefs linked to female fertility.[13] Guo Wei has dubbed this prevalent complex of beliefs and practices linked to female reproductive power the 'Flower Cultural Sphere' (*huawenhuaquan*), and this is the term I have adopted here.[14] Consequently, my enquiry into goddesses of fertility among the Yao commences with a brief overview of the widespread complex of flower symbolism connected to two specific flowers, peach blossom (*tao*) and plum blossom (*mei*).

[13] Barend J. ter Haar, 'Review of The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult', *T'oung Pao*, LXXXVIII (1992), 373-378.
[14] Guo Wei, *Zhongguo Nüshen* 中國女神 (Chinese Goddesses) (Nanning: Guangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000).

As Ter Haar concludes, 'All over Southern China, children are perceived as white (male) and red (female) flowers on a plant in a pot, which represents the mother and her womb'.[15] In the Flower Cultural Sphere of southern China, flower symbolism and an imagined garden (or grotto or valley or mountain) have constituted a cosmogenesis to explain a cosmological dimension of how a person is formed. In a nutshell, besides the corporeal aspect of a person, human souls, referred to as 'flower souls' (*huahun*), have been thought to reside in a flower garden from the time before their birth until puberty.

The flower symbolism for male and female not only includes the colour metaphor of white and red, it is also associated with particular flowers: plum blossom for male and peach blossom for female. In fact, as early as the mid-seventeenth century, the worship of deities of fertility, in this case the Parents of the Flowers (*Huawang Fumu*), and the parallelisms of white, plum and male versus red, peach and female, are already recorded in an account in *Guangdong Miscellanies* (*Guangdong Xinyu*). An entry on the Parents of the Flowers from 'Miscellany on Deities' (*shenyu*) reads as follows:

> When the people in Guangdong and Guangxi pray for offspring, they ask the Parents of the Flowers for help. The verses in the prayer read, 'Boy, white flower; girl, red flower.' … They draw on the metaphor 'flowering like peach and plum' from the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*). The *Book of Songs* uses peach and plum to refer to female and male respectively. Hence, 'Taoyao' (The peach tree is young and elegant) refers to girls, and the blossoming plum indicates boys. A girl is a peach and a boy is a plum .[16]
>
> 越人祈子，必於花王父母。有祝辭云：「白花男，紅花女。」…，蓋取《詩》「華如桃李」之義。詩以桃李二物，興男女二人，故桃夭言女也，摽梅言男也。女桃而男梅也。

[15] Barend ter Haar, *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads: Creating an Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 90. According to Rolf A. Stein, the belief that identifies a cave-rich landscape or a rocky area with many caves as a womb appears in both modern and traditional Vietnamese and Chinese folklore. See Rolf. A. Stein, *The World in Miniature: Container Gardens and Dwellings in Far Eastern Religious Thought*, Phyllis Brooks (trans.) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 96.

[16] Qu Dajun (1630-1696), 'Shenyu' 神語 (Miscellany on Deities), *Guangdong Xinyu* 廣東新語 (Guangdong Miscellanies) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1934), 214.

The parallelism of female as peach and male as plum is also revealed in the Yao cosmology relating to life and death, as Michel Strickmann has pointed out: 'The Peach-blossom Spring—female—complements the male Plum-blossom Mountain'.[17] In contrast to the Peach Spring Grotto, and by extension the flower garden that symbolically refers to a place of life and femaleness, the Plum Mountain is a place where the men and boys learn how to perform the rituals and constitutes a landscape associated with death and maleness/masculinity.[18] An indigenized Daoist sect is also called after the Plum Mountain, which is closely associated with local beliefs about hunting among many non-Han peoples in South China.[19]

As the discussion below will show, among the Yao the Parents of the Flowers recorded in *Guangdong Miscellanies* have continued to maintain their position among the most prominent flower deities. Most importantly, even though the flower deities often appear in pairs, an inclination to highlight the power of femaleness in fertility beliefs is readily ascertainable.

Goddesses of Fertility in the Flower Cultural Sphere

1. An Overview of Goddesses of Fertility and Their Abodes

Obviously, the complex of flowers representing fertility and the landscape representing a mythical womb must be connected with female divinities or deities whose divine powers can produce children.[20] The popularity of goddesses associated with flower symbolism and fertility beliefs ensure that this is a widespread and enduring local cult transcending geographical and ethnic boundaries in southern

[17] Michel Strickmann, 'The Tao among the Yao: Taoism and the Sinification of South China', in Rekishi ni okeru minshû to bunka-Sakai Tadao sensei koki jukuga kinen ronshû 歷史における民眾と文化 ― 酒井忠夫先生古稀祝賀記念論集 (Peoples and Cultures in Asiatic History: Collected Essays in Honour of Professor Tadao Sakai on His Seventieth Birthday), 23-30 at 25.

[18] The associations of Plum Mountain with a place where Yao males acquire the ritual repertoires and the world of the deceased are prevalent throughout Yao ritual texts. One example is a ritual manuscript entitled the *Rituals for Crossing the Thirty-Six Caves in Plum Mountain* (*meishan sanshiliudong ke*) from the Munich Collection (call number 293 Cod. Sin. 463).

[19] Jacques Lemoine, 'Mianyao de lishi yu zongjiao chutan' 勉瑤的歷史與宗教初探 (Preliminary Investigation into the History and Religion of the Iu-Mien), *Guangxi minzu xueyuan xuebao* (廣西民族學院學報 Journal of Guangxi College for Nationalities), 4 (1994), 22-25.

[20] Rolf. A. Stein, *The World in Miniature: Container Gardens and Dwellings in Far Eastern Religious Thought*, Phyllis Brooks (trans.) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 91.

China. Furthermore, as Ho Ts'ui-p'ing aptly concludes, 'It is certainly not novel to have gendered or varied stories told of a popular cult, nor is it exceptional to have varieties of representations of any historical or mythical figures'.[21]

For example, a general term for goddesses of fertility in South China is the Supreme Matron (*powang*). The worship of the Supreme Matron can be found among many Han and non-Han local societies throughout the border areas of Hunan and Guangxi as well as those of Fujian, Guangxi and Yunnan (see below). Despite similarities in terminology, however, there is considerable diversification pertaining to the efficacy of the goddesses involved. For instance, the Zhuang call the Supreme Matron the Holy Mother of the Flowery Deities (*Huawang Shengmu*), who is believed to reside in an imaginary heavenly flower garden and be imbued with the divine power to give children.[22] In stark contrast, the cult of the Supreme Matron popular among the Min Yao and Han communities in the border areas of Hunan and Guangxi does not have any explicit associations with fertility beliefs. Instead, her worship seems to have become more intertwined with a local custom praising friendship between unmarried girls, known as 'sworn sisters of the same age bonded together' (*jielaotong* or *baitongnian*).[23]

On the other hand, although they bear different names, nevertheless the cosmological constructions connected to flower symbolism and fertility beliefs do reveal that great similarities do persist across ethnic boundaries. For instance, among the Miao of western Hunan, people refer to the parents of a prominent local god, the White Emperor Heavenly King (*Baidi Tianwang*), as the Father of Exorcism (*Nuogong*) and his consort, the Mother of Exorcism (*Nuomu*). They are thought to

[21] Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, 'Gendering Ritual Community across the Chinese Southwest Borderland' in David Faure and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing (eds), *Chieftains into Ancestors: Imperial Expansion and Indigenous Society in Southwest China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 206-246 at 210.

[22] Gao Yaning, 'Zhuangzu yishi wenbenzhong de Zhuang-Han guanxi' 壯族儀式文本中的壯漢關係 (The Ethnic Relation between the Zhuang and Han Chinese in Zhuang Ritual Texts), paper presented at the conference of Xinan duominzu gongsheng guanxi xueshu huiyi 西南多民族共生關係學術會議 (The Conference of the Symbiotic Relations among Multi-Nationalities in Southwest China), Guiyang, Guizhou, 2010.

[23] Liu Xiuli, 'Jiemei zuohua zongjiao zhuti yanjiu' "姊妹坐化" 宗教主題研究 (A Study of the Religious Theme, Sworn Sisters Died Together Remaining Seated Cross-legged), *Wenhua Yichan* (文化遺產 Cultural Heritage), 3 (2010), 139-146.

rule the Peach Spring Grotto and to take care of women and children.[24] Interestingly, although they appear as a pair, it is the Mother of Exorcism who plays the leading role in exorcism rites, as well as commanding all the martial deities, including the fifth Lad Surnamed Zhang (*Zhang Wulang*), also referred to as the Second Lad Surnamed Zhang and Zhao (*Zhang-Zhao Erlang*), the Five Furies (*Wuchang*) and the Five Legions (*Wuying*). The rather overshadowed Father of Exorcism 'is said to be only good for engaging in bouts of heavy drinking, as indicated by his red face'.[25]

As mentioned earlier, the constructions of the fertility beliefs of the Yao in Guangxi and Yunnan mainly revolve around the Parents of the Flowers and the Peach Spring Grotto. Taking the Parents of the Flowers, who are popular among the Mien, as an example, there are three ways of referring to these deities. In ritual texts, two terms in Chinese, the Parents of the Flowers (*Huahuang Fumu*) and the Father of the Flower and Mother of the Flowers (*Huagong Huamu*), are used. In daily language, people refer to them as *piaŋ*^{31} *mien*^{53}, as *piaŋ*^{31} means flower ([Ch] *hua*) and *mien*^{53} means spirits (ghosts or deities, [Ch] *gui* or *shen*). Although there is no certain textual or ethnographic evidence that indicates the Mien have highlighted the prominence of femaleness in the paired flower deities as the Miao have done, the Mien do venerate a distinguished goddess called the Fifth Wife of King Tang (*Tangwang Wupo*), who is thought to have produced humankind.[26]

The Peach Spring Grotto is a three-storeyed building. The top storey is called the Golden Palace (*jindian*), the middle storey the Silver Palace (*yindian*) and the bottom storey the Jewel Palace (*baodian*). In each storey resides a pair of Parents of the Flowers, and they are joined by 120 Fathers and Mothers of the Flower with

[24] The father had the Long (Dragon) family name and the mother the Yang family name. There is a citation in Xiangxi Tujiazu Miaozu zizhizhou minjian wenxue jicheng banggongshi [XTMZMWJB] referring to a woman of the Yang family name being called *niangniang* (empress), whose task is to oblige people with children. See Xie Xiaohui, 'From Woman's Fertility to Masculine Authority', in David Faure and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing (eds), *Chieftains into Ancestors: Imperial Expansion and Indigenous Society in Southwest China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 111-137 at 126, 134 note 16.

[25] Paul R. Katz, 'Repaying a Nuo Vow in Western Hunan – A Rite of Trans-Hybridity?' *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology*, 11/2 (2013), 1-88 at 17-18.

[26] Jacques Lemoine, *Yao Ceremonial Paintings* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1982), 54-55.

different Han Chinese surnames, who also reside in the Peach Spring Grotto and have to be extended invitations to participate in the flower-related rites.[27]

In a similar vein, the prominent flower deities venerated among the Mun are called the Parents of the Flower Roots (*Huagen Fumu*). In ritual texts, they are referred to as the Parents of the Flower Roots of the Upper Storey (*Shanglou Huagen Fumu*) and Supreme Parents of the Flower Roots (*Powang Huagen Fumu*). In everyday language, people call them *ta*^{22} *fa*^{22} *mhaan*^{44} (*ta*^{22} *fa*^{22}: meaning unclear, *mhaan*^{44}: deities, [Ch] *shen*). As indicated by the name of the Parents of the Flower Roots of the Uppermost Storey, the flower garden is also a three-storey building. In the middle storey reside the flower deities called the Parents of Flowers of the Six Kingdoms in the Middle Storey (*Zhonglou Liuguo Huawang*). The flower deity of the Bottom Storey is called the Lonely Fairy Matron of the Bottom Storey (*Xialou Gudu Xianpo*). In daily language, people refer to Lonely Fairy Matron as *ni*^{22} *wa*^{22} *mhaan*^{44} (ni^{22}: children, wa^{22}: flower). It is said that the Lonely Fairy Matron of the Bottom Storey has neither husband nor children. One of her pleasures is descending to the mortal world to play with children but, although she enjoys this pastime, her presence is harmful to the children and will bring them illness, even death.[28]

Most significant to the argument here is that, reminiscent of the privileged image of the Mother of Exorcism in Miao exorcist rites, the Mun have also given prominence to the Mother of Flower Roots (*Huagenmu*) in the paired flower deities called the Parents of Flower Roots. In ritual texts as well as daily language, the Mun people refer to the Mother of Flower Roots as the Mother of Emperors (*tei*^{35} *mu*^{42}, [Ch] *dimu*) (discussed in more detail below). Pertinently the Mother of Emperors has not taken up her abode in the Peach Spring Grotto. Instead, she is said to live in the Temple of Ao Mountain and to rule over the Flower Mountain (*huashan*).

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[27] Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao rende goucheng yu shengming de laiyuan* 從命名談廣西田林盤古瑤人的構成與生命的來源 (Conceptualizations of Personhood and the Origins of Life as Seen in Naming Traditions among the Pangu Yao of Tianlin, Guangxi) (Taipei: Tangshan, 2003), 206-211.

[28] Huang Guiquan, 'Landianyao de hua, dou, renguan—nahongcun Landianyao dansheng, wenghua, shuadou hen dushi liyi de diaocha yu yanjiu' 藍靛瑤的花、斗、人觀—那洪村藍靛瑤誕生、翁花、耍斗和度師禮儀的調查與研究 (The Conceptualizations of Flowers, Constellations and Person: A Survey of Birth Ceremonies, Flower Rites, Rituals for Supplementing Rice and Ordination), *Wenshan shifan gaodeng zhuanke xueyuan xuebao* (文山師範高等專科學院學報 Journal of Wenshan Teachers College), 16/3 (2003), 161-167 at 162.

After this overview of the similarities and differences between the cosmological constructions of different goddesses of fertility and their abodes, the next section moves on to illustrate the different sources of potency shared between Chinese female deities and the goddesses of fertility in the Flower Cultural Sphere venerated among the non-Han Chinese societies. It highlights the prominence accorded to female fertility potency in this worship, that contrasts sharply with the worship of Chinese female deities, whose ability to reproduce or cause reproduction has often been downplayed in the process of their deification.[29]

2. The Different Sources of Potency Shared between Chinese Female Deities and Goddesses of Fertility in the Flower Cultural Sphere

In essence Chinese female deities are different from male deities who are conceived as members in a celestial bureaucracy that mirrors the imperial hierarchy.[30] Therefore, their source of potency is not the congruent of the posts they hold but emanates from their divine qualities instead. As mentioned earlier, the female virtue of purity constitutes a great part of the spiritual efficacy of the Chinese female deities. Indeed, a study of the hagiographies of Chinese female deities unequivocally shows that either they have never entered into a marriage or have never had children. Their hagiographies concentrate heavily on their diligence in cultivating their religiosity by chanting scriptures or mastering ritual repertoires devised to rescue those in need, and most importantly, their contributions to bolstering state governance. Take Chen Jinggu, the Lady of Linshui, for example. Brigitte Baptandier concludes that,

> The key elements of it [the cult of Chen Jinggu] are the battle against a snake—astral breath or harmful demon—and Chen Jinggu's apprenticeship at Mount Lü with the ritual masters, Jiulang [the ninth lad] and Perfected Lord Xu, who pass on to her, above all, the

[29] It is noteworthy that the cult of the goddess of Taishan (*Taishan niangniang* or *Bixia yuanjun*) popular in North China presents a mixed representation in this regard. Her sexuality was emphasized in some versions of her deification story, while she 'seemed to be on a path toward co-optation and standardization much like that of Tianhou, but ultimately this process was aborted'. Kenneth Pomeranz, 'Orthopraxy, Orthodoxy, and the Goddess(es) of Taishan,' *Modern China*, 33/1 (2007), 22-46.

[30] Robert P. Weller and Meir Shahar, (eds), *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China* (University of Hawaii Press, 1996).

> Thunder arts and those of the Northern Dipper. She died while performing the ritual for rain, after having *tuotai* [a fatal abortion] and after taking a vow to help women…. Finally, according to some versions, Nanhai Guanyin, the Bodhisattva of the South Sea, is said to have miraculously caused her birth so that she would eliminate the snake demon of the country of Min [roughly today's Fujian]. The theme of rejecting marriage is also sketched.[31]

The legend and the myth apparently describe Chen Jinggu as an assiduous practitioner of rituals who, having rejected married life, decided instead to devote herself wholeheartedly to helping women and children. She is also said to be the protector of the country of Min. Quite clearly, neither marriage nor reproductive powers play or have played an essential role in contributing to the efficacy of the female cult of the Lady of Linshui.

Although not always a success, the effort of integrating local societies by dint of naturalizing of goddesses of fertility, and by extension the regulation of women's social roles and sexual behaviours, has nevertheless been deliberately??? employed in the imperial state expansion in South China. David Faure offers a graphic example of the state persecution of female fertility deities, in this case Madam Golden Flower (*Jinhua Furen*), that emerged from anti-village religion attitudes and executions in Guangdong in the sixteenth century. He states,

> The clearest evidence of some impact from Wei Xiao's [Guangdong Assistant Surveillance Commissioner] efforts [to attack village religion] may be found in reports on the temple of Madam Golden Flower, known as a pretty young woman who had drowned at the nearby Fairy Pond, to whom local people prayed for sons. She came to be the personification of sorceresses… The sexual connotations of sorceresses using their physical beauty to entice the deities in pursuit of sons would not have been lost on contemporaries. Although the temple had received some official approval when it was rebuilt in 1469, it was destroyed on Wei Xiao's orders.[32]

[31] Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult*, Kristin Fryklund (trans.) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 14, 29.
[32] David Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor: State and Lineage in South China* (Stanford University Press, 2007), 103.

This account unquestionably indicates that the regional worship of goddesses of fertility was once regarded as illegal and immoral in the eyes of the Chinese state and hence targeted for domestication. Its offence was that it had indisputable associations with female autonomy in matters of sex and reproduction. Cogently, the proximity of female fertility to nature was usually embodied in the form of female shamanistic powers, namely 'sorcery' (*wu*). Most importantly, the vicissitudes endured by Madam Golden Flower clearly points out that throughout history the Chinese imperial state always had an interest in either choosing to utilize the power of female fertility in its imperial incorporation of local societies or, going to the other extreme, deciding to contain it by destroying it.[33]

However, as much past research has shown, village religions or regional cults are not so easily destroyed.[34] Among many non-Han Chinese societies in South China, the worship of the goddesses of fertility is heavily centred on the belief in the reproductive powers of these divinities.[35] Such an emphasis on the female reproductive powers on the divine level also finds its mundane extension in the ritual performance in which women who have many children and grandchildren are highly respected. For instance, as a most honourable female deity in the pantheon of both the Daoist tradition and popular belief, the local version of the Queen Mother of the West (*Xiwangmu*) venerated in Guangdong places heavy emphasis on her ability to grant children.[36] In 'Miscellany on Deities' from the *Guangdong Miscellanies*, a record of the Queen Mother of the West reads as follows:

> There are many temples for worshipping the Queen Mother of the West in Guangdong.… The walls of her temple are usually decorated with the theme of protecting children. It is called the Hall of

[33] The state cult of chastity (*zhenjie*), which originated in the Song (960-1279) and was practised until the Qing (1644-1911), is another explicit example of a state attempt to control female fertility. Janet Theiss has argued that the emergence of the cult of chastity was to build a foundation for bolstering a patriarchal society, and indirectly, the Chinese imperial state's control of local society. See Janet M. Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 25-38.

[34] For example, Michael Szonyi, 'Making Claims about Standardization and Orthopraxy in Late Imperial China: Rituals and Cults in the Fuzhou Region in Light of Watson's Theories,' *Modern China* 33/1 (2007), 47-71.

[35] Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, 'Gendering Ritual Community'.

[36] Suzanne E. Cahill, *Transcendence & Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

> Offspring. When people have children, they go to the temple and have their children take the Queen Mother of the West as their fictitious foster mother. [37]
>
> 廣州多有祠祀西王母，…。壁上多繪畫保嬰之事，名子孫堂，人民生子女者，多契神以為父母，….。

This account vividly illustrates the belief in the reproductive powers of the Queen Mother of the West invites people to worship her to entreat her to bless them with numerous offspring. There is no doubt that the source of potency of the Queen Mother of the West is derived from her power over fertility, rather than any ideas of her being a miraculous saviour.

Most intriguingly, Shi Lianzhu reports that a ritual practised among the She, an ethnic minority in eastern Guangdong, clearly demonstrates the beliefs in the reproductive powers of the Queen Mother of the West. In their ancestor-worship rite, the most important role is assumed by a woman who plays the part called the Queen Mother of the West (*Xihuangmu*) or the Queen Mother of the Majesty (*Huangmuniang*). There are several stipulations attached to the selection of the female candidate who is deemed worthy to assume the role of the Queen Mother of the West. For instance, the woman must have married and have two descending generations if she is to be elected to assume the role. Furthermore, there must have been female ancestors in the clan of her husband who have assumed the role in the past. That is, a lineage traced through female regenerative power is essential to the selection of the female candidate for the role. Most importantly, these provisions indicate that the female candidate who is qualified for the role of the Queen Mother of the West has already fulfilled her reproductive responsibility. Women who have performed the role of the Queen Mother of the West will be granted the right to have a 'huge merit-making' (*dagongde*) ceremony spanning three days and nights, meaning a solemn funeral ceremony after her death. Afterwards, these women will also be referred to as the Queen Mother of the West or the Queen Mother of the Majesty in religious contexts.[38]

[37] Qu Dajun, *Guangdong Xinyu,* 214.
[38] Shi Lianzhu, *Shezu* 畲族 (The She Nationality) (Bejing: Minzu chubanshe, 1988), 114-115.

To sum up, a comparison of the different sources of potency pertaining to the cult of the Lady of Linshui and to a local version of the Queen Mother of the West indisputably reveals that the discourses on the power of female fertility could be downplayed or highlighted for different purposes in different contexts. Furthermore, the example of Madam Golden Flower strongly suggests that the state control of female fertility was transformed into a 'civilizing project' through which the political agenda of the state was implemented in an attempt to transform village religion. All this indicates that the cosmological constructions revolving around female fertility not only have a cultural meaning, they are also permeated with political significance. To support this contention, the following section elaborates on Yao cultural constructions of personhood, showing how men have sought a substitute for and downplayed female fertility through their espousal of patrilineal Daoist ordination.

Yao Personhood and Gender Relations

To explore the Yao ritual constructions of female fertility and the role of the Chinese civilizing project in it, this section sets out to illustrate three aspects of Yao personhood: the corporeal, cosmological and cultivated dimensions. In my definition of personhood, I adopt the concept of the 'partible person' proposed by Marilyn Strathern and developed by Ho Ts'ui-ping, 'which views persons and things as composite sites of relationships where processes of objectification, personification, and reification come together to construct personhood.' [39] The section focuses on the changing conceptualizations of Yao personhood with respect to the rites and norms attributed to the constructions of female fertility as well as to women's positions in relation to men.

1. The Corporeal Dimension of a Person: Bone, Blood and Breast-Milk

[39] Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, 'Gendering Ritual Community', 207. Also see Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). He Cuiping (Ho Ts'ui-p'ing), 'Cong Jingpo renti tuxiang tan ren yu wu de guanxi' 從景頗人體圖像談人與物的關係 (Between Persons and Things: A Discussion of Jingpo Human Figurines), in Huang Yinggui (ed.), *Wu yu wuzhi wenhua* 物與物質文化 (Substance and Material Cultures) (Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 2004), 261-333.

The first aspect of Yao personhood is on the corporeal level. The Yao think that a baby is formed by the coming together of essences from both the father's and mother's sides. The father gives his 'muscle' (*jin*) and 'bone' (*gu*), and the mother gives her 'blood' (*xie*) and 'flesh' (*rou*). Li Decai told me that,

> A person is like a 'flowery dragon' (*hualong*), whose birth is the result of a combination of the Father of the Flowers (*Huagong*) and the Mother of the Flowers (*Huamu*). The Father of the Flowers gives the children 'bone' and 'muscle', and the Mother of the Flowers gives the children 'flesh' and 'blood'. Originally, a 'flowery dragon' had only 'flesh' and 'blood'. Only after the 'flowery dragon' had eaten with chopsticks and a spoon could he/her obtain the 'bone'.[40]

Nor is Li Decai alone in his opinion. Other Mien people in Weihao also share similar ideas about men contributing 'bone' (and 'muscle') and women giving 'blood' (and 'flesh'). They say that the component of a father's Han Chinese name, the last character in the customary three-character Chinese name that will be used to name the children, symbolizes the 'bone' he has contributed. A Yao male's Han Chinese name contains a family name, a generational name (*beihangming*) and a randomly chosen Chinese character; for instance, Deng Gui-Wang 鄧貴旺. If Deng Gui-Wang has a child who has been named *ke* 客 (guest) by a ritual master after the naming ritual on the third day after his or her birth, he or she will be called *ke wang* (*wang,* 旺 prosperous). As can been seen, *wang* is the last character of the Han Chinese name of the child's father and indicates the 'bone' he gave.[41]

There is no explicit linguistic reference indicating the significance of women's 'blood' and 'flesh' in the physical aspect of a person. Instead, the emphasis has shifted to women's role in breast-feeding (*yangnai*). Among the gifts the spouse-taker group offers to the spouse-giver group with which they are making an alliance is what

[40] Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao*, 88-89. The Mun people do not seem to have a well-established explanation for the corporeal construction of a person; therefore, this illustration of the corporeal dimension of personhood unfortunately cannot include a concrete example from the Mun. However, as do the Mien people, the Mun also believe that souls are sent by flower deities. See Huang Guiquan, *Yaozuzhi, xiangwan: Yunnan yaozu wenhua yu minzu rentong* 瑤族志：香碗—雲南瑤族文化與民族認同 (An Ethnography of the Yao, Incense Bowl: Culture and Ethnic Identity of the Yao in Yunnan) (Kunming: Yunnan daxue chubanshe, 2009), 167-172.
[41] Chen Meiwen, ibid., 85-88.

are called the 'honorarium for breast-feeding' (*yangnaiqian*).[42] People told me that the money is intended to express gratitude to mothers for feeding breast-milk to the children so that they can grow up healthy.[43]

2. The Cosmological Dimension of a Person: Flower Deities as 'others'

In addition to the physical contribution, the second aspect of personhood that makes the birth of a baby possible is the cosmological level: the 'flower soul' sent by such flower deities as the Parents of the Flowers popular among the Mien and the Parents of the Flower Roots venerated by the Mun. The flower gardens in which these flower deities reside are symbolically situated outside the boundary of the household, even of the community. Citing the example of Zhuang patrilineal marriage arrangements, Ho Ts'ui-p'ing points out that, either literally or symbolically, the wife-giver group and female fertility are often associated with a cave, grotto, river or lake, all sites that are considered unknown and dangerous, because the locations of these landscapes are often situated in the wilderness, beyond the familiar boundaries of the everyday community of the spouse-taker's group.[44] Therefore, it is important for the spouse-giver group to initiate the 'Making a Bridge to Receive a Flower' (*Yinghuajiaqiao*) rite, either on the wedding day itself or before a child's first birthday, so that the flower deities know where to send the flower soul.[45] This has led Ho to suggest that '…in the construction of the androcentric house, the flower garden, the imagined tamed and civil space, is a substitute for the source of reproduction that resides with the wife-givers, who are mostly from outside—that is, from an agnatic group outside the neighborhood or village'.[46]

In contrast to the Zhuang insistence that spouse-givers continue to show involvement in childbirth and child-rearing after marriage, the Yao, both Mien and Mun, do not engage in reciprocal exchanges between spouse-takers and spouse-givers

[42] I use spouse-taker group instead of wife-taker group to indicate the diverse patterns of marriage arrangements among the Yao.
[43] Ibid., 89.
[44] Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, 'Gendering Ritual Community', 229-232.
[45] Kao Ya-ning, 'Diversification of the Flower Ritual among the Zhuang People', *Tai Culture: Tai/Thai Women in Asian Context*, 22 (2011), 73-92 at 79.
[46] Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, *op. cit.* 230.

after the spouse is taken into the household. Any expenses and prestations involved in the rituals of childbirth and child-rearing are all taken care of by the spouse-takers themselves.[47] If the flower garden is understood to be a symbolic substitute for the source of reproduction that refers to female fertility, taking perhaps a more male-oriented perspective, the Yao seem to relate the flower deities (though they appear in pairs, the female is usually privileged) to dangerous yet unavoidable 'others'.

By now, especially when they are compared to Zhuang dealings with the flower deities, the otherness of the flower deities (female fertility) in the Yao cultural construction will have emerged more distinctly. Among the Zhuang, once the rite of 'Making a Bridge and Receiving a Flower' is completed, a tablet known as the Tablet of the Holy Mother of the Flowery Deities (*Huawang Shengmu zhi shenwei*) that is written in Chinese will be set up, the place assigned to it being on the right-hand side of the altar where it has its incense burner.[48] In contrast, the Yao do not worship or set up any visible tablet or statue for the Parents of the Flowers and Parents of the Flower Roots on the household altar.[49] These flower deities will only be invited to attend when the rites happen to involve children's illnesses or problems identified as having been caused by them. On a symbolic level, the inside and outside boundaries of the household are often blurred because of the instability of flower souls. To ensure the fragile soul remain attached to the child until he or she reaches puberty, and to consolidate the internal-external boundaries of a household, the Yao (males) have to continue to negotiate with these flower deities from time to time by ritual means.

As a child reaches puberty, the Mien will perform a 'Detaching from the Parents of the Flowers' (*chaihuahuang*) rite for the child. Only after the rite has been performed is the soul of the child thought to be completely free from the control of the flower deities and the flower garden. Now his or her soul can instead be taken care of by a household spirit called the Lord Star of Fate for Every Family Member (*Hejia Daxiao Benming Xingjun*).[50]

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[47] Chen Meiwen, *op. cit.* 161-162. Huang Guiquan, 'Landianyao de hua, dou, renguan', 163.
[48] Kao Ya-ning, *op. cit.* 80.
[49] The Mother of Emperors, the extended version of the Mother of the Flower Roots, is indeed regularly venerated on the household altar (more details see below).
[50] Chen Meiwen, *op. cit.* 89. The Mun do not perform such a rite. But, as noted earlier, the 'Lonely Fairy Matron of the Bottom Storey' is thought to be a flower deity whose engagements with children

If the logic of female fertility – as personified by the flower deities, whose femaleness is highlighted, who symbolically represent a dangerous yet unavoidable 'other' from a male point of view – is accepted, it seems that the Yao males have needed the long period from a person's pre-birth to puberty to domesticate the natural force of female fertility in a ritual fashion. The next section elucidates in more detail that the natural force of female fertility is eventually completely substituted by a bloodless and hence pollution-free ritual rebirth in the patrilineal Daoist ordination.

3. The Cultivated Dimension of a Person: A Ritual Rebirth

If a person, especially a male, is to become a fully-fledged *persona* culturally, that person must undergo a Daoist ordination. By submitting to ordination, a person paves the way either to cultivate himself to be able to attain a glorious afterlife by progressively performing different levels of ordination (among the Mien),[51] or accumulate the merit that will enable him to be reborn into a better next life in a following reincarnation (among the Mun).[52]

The actual ordination procedures vary from village to village, if not indeed from subgroup to subgroup.[53] The following description of a programme of ordination, called *tuui*^{22} *wi*^{22}/*u*^{42} *daai*^{22} ([Ch] *diaoyuantai* or *diaowutai*, 'Falling from the Cloudy/Fifth Platform'), is derived mainly from the Mun ordination for ritual masters in Yunnan. The materials in Mien ordination will be referred to whenever necessary.

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could cause their illness or even their death. This is a reconfirmation of the double-edged quality of the flower deities as dangerous yet unavoidable 'others'.

[51] Of course, the act of undergoing ordination alone does not guarantee one's afterlife status. A man has to get married and have male descendants to carry on the ritual legacy of the household, as discussed in Chapter 3. Only then is he regarded as having achieved the status of a cultivated person. See Chen Meiwen, *op. cit.* 105-118.

[52] Apart from undergoing ordination, accumulating merit by doing good deeds during one's lifetime, and having descendants to hold funerary rites after one's death can contribute to a good life in one's next incarnation. See Huang Guiquan, *Yaozuzhi, xiangwan*, 159, 192.

[53] Zhang Jingsong, 'Zhongguo Lanshanxian guoshanyao dujie yishi guocheng de xinyang yiyi ji dujie zhi gongneng' 中國藍山縣過山瑤度戒儀式過程的信仰意義及度戒之功能 (The Ritual Implications and Functions of Ordination among the Mien people in Lanshan County, China), paper presented at the conference ヤオ族伝統文献研究国際シンホ゜シ゛ウム (International Symposium on Research of Yao Traditions), 23 November 2010, 神奈川大学横浜 Yokohama, Kanagawa University, 1-9 at 7.

The fundamental steps in the 'Falling from the Cloudy/Fifth Platform' programme in the ordination for ritual masters can be elaborated as follows. As the programme commences, the ordination masters lead the ordinands to a platform constructed of bamboo and wood, situated on a piece of level ground outside the household.[54] The Mun believe that the platform symbolizes a ritual womb that is pregnant with the ordinands. The masters climb up the wooden ladder (it is said that it used to be a ladder of knives), followed by the ordinands. When the masters descend from the platform, they will stand on the side facing the wooden ladder; the ordinands will remain on the platform and prepare to assume a falling posture. The masters instruct the ordinands how to position themselves for the fall. The ordinands squat and clasp their calves with their arms, aligning their thumbs with their big toes, grasping the edge of the platform with their toes.[55]

This is the prelude to the climax of this ritual. To put it simply, their falls imitate the delivery of a baby. Eight people, including four ordination masters, wait under the platform to catch the ordinands one by one. Four random males hold up a rattan net stretched out one metre below the level of the platform. The four masters then take turns to put blankets on the rattan net. They also use their 'swords of war' (*zhandao*) to clear away the extra knots on the net and the decorative papers pasted on to the platform. Three masters then kneel down facing the platform, and the fourth master takes a mouthful water and extends his legs with one to his front, bent, the other stretched out backwards. As the fourth master slowly moves his bent front leg back towards himself, the ordinands begin to move themselves into the two square frames that had been made earlier along the edge of the platform. When they spy the movements of the ordinands, the three kneeling masters shout out together in Yao language, 'Almost there, almost there!' The fourth master spits a mouthful of water towards the ordinands, and they begin to fall from the platform, still keeping their squatting posture.

[54] There is usually more than one ordinand for ordination as different households can share the expenses of holding the ritual. See Huang Guiquan, 'Landianyao de hua, dou, renguan', 165.

[55] The Mien also build a cloudy platform for ordination with a knife or wooden ladder. Only this platform is not so closely associated with the image of a ritual womb, although similarly, the Mien ordinands will also be led to climb up onto the platform by the ordination masters. This act is intended to open the heavenly gates and introduce the ordinands to the 'Grand Supreme Elderly Lord' (*Taishang Laojun*). Zhang Jingsong, *op. cit.* 5.

The people holding the net catch them and lower them gently onto the ground covered with generous amounts of straw. The three kneeling masters all hurry to see the ordinands. The fourth master comes to remove the blankets wrapped around the ordinands, unties the arms clasped around their calves and helps them sit on the blankets with their legs crossed. After a while, the first master joyfully informs the ordinands, 'Now you can go to Heaven; now you can see Heaven'. Every master, every disciple and every relative of the ordinands joins in singing the following salutation, 'carefree and happy' (*xiaoyao kuaile*), three times, celebrating the trouble-free delivery of the ordinands. It is said that if the ordinands do not retain their posture when falling, the ordination is regarded as a failure.

After the step of 'Falling from the Cloudy/Fifth Platform', the masters feed the ordinands glutinous rice cooked wrapped in banana leaves. Each ordination master feeds the ordinands a small bite of the rice. It is said that these ordinands are just like newborn babies, so the parents, that is, the masters, must give them rice to nourish them.[56] Obviously, the whole process of 'Falling from the Cloudy/Fifth Platform' is an imitation of a female pregnancy and delivery. Symbolically, the patrilineal Daoist ordination has replaced the natural force of female fertility in reproduction. Significantly, only male ritual specialists and male members can conduct the ceremony, and the ritual birth is free of blood and hence of pollution.[57]

To conclude, Yao cultural constructions to do with the corporeal aspect of the person mostly present a complementary view of the relationship between two genders. In the cosmological dimension, female fertility, as personified by flower deities and an imagined flower garden, is perceived as a dangerous yet unavoidable 'other', perhaps especially from a male perspective. The femaleness assumes a dominant position in governing children's flower souls, and hence social reproduction, in the period from pre-birth to puberty. The investigation into the cultivated aspect of a person has prompted an exploration into the significance of a ritual rebirth of the participant ordinands at ordination. Strikingly, the power of

[56] Huang Guiquan, *Yaozuzhi, xiangwan*, 126-128.
[57] It is noteworthy that there will be two female singers participating in an ordination, who will initiate each programme by singing songs recorded in a songbook entitled *The Songbook for Relieving People in the Red House* (*honglou duren geshu*). Fieldwork notes, 8 Nov. 2012. Also see more details in Chapter 5.

female fertility has been completely overwritten, as the ritual birth has manifested itself as a bloodless and pollution-free pregnancy and delivery.

It seems that, even though Yao society might not have been overtly turned into a lineage society, the Daoist ritual rebirth, regarded as a part of the state civilizing project, still in a way has successfully substituted the significance of female fertility, that is integral to native belief. However, as David Faure has made clear, 'Village religion was deeply rooted in established practices, and no amount of legal prohibition was ever able to eradicate them'.[58] Fully endorsing this statement, the following section seeks to probe the proposition as it applies to Yao religion. It analyses the practices and narratives surrounding a female fertility deity, the Mother of Emperors, who is thought to have originally been the Mother of the Flower Roots. The analysis will show that the constructions of the Mother of Emperors display a local mode of appropriation of the ideologies and discourses of religious traditions external to the community. It will also show that the power of female fertility is not submerged in this cross-cultural interactive process; instead, it can be said to be highlighted to indicate the struggles of the local society to claim their autonomy.

The Mother of Emperors: A 'Trans-Hybrid' Fertility Deity

Many scholars working on Daoist ritual traditions in non-Han societies have advocated the need of a nuanced account of the interaction between Daoist rituals and communal religious practices. For instance, David Holm's research on the rituals and narratives to do with a filial son, Dong Yong, in Zhuang society shows that 'Taoist ritual elements were adopted by local communities to serve as protective covering for indigenous traditions and practices, and that the underlying "model" remained an indigenous one'.[59] To account for the dynamics in the interaction between Daoism and local religious practices, Paul Katz has proposed the term 'trans-hybridity', already introduced in Chapter 1, to be used as a conceptual tool with which to elucidate the simultaneous process of the deliberate transmission of Daoist doctrine

[58] David Faure, *Emperor and Ancestor: State and Lineage in South China* (Stanford University Press, 2007), 103.
[59] David Holm, 'The Exemplar of Filial Piety and the End of the Ape-Men Dong Yong in Guangxi and Guizhou Ritual Performance', *T'oung Pao*, 90/1-3 (2004), 32-64 at 63-64.

and liturgy into village religions and their gradual absorption of indigenous beliefs and practices.[60] As will be argued in this section, the construction of the Mother of Emperors of the Mun gives plenty of examples of such dynamisms in the interaction between local religious practices and the dominant religious traditions of universal claims and wide disposal, such as Daoism and Buddhism, and can therefore be regarded as an outcome of 'trans-hybridity'.

1. Who is the Mother of Emperors?

In the Mun language, the name of the Mother of Emperors is pronounced *tei*^{35} *mu*^{42}. The Chinese characters 帝 (*di*, emperor) and 母 (*mu,* mother) are used to transcribe the name of and refer to this goddess of fertility.[61] Among the surviving extant ritual manuscripts that could be consulted for this study, the earliest ritual manuscript that carries the name 'the Mother of Emperors' in the title was copied by a Mun Daoist priest, Lu Daode, in the ninth year of the Jiaqing Emperor (1814); the manuscript is entitled *Rituals for the Mother of Emperors* (*dimuke*) (Guangxi and Yunnan Collection). The date of composition of this manuscript would seem to indicate that the creation of the Mother of Emperors in the Mun Daoist tradition was initiated at least two centuries ago.

The term 帝母 can also be found in Chinese texts. In *The History of the Former Han* (*Hanshu*), the 'Queen Mother' (*huangtaihou*) is referred to in her written form as 帝母 (*dimu*), meaning 'the Mother of the Emperor'.[62] However, in a poetry written by Wang Shizhen (1526-1590) during the Ming dynasty, the Chinese term 帝母 (*dimu*) has been assigned a different meaning and is used instead to refer to the

[60] Paul R.Katz, 'Repaying a Nuo Vow in Western Hunan: A Rite of Trans-Hybridity?', *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology*, 11/2 (2013), 1-88.

[61] The Chinese characters 帝母 used to refer to the Mother of Emperors are written fairly consistently throughout Mun ritual manuscripts. Therefore, although the fertility power of the Mother of Emperors does indeed run parallel to the 'Mother Goddess' 地母 (地 *di*, land; 母 *mu*, mother), who is associated with popular beliefs in the fertility power of the land, we should be careful not to confuse 地母, in written form, for the deity most popular among the Mun. See Hsiao Teng-fu, 'Houtu yu dimu: Shi lun tudi zhushen ji dimu xinyang' 后土與地母—試論土地諸神及地母信仰 (On the Gods of All the Ground and Di-Mu Belief), *Shijie zongjiao xuekan* (世界宗教學刊 Journal of World Religions), 4 (2004), 1-41.

[62] Zhongguo zhexue dianzishu jihua 中國哲學書電子化計畫 (Chinese Text Project), 'The First Volume of Relatives of Queens' (*waiqizhuan, shang* 外戚傳上) (?), [web document] <http://ctext.org/han-shu/wai-qi-zhuan-shang/zh>, accessed 17 Nov. 2014.

Queen Mother of the West.[63] Nevertheless, the textual reference most relevant to our understanding of the term the Mother of Emperors is a Buddhist classic, *The Mantra of Mother Hāritī* (*helidi mu zhenjing*). In it, in Chinese Mother Hāritī is called 帝母 (*dimu)* (or 'Ghost/Demon Child Mother Deity', *guizimu*), and her hagiography bears a close resemblance to that of the Mother of Emperors, as will soon be discussed in detail below.[64]

Before conducting a detailed textual analysis of the narratives of the Mother of Emperors, it is important to set the regional and village contexts of the worship of the Mother of Emperors.

1-1. The Mother of Emperors among the Mun and the Zhuang

As the foregoing descriptions have hinted, the Mother of Emperors is by nature a sort of Supreme Matron whose cult is widespread across different ethnicities in South China. Nevertheless, the practice of using this specific Chinese name 帝母 (*dimu*) to refer to the Supreme Matron is found only among the Mun and the Zhuang. These two names, the Mother of Emperors and the Supreme Matron, are still used interchangeably only among the Mun, but although the Supreme Matron remains a dominant term among the Zhuang, the use of the term 'the Mother of Emperors' is on the wane.[65]

In addition to using the title 'the Mother of Emperors', the Mun and the Zhuang also recite a similar set of names of flower deities in the Daoist scriptural tradition, found in texts bearing such titles as *The Sublime Scriptures about the Royal Deities of the Flowers* (*taishang shuo huawang miaojing*) or *The Sublime Scriptures*

[63] A full text of the poem is available at <http://sou-yun.com/Query.aspx?type=poem&id=448779>, accessed 17 Nov. 2014.

[64] A full text of the mantra is available at Zhonghua dianzi fodian xiehui 中華電子佛典協會 (CBETA), 'Mantra of Mother Hariti' (*helidi mu zhenjing* 訶利帝母真經) (2002), [web document] <http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/BDLM/sutra/chi_pdf/sutra10/T21n1261.pdf>, accessed 18 Nov. 2014.

[65] The textual evidence derives from a comparison between the above-mentioned manuscript of *Rituals for the Mother of Emperors* (1814) by Lu Daode, and a ritual manuscript entitled *Rituals for Passing Through the Hurdles* (*lianguanke*), composed by Qin Qixian during the Qing dynasty (year of composition unclear), collected in Mashan County, central Guangxi. Mashan texts are Xerox copies of a partial collection of Zhuang ritual manuscripts currently housed in the Special Collections Division of National Tsinghua University in Hsinchu, Taiwan. I helped catalogue this collection in February 2012 and therefore have had first-hand experience of reading these Zhuang texts.

Concerning the Holy Mother (*taishang shuo shengmu miaojing*).[66] To give but a few examples, the names of the flower deities listed in these scriptures include the Parents of the Flowery Deities of the Eastern Dipper and the Heavenly Lady of Venus of the Upper Palace (*Shanggong Dongdou Huahuang Fumu Taibai Tianniang*), Great Father of the East of the Upper Palace (*Shanggong Donghuanggong Dadao*), and the Queen Mother of the West of the Upper Palace (*Shanggong Xiguo Huangmu Furen*).

So far, most of the inter-ethnic textual similarities to do with fertility deities have been discovered in Daoist ritual manuscripts, that are usually written in prose form. Such inter-ethnic textual similarities are by no means common in texts about fertility deities composed in the ritual-master tradition, that are usually written in seven-syllable verses. The inter-ethnic textual similarities found in texts about the Supreme Matron suggest that this regionally popular goddess of fertility has been enlisted into the Daoist pantheon. At the present moment, no studies have yet provided enough evidence either to define who the actors facilitating the textual interaction between local religious traditions and Daoism might have been or what their purposes were. Nevertheless, the fact that the Supreme Matron is considered a deity whose status is equivalent to that of the deities in the Daoist pantheon is thought-provoking. The next section will discuss more details about the local view that she is the wife of a Daoist martial deity, the Father of Commands (*Linggong*).

As mentioned above, it is said that the Mother of Emperors is in fact the Mother of the Flower Roots. However, the Mun people in Dingcao have another version recounting the background of the goddess. Many ritual specialists in Dingcao told me that the Mother of Emperors is the wife of the Father of Commands; while the Mother of Emperors is the protector of children, the Father of Commands rules over humankind.

In the 'Folklore Section' (*minsuzhi*) in *Annals of Guangxi* (*Guangxi tongzhi*), published in 1992, it is recorded that the worship of the Father of Commands is popular among different Yao groups, and his temples are well established in many

[66] The textual evidence derives from a comparison between the above-mentioned manuscripts *Rituals for the Mother of Emperors* (Mun), *Rituals for Passing Through the Hurdles* (Zhuang), and *Rituals for the Holy Mother (shengmuke*), composed by Huang Daoping in the 1980s, collected from Mashan County.

parts of Guangxi.[67] One version states that he was the famous Tang dynasty general Li Jing (571-649); another stresses his mythologized image, addressing him as the Father of Commands Who Governs the Northern Prefecture (*Beifu Linggong*). It is said that the Father of Commands and Lord Guan (*Guangong*), whose miraculous powers can expel demons, are two of the most efficacious martial deities in Daoism.[68]

A Mun version of the story of the Father of Commands recounted to me during my stay in Dingcao by He Decai, a ritual master in his seventies, suggests that the Father of Commands was originally a leader of a group of bandits in the neighbouring areas of present-day Shangsi County, where the Mun have resided since the Qing.[69] These bandits led by the Father of Commands, whose mighty strength was famed far and wide, caused havoc in the prosperous villages. He Decai could not remember the exact name of the Father of Commands when he was still a mortal, but he did say the reason the Mun worship him as a guardian deity is because he was very ferocious (*xiong*). On account of his ferocity, the Father of Commands is able to expel any malign spirit.

At a Mun household altar the Father of Commands is worshipped as a Daoist deity. As his wife, the Mother of Emperors, is also guaranteed a position at the altar.[70] As noted earlier, the Parents of the Flower Roots are not worshipped at a household altar but only make their appearance in a household if and when invited. Consequently, were the Mother of Emperors no more than the Mother of the Flower Roots, she would not be in a position to enjoy regular offerings at the household altar. This is yet further confirmation that the Mother of Emperors, a type of Supreme Matron, is indeed elevated to the same level as a Daoist deity in the local perception.

To sum up, by referring to textual and ethnographic evidence, this section has shown that the Mother of the Flower Roots (or the Supreme Matron) could have been

[67] Guangxi zhuangzu zizhiqu difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (eds), '*minsuzhi'* 民俗志 (Folklore Section), in *Guangxi tongzhi* 廣西通志 (Annals of Guangxi) (Nanning, Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1992), pp. 88, 134, 217 for three entries that mention the temples of the 'Father of Commands' in contemporary Yangshou county, northeast Guangxi, Laibing County, central Guangxi, and Pingle County, northeast Guangxi.

[68] Ibid., pp. 367-369 for a short narrative regarding the birth of the 'Father of Commands'.

[69] Deng Wentong, 'Landian Yao qianxi yanjiu' 藍靛瑤遷徙研究 (A Study of the Migratory History of the Mun), *Guangxi minzu daxue xuebao* (廣西民族大學學報 Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities), 19/4 (1997), 76-79.

[70] Interview notes. Nov. 2012. Also see Guangxi zhuangzu zizhiqu difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (eds), *op. cit.* 368-369.

singled out and elevated to the Daoist pantheon, in which she is referred to as the Mother of Emperors and became the wife of a Daoist martial deity. Her elevation is unequivocally present in Daoist ritual manuscripts in both Mun and Zhuang societies, as well as in Mun local knowledge. As will be shown below, the narratives to do with the Mother of Emperors in the Mun ritual-master tradition also seem to have undergone an elevation similar to that she has experienced in Daoist ritual tradition. One major difference is that it is Buddhist ideologies and narratives that have been employed in the making of the Mother of Emperors in the ritual-master tradition, especially those relating to the Buddhist goddess, Mother Hāritī.

2. Mother Hāritī and the Mother of Emperors

Mother Hāritī (*Helidi mu* or *Guizimu*) is an ancient Indian goddess of pregnancy and childbirth. At one time her cult was widespread throughout South and Southeast Asia, and could be found from India to Nepal and Bali.[71] As Geoffrey Samuel concludes,

> Her worship seems to have been particularly important in Gandhāra and Mathura (present-day Pakistan and North India, first century BCE to fourth century CE)…. Today, traces of her presence remain throughout South and Southeast Asia.[72]

Traces of the cult of Mother Hāritī can also be found in China. Lian Ruizhi's study of the female ancestors and goddesses of noble families in the Nanzhao Dali Kingdom (752-1254), Erhai area, Yunnan, before the fifteenth century indicates that the image of Mother Hāritī was incorporated into the act of deifying noble female ancestors and transmogrifying them into the guardian goddesses of the kingdom.[73]

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[71] Geoffrey Samuel, 'Introduction: The Daughters of Hāritī Today', in Santi Rozario and Geoffrey Samuel (eds), *Daughters of Hariti: Childbirth and Female Healers in South and Southeast Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 1-34.
[72] Ibid., 1.
[73] Lian Ruizhi, 'Nüxing zuxian huo nüshen: Yunnan Erhai diqu de shizu chuanshuo yu nüshen xinyang' 女性祖先或女神—雲南洱海地區的始祖傳說與女神信仰 (Female Ancestors or Goddesses: The Legend of the Founding Ancestors and Beliefs in Goddesses), *Lishi renleixue xuekan* (歷史人類學學刊 Journal of History and Anthropology), 3/2 (2005), 25-56.

What is intriguing is that the legend of Mother Hāritī describes her as originally having been a child-eating demoness who was later converted from her cannibalistic vagaries by the Buddha. There are many versions of the legend of Mother Hāritī', but the fundamental plots can be described as follows. It is said that Mother Hāritī had hundreds of demon children whom she loved (hence the title 'Ghost/Demon Child Mother Deity'). In order to feed them, Mother Hāritī abducted and killed the children of others. Upon hearing of her evil deeds, Śākyamuni Buddha stole her youngest son and hid him under a rice bowl. Mother Hāritī searched desperately for her son and eventually came to ask Śākyamuni Buddha for help. The Buddha asked if she now understood the pains of those parents who lost their children. Mother Hāritī replied contritely that their sufferings must be many times greater than hers. In front of the Buddha, Mother Hāritī vowed to give back the children to their heart-broken parents and become a protector of pregnancy and childbirth.[74]

Interestingly, the narratives of the Mother of Emperors discovered in Mun ritual-master manuscripts do show undeniable similarities to the legend of Mother Hāritī set out above. The full story of the Mother of Emperors goes as follows:[75]

> Originally the Supreme Matron was a child of the Huang family. She liked to play on the top of Mount Meru.[76] On top of Mount Meru grew a holy peach tree. The Holy Lady [i.e. Supreme Matron] fell pregnant after eating the fruit of the peach tree. She was pregnant for eighty-one years. [After such a long period of pregnancy], she [finally] gave birth to her first child, the Grand Supreme Elderly Lord (*Taishang Laojun*) [the mythical founder of Daoism]. When the Grand Supreme Elderly Lord grew up, he became a ruler living in a golden palace. He took care only of the heavenly, not the secular world. The

[74] John S. Strong, *The Legend and Cult of Upagupta: Sanskrit Buddhism in North India and Southeast Asia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[75] This version is printed in Guangxi Zhuangzu zizhiqu bianjizu, *Guangxi yaozu shehui lishi diaocha diliuce* 廣西瑤族社會歷史調查第六冊 (The Social and Historical Survey of the Yao People in Guangxi, Volume Six) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1987), 296-297. It is entitled *The Vow of the Mother of Emperors* (*dimuyuan*), recorded in the *Book of Ghost Feet* (*guijiaoke*), a ritual-master manuscript composed in the year of Xinsi (probably 1941). In the verses, the Mother of Emperors is referred to interchangeably as the Heavenly Lady (*tianniang*), the Supreme Matron (*powang*) and the Holy Lady (*xianpo*).

[76] Mount Meru is 'also known as Sumeru or Sineru. According to ancient Indian cosmological beliefs, the axis mundi or world mountain that stands at the centre of the world, surrounded by oceans and continents'. Damien Keown, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 177.

Supreme Matron also gave birth to the Three Pure Ones (*Sanqing*) [the highest deities in the Daoist pantheon], Pan Gu (the mythical ancestor of Chinese people), and the Third Lad (*Sanlang*). She also gave birth to Gautama Buddha (*Shijiamoni*), Maitreya (*Mi'le Pusa*) [of Buddhism] and to the Earth God of the Mortal World. Three years passed and she fell pregnant again and gave birth to [her youngest son], the Nineteenth Lad, named Flowery Forest (*Hualin*).[77] When Flowery Forest grew up, he led the Supreme Matron up to the frontier of the flowering sky.

She rode on clouds by cultivating herself [into transcendence] three times [implying a great deal of effort], but she still failed to reach the sky. She decided to return [to her palace] and eventually arrived on Mount Wutai.[78] She remained on the mountain overnight and pondered the possibility of descending to the mortal world. She thought, 'Since I am unable to cultivate myself successfully so as to become one of the heavenly deities, I would rather go to the mortal world and harm the children.' [After she had made the decision], she devoured eighteen boys and girls at one meal.

One day, on her child-eating journey, she arrived in the Kingdom of Qipo [a Buddhist kingdom]. In the kingdom there was a temple whose gate faced to the south. [Gautama Buddha lived in the temple].

When Gautama Buddha learned of the evil deeds of the Supreme Matron, he went to abduct Flowery Forest and hid him in his temple. As the Supreme Matron searched for Flowery Forest at night and could not find him, she cried so loudly her weeping caused Heaven to fall and Earth to rend. Finally the Supreme Matron arrived at the temple and learned that her son had been taken hostage by the Buddha. [She used] an iron stick to [try to] crack the temple bell but failed. She cried and her tears were like the waves running onto the shore. After [grieving so deeply], the power of the Supreme Matron was miraculously enhanced. She summoned up the soldiers of thunder to destroy the temple bell for her. But not even the 500 soldiers of thunder could destroy it. They fell one after another like water dropping into the ocean. Gautama Buddha sat inside the temple, smiling confidently. He said, 'Supreme Matron, you think your power is great, but mine is greater still. It is easy for you to eat other people's children; now you know how difficult it is to see your own child being taken. If you are willing to convert to Buddhism and follow the Buddha, I shall not hesitate to allow your son go free'.

[Upon hearing what the Buddha had said], the Supreme Matron took a solemn vow in the temple. Swearing an oath before the Buddha

[77] In other version, the 'Flower Forest', usually two of them, are said to be the brothers of the 'Mother of Flower Roots'. See Huang Guiquan, *Yaozuzhi, xiangwan*, 92-93.
[78] Mount Wutai is 'one of the "Four Famous Mountains" known as major pilgrimage sites in Chinese Buddhism'. Damien Keown, *op. cit.* 337.

made her vow as heavy as a mountain. The Supreme Matron vowed, 'If I ever eat another child again, let there be neither clouds nor stars in the sky'. After seeing the Supreme Matron take her solemn vow, Gautama Buddha released Flowery Forest, and he could finally be re-united with the Supreme Matron; they both felt as if they had once died and returned from the dead. The mother and the son entered the Palace of Ao Mountain together. They established a temple specifically for the governance of Flower Mountain. The Supreme Matron drank from a bowl of wine offered by the people praying, and she returned the bowl to them. [The reciprocal relationship between the Supreme Matron and those offering prayers] was as if, although she had eaten the children of others, she would return them when the time was ripe. The true flower would be sent to the owner of the lamp [referring to the household in which the ritual is held]. The true flower would grow up and live long and healthy ever after.

婆王原是黃家子 原在須彌頂上玩
須彌有根仙桃樹 仙婆吃了就懷胎
八十一年懷胎內 生下老君是頭男
老君長大朝金闕 渺渺管天不管凡
又生三清三尊佛 又生盤古及三郎
又生釋迦彌勒佛 並生下界地祈王
過後三年又懷孕 生下花林十九郎
養得花林年長大 引婆直上秀天關

三變隨雲去不得 復歸放下五台山
就在其山宿一夜 思量下界算必煩
相我修善不成嘆 不如下界害兒男
十八男兒做一短 十八女兒一短貪
吃兒去到齊婆國 有個寺門面向南

釋迦見婆行惡大 捉取花林禁取還
夜來婆婆尋不見 叫得天崩地又翻
將來婆去觀宮子 說道你兒禁侍堂
鐵棒打鐘鐘不壞 眼淚如同水過灘
從此婆婆法力大 叫取雷兵供妹扛
五百雷兵扛不動 跌落如同水下灘
釋迦殿上吟吟笑 說道你乖我更乖
你吃人兒說道易 吾禁你兒設道難
若你皈依隨佛去 脫放你兒有何難

婆在侍堂發大愿 佛前發願重如山
我今再吃人兒去 天上無星無虎斑
釋迦見婆發願重 脫放花林十九郎
花林得共婆相見 如同死去再回返
母子同入鰲山殿 至今立廟管花山

婆吃酒缸還酒碗 吃人兒女到時還
真花送與郎灯主 求作堂前萬歲男

Examining the Indian legend of Mother Hāritī, Samuel suggests that the complex figure of Mother Hāritī might have resulted from a process in which locally respected deities of fertility, such as Mother Hāritī, 'were brought into a subordinate relationship with the newly developing Buddhist and Brahmanical pantheons'.[79] Even though this statement might contain a great deal of truth, it reveals only the top-down perspective in the interaction between local religious practices and dominant religious traditions. To balance the picture, these narratives of the Mother of Emperors found in the Mun ritual-master manuscripts offer a good example of a bottom-up perspective in the construction of the local goddess of fertility, that tellingly shows the protest and struggle in the experience of local society in its encounter with extraneous religious traditions. Therefore, I propose that the narratives of the Mother of Emperors should be viewed as an outcome of the 'trans-hybridity', suggested by Paul Katz, precisely to give equal weight to the external and internal cultural forces at play in the process of the interaction.

Unfortunately, there is not sufficient evidence at this point to tackle the issue of how the Yao people might have come into contact with the Buddhist ideologies and narratives.[80] Be this as it may, the narratives of the Mother of Emperors must have been constructed under the influence of the Indian legend of Mother Hāritī. The interesting part is that the many twists and turns taken in the Mun version of the Mother Hāritī legend tellingly reveal local perceptions of the influence of Daoism and Buddhism.

The first twist is that she is described as having become pregnant after eating the fruit of a peach tree growing on a Buddhist mountain, a scene not in the Indian version. Secondly, her children are not demons, but prominent patriarchs of the

[79] Geoffrey Samuel, *op. cit.* 1-2.
[80] James Robson has tried to map out the spread and development of Buddhism and its impact on Yao society in central Hunan, but he admits that, 'any attempt to write the history of Buddhism in the Xiangzhong region [central Hunan] during the pre-Ming period is fraught with difficulty (as was the case with the Daoist history) due to a shortage of reliable sources'. See James Robson, 'Manuscripts from the Margins: On the Historical and Religious Dimensions of the Central Human Religion', paper presented at the conference of Frontier Societies and State-making in China 邊陲社會與國家建構, November 25-26, 2012, Hong Kong, 1-36 at 20.

different religious traditions, including the Grand Supreme Elderly Lord of Daoism and Gautama Buddha and Maitreya of Buddhism, to name just a few. Replacing demon children by patriarchs of the dominant religious traditions clearly represents a total transformation of the Indian version. Cogently, it is this transformation that has successfully expunged the demonic nature of the Mother of Emperors and secured her the superior status of being the origin of Daoism and Buddhism.

The third important twist is that another narrative transformation underlies the reason the Mother of Emperors became a child-eating demoness: it was not because she had to feed her demon children, but because she was denied a place in the heavenly world, even though she had diligently cultivated herself. As illustrated in the cultivated aspect of the person above, the value of 'cultivation' is closely related to state-supported rites and the religious world. This narrative variation of a 'cultivated' fertility deity being denied the recognition of the civilizing centre (the heavenly world) might suggestively reveal the complex attitude of local society caused by its encounters with Daoist-Buddhist religious traditions and state power. Unquestionably, a respectful local attitude towards the power of female fertility can be ascertained, as the Mother of Emperors has been re-invented as the origin of dominant religious traditions as well as a 'cultivated' subject. Nevertheless, local society seems to have attempted to promote this 'upgraded' version of the Mother of Emperors in its efforts to be granted recognition by the civilizing centre. Unfortunately, her search for recognition was repudiated, and this led to the destructive consequence of her turning into a child-eating demoness.

The struggle of local society to create more space for negotiation, and thereby maintain its autonomy in opposition to state power and dominant religious traditions, becomes even more apparent in the last narrative variation in the Mun version of the Mother of Emperors. When the Mother of Emperors learned that the Buddha had abducted her youngest son, she did not surrender to his power immediately. Instead, she tried to win back her son by doing battle with the Buddha, before she finally succumbed to conversion to Buddhism. This introduced episode seems to indicate a failed attempt on the part of the local society to resist the civilizing force. It is true that the Mother of Emperors, the natural force of female fertility and in this story by

extension the local society, was eventually domesticated by the power of the dominant religious traditions. However, as the plot unfolds, the agency of the female gender has undoubtedly served as a crucial force in the negotiations of local society in managing the intervention of the powerful civilizing force at the village level.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed various levels on which the significance of female fertility is constructed. It began by pointing out the profound metaphorical relationship between flower symbolism and female fertility in South China. It has unequivocally demonstrated that the Yao worldview of life and death is closely connected with the widespread cultural complex of fertility beliefs and flower symbolism. The investigation into the different sources of potency shared by Chinese female deities and locally respected goddesses of fertility emphasized the salience of the power of female fertility in the efficacy of the latter's development. Moreover, it revealed that the constructions of female fertility are more than a cultural practice, they have also been imbued with political significance, as successive Chinese imperial states have continued to maintain an ambivalent attitude in their dealings with village religions in general and the cults of local goddesses of fertility in particular.

In its exploration of the cultural and political impacts of the civilizing force of the state on the perceptions of female fertility in local society, the chapter has concentrated on addressing three aspects of Yao personhood and gender relationships constructed at different stages of a person's lifecycle. The investigation of the corporeal dimension of personhood revealed that the two genders have a complementary relationship. The cosmological aspect of a person betrays what is probably a male perspective in viewing the power of female fertility as dangerous yet unavoidable to social reproduction. The significant finding is that the power of female fertility has been completely overwritten by a bloodless and pollution-free ritual rebirth, performed in a Daoist ordination, in the cultivated aspect of a male person. It would seem that the significance of female fertility powers has been totally subsumed

by a state civilizing project, namely the Daoist ordination, that is constructed on patrilineal ideology and privileges maleness. But this is only one side of the story.

The chapter concluded by carrying out a close reading of the narratives and practices surrounding one goddess of fertility, the Mother of Emperors, among the Yao. The ethnographic and textual evidence strongly suggests that the making of the Mother of Emperors can be viewed as an outcome of 'trans-hybridity', in which new religious traditions (Daoism, Buddhism and so forth) and native beliefs are being consciously merged, modified and reinvented. Most importantly, and especially relevant to my argument, is that the power of female fertility has not only helped to create a space for negotiation in Yao historical encounters with the Chinese imperial incorporation, it has also represented a negative attitude towards the intervention of state power. As the agency of female fertility, and by extension the position of women, is pivotal to Yao reflections on and resistance to state power, the next chapter will explore the different forms of expressions and actions assumed by women in their ritual lives and as recorded in ritual texts in greater depth.

Chapter 5. Performative Literacy: Women, Singing, and Subjectivities

This chapter probes the gendered dimension of the Yao indigenous construction of literacy and reveals the gender implications underlining the narratives of female fertility deities. Its purpose is to suggest the possibility that Yao women shared in the authorship in the composition of Yao ritual texts, specifically the ritual-master manuscripts, despite the fact they were not literate in Chinese. On this premise, the chapter views the narratives of female fertility deities who assist the Mother of Emperors in protecting pregnancy and children as the probable products of female singing written down and adopted into ritual-master manuscripts, most likely by literate men. Furthermore, the chapter argues that this specific group of narratives about the female fertility deities might point to a regionally relevant religious practice for dealing with women who did not fulfil their gender roles as wife and mother. These women either died a 'bad death' (*xiongsi*) or renounced their womanhood to seek transcendence.

The chapter suggests singing, that is defined as a form of 'performative literacy' in this research (details see below), was the vehicle for Yao women's probable participation in the authorship of ritual texts. The significance of women in singing and music is a cross-cultural phenomenon.[1] Partly on account of the generally marginalized position of females in written traditions, women are more likely to be involved in the creative processes in song writing as well as inclined to express themselves through singing and song.[2] Singing and music have therefore helped to create a symbolic space in which women reflect on their assigned gender roles and their relationship with other social members in a male-dominated society.[3] In certain

[1] Ellen Koskoff (ed.), *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1989).
[2] May-bo Ching, 'What Alternative Do You Have, Sixth Aunt?—Women and Marriage in Cantonese Ballads', in Helen F Siu (ed.), *Merchants' Daughters: Women, Commerce, and Regional Culture in South China* (HK: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 59-76.
[3] Ellen B. Basso, 'Musical Expression and Gender Identity in the Myth and Ritual of the Kalapalo of Central Brazil', in Ellen Koskoff (ed.), *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 163-176.

cases, the songs they sing even voice a sense of resistance against the 'discourse of power', such as a civilizing agenda or a patrilineal ideology, even though their resistance might not have led to widespread protest or bring about any profound social change in their situation.[4] In addition to claiming their individuality via singing, women also often act as innovators and preservers of the folksong tradition and local culture.[5] These general characteristics of the association of women with singing and folksong are also well attested in various societies in South China.

One very pertinent illustrative example of singing as a form of women's expressivity discovered in South China is the bridal laments (*kujiage*).[6] Bridal laments are invariably created and performed by women. The lamentations express women's grief at their destined fate as they have to marry into a household of a stranger and leave their natal family and close sworn-sisters. In a reflection of women's anxiety about the patrilineal marriage pattern, a striking image of bridal laments, the one found in Guangdong and performed during wedding, concerns death, especially with reference to the groom and his family.[7]

In other cases, the female singing of laments and the hardships involved in their gender role are conversely precisely the source by which the efficacy of the ritual and ceremony of patrilineal ideology are guaranteed. In early imperial China, funeral and mourning rites emphasized the importance of female roles, namely those of the wives of the descendants of the deceased, within the patrilineal family. Women mourned inside the hall in which the coffin was placed whereas the men remained outside; on many occasions, men were expected to remain silent while the women wailed. Because of the wife's vital role in funeral and mourning rites, the husband did not dare not to show her respect. Nevertheless, the emphasis on female roles in

[4] Mariko Asano Tamanoi, 'Songs as Weapons: The Culture and History of Komori (Nursemaids) in Modern Japan', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 50/4 (1991), 793-817.
[5] Patricia K. Shehan, 'Balkan Women as Preservers of Traditional Music and Culture', in Ellen Koskoff (ed.), *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 45-54.
[6] See for example, Anne E. McLaren, *Performing Grief: Bridal Laments in Rural China* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).
[7] May-bo Ching, *op. cit.* 64.

funeral and mourning rites once again embodied and conveyed patrilineal beliefs about what it was to be a woman.[8]

In the case of Yao, even though the Yao society is by no means organized around an androcentric ideology, the religious domain has been the interface at which an absolute patrilineal ideology and probable imperial intervention are vividly manifested. In other words, the Yao religious domain has modified or even created a new set of gender ideologies and male-female relations that regulate women in support of a religious tradition of male domination. If we are to understand gender as a 'product of negotiation' as Dorothy Ko, Jahyun Kim Haboush and Joan R. Piggott have suggested, the ritual narratives about Yao female fertility deities are one such example.[9] As will soon be shown, the narratives of female fertility deities in Yao ritual-master texts actually have nothing to do with fertility. On the contrary, they tell of a group of women who chose to renounce or disengage themselves from their given social roles that bolstered a patrilineal ideology. Even though the songs about their protest and resistance are, again, used to support the patrilineal-oriented religious culture ritualistically, the narratives of these female fertility deities nevertheless explicitly depict different forms of female individuality and subjectivity.

To support the argument of gender as a 'product of negotiation', the chapter address two aspects of 'gender'—'a focus on women' and 'female subjectivities'—to elucidate the ways in which the Yao have negotiated with the imported written tradition, and the imposed gender ideals that accompany it, through their own voices, particularly through the actions of female singing and composing songs about women.

A Focus on Women: Women as Authors

Yao women's subordination in the religious domain is said to be the result of the taboos on particular aspects of female physiology. Nevertheless, this explanation might not be the one and only reason Yao women are marginalized from religious

[8] Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2011), 148.
[9] Dorothy Ko, Jahyun Kim Haboush, and Joan R. Piggott, 'Introduction', in Dorothy Ko *et al.* (eds), *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1-24 at 1-3.

activity. The fact that education in Chinese literacy during imperial times overlooked women in general and non-Han women in particular might also be a decisive reason.[10] Even private education (*sishu jiaoyu*)—which was spontaneously organized by the Yao in southeast Yunnan during the 1930s-1940s to teach Chinese literacy and Chinese classics—was available only to men.[11] Indeed, most women in their sixties in Weihao are barely literate in Chinese script, let alone capable of composing written texts.

Be that as it may, the *Gazetteer of Kaihua Prefecture* (in southeastern Yunnan province) surprisingly states that, 'the Yao people…both men and women know writing/books'.[12] It would be going too far to claim that Yao women knew how to read and write 'books' merely on the basis of this single record, especially as the present situation strongly indicates otherwise. Nevertheless, what is certain in the eyes of the observer who wrote the original statement is that Yao women must have participated, in one way or another, in a domain in which 'writing/books' was important. In the Yao case, without doubt this is the religious domain. If we break ourselves away from the presumption that emphasizes literacy as the ability to read and write, the important question that remains to be asked is not: 'Did Yao women know how to read and write?' The question we should ask instead is: 'In what ways have Yao women engaged in the religious domain, contributing certain knowledge relating to rituals?' The ethnographic materials reveal the answer to be 'by singing'. Moreover, there is a strong possibility that the 'books' mentioned in the gazetteer account might have referred to either (or both) real books, such as the 'book of singing' (*geben*), or else women's 'performative literacy' of folksongs that were integrated into ritual texts and performed in rituals (details see below).

As in many local cultures in South China, singing is of integral importance to daily interaction and ceremonial performance in Yao society. In *Notes on Lingnan*

[10] Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander Woodside (eds), *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).
[11] Wang Li and Huang Guiquan, 'Han wenhua dui Yaozu wenhua jiqi jiaoyu de yingxiang' 漢文化對瑤文化及其教育的影響 (The Influences of Han Culture on the Culture and Education of the Yao Nationality), *Minzu jiaoyu yanjiu* (民族教育研究 Journal of Research on Education for Ethnic Minorities), 4/13 (2002), 61-65 at 63-64.
[12] Tang Dabin (revised), Zhao Zhen et al. (redacted), *Kaihua fuzhi juan jiu* 開化府志卷九 (The Gazetteer of Kaihua Prefecture, Volume Nine) (Beiping: Guoli beiping tushuguan, 1758, reprint in 1939). The text in Chinese reads: '傜人…男女皆知書'.

(*Nanyue Biji*), an entry titled 'Fondness for Singing in Lingnan' (*Yuesu Haoge*) describes the people in Guangdong and Guangxi in these words: 'Whenever a happy event takes place, people celebrate the event by singing'.[13] The Yao were especially fond of singing: 'In Yao custom, singing is of the utmost importance. Men and women are mixed; when one sings a hundred will follow and sing in harmony'.[14] Consequently, a considerable number of scholarly works have already been devoted to exploring the role of Yao female singers and their significance in both ritual and non-ritual settings.[15] Many works have approached the subject particularly from the linguistic and ethno-musicological perspectives.[16] I am neither a linguist nor an ethno-musicologist. What I am going to pursue is an anthropological analysis. Drawing on this specific group of linguistic and ethno-musicological ethnographies, historical accounts and materials from the ethnographic present, the following discussion of women as singers at ritual and ceremonial sites highlights the agency of women by proposing the hypothesis that women have played an important role in the authorship of ritual texts.

To explore the hypothesis of women as authors of folksongs that were adopted into ritual texts, I first investigate the interchangeability of writing and singing. Then I suggest an alternative reading of Yao ritual texts in connection with the Immortal of Singing, Liu Sanjie, interchangeably called Liu Sanmei or Liu San. Finally, I describe the mythical and performative significance of female singers, especially that demonstrated in the roles of a 'mother of singing' and of 'unmarried girls' (*tongnü*) in

[13] Li Diaoyuan (ed.), *Nanyue Biji* 南越筆記 (Notes on Lingnan), in Wang Yunwu (ed.), *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 (Preliminary Integration of a Series of Books) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935-1937), 8. The text in Chinese reads: '凡有吉慶，必唱歌以為歡樂'.

[14] Ibid., 10. The text in Chinese reads: '猺俗最尚歌，男女雜遝，一唱百和'.

[15] Huang Huali, 'Yaozu huan panwangyuan yishi geniang jiaose de chuancheng xiangzhuang' 瑤族還盤王願儀式歌娘角色的傳承現狀 (Current State of the Transmission of *geniang* in the Ritual 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan' among the Yao), *Hunan keji xueyuan xuebao* (湖南科技學院學報 Journal of Hunan University of Science and Engineering), 28/12 (2007), 194-195. Wu Ninghua and He Mengmeng, 'Menren nüxing gechang chuantong bianqian yanjiu' 門人女性歌唱傳統變遷研究 (A Study of Transitions Regarding Traditional Mun Female Singing from Shangsi County in Guangxi, China), *Kundu yinyue xuekan* (關渡音樂學刊 Kuandu Music Journal), 20 (2014), 43-66.

[16] For example, Zheng Changtian, *Yaozu 'zuogetang' de jiegou yu gongneng: Xiangnan Panyao 'gangjie' huodong yanjiu* 瑤族"坐歌堂"的結構與功能：湘南盤瑤"岡介"活動研究 (The Structure and Function of 'Sitting in the Hall and Singing' among the Yao: A Study of the Pastime of Telling Jokes among Pan Yao in Southern Hunan) (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2009). Wu Ninghua, 'Yishi zhong de shishi: "Panwangge" yanjiu' 儀式中的史詩─《盤王歌》研究 (Epic in Ritual: A Study of the 'Song of King Pan'), PhD thesis (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music, 2012).

the ritual 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan'.

1. Interchangeability of Writing and Singing

In *The Annals of the Barbarians South of the Five Ranges* (*Lingbiao Jiman*), a book offering accounts of the cultures and customs of non-Han Chinese people in South China during the Republican Era, the author Liu Xifan (1885-1968) observes the following,

> The barbarians do not have written scripts. When they narrate the histories of their forebears, they eulogize them in verse (or in the scriptures of Daoism and shamanism). Therefore, in the eyes of barbarians, folksongs are as precious as [the genres of] genealogy, history and canon in past ages.
>
> 蠻人無文字，述其先哲歷史，完全以歌詞（或道巫經典）傳誦之，故蠻民眼光下之歌謠，幾與歷代『宗譜』、『史乘』、『典章』同一珍貴。[17]

Therefore, Liu Xifan concludes,

> […] even the scriptures of Daoism and shamanism can be seen as folksongs. To the extent that, when they worship ancestors and deities, burn incense and venerate, at moments of solemn awe they often sing songs that narrate love affairs between men and women.
>
> …即道巫經典，亦可以歌謠目之。甚至享祝祖考，祭祀神祇，馨香膜拜，肅穆敬畏之時，亦常涉及男女風流情歌娓娓之事。[18]

The observations made by Liu Xifan point out two important dimensions of the interchangeability of writing and singing. The first dimension is that, in previously non-literate societies, singing has a similar function and value to writing. The second

[17] Liu Xifan, *Lingbiao Jiman* 嶺表紀蠻 (*Annals of the Barbarians South of the Five Ranges*) (Shanghai: Shanghai shangwu yinshuguan, 1934), 155.
[18] Ibid.,156. This also holds true for the folksong traditions found in southern Jiangsu, an eastern coastal province of China. See Antoinet Schimmelpenninck, *Chinese Folk Songs and Folk Singers: Shan'ge Traditions in Southern Jiangsu* (Leiden: CHIME Foundation, 1997).

point he makes is that rituals are performed as singing events, and the Daoist and shamanistic books used to perform rituals are something identical to folksongs.

1.1. Singing as 'Performative Literacy'

I argue that singing is characteristic of a form of 'performative literacy' that has been accorded an identical function and value to the ability to read and write among non-Han Chinese societies.[19] David Holm uses the term 'performative literacy' to refer to 'the performative act of reciting a text'. He argues that the recitation and the copying of texts should be regarded as separate activities, and that the knowledge of reciting a text is orally conveyed among the Zhuang.[20] Adopting this premise, I would like to add another dimension to the definition of 'performative literacy', which is 'an enabling knowledge'— knowledge that enables actors to activate and use all the other forms of knowledge so that they continue to grow in knowledge and literary competence through their recitation and singing experiences.[21] My purpose is to emphasize the agency of an individual in his or her acquisition of cultural knowledge conveyed through such performative interfaces as ritual performance and singing events. Therefore, the concept of 'performative literacy' can provisionally be defined as *knowledge that enables actors to engage in the acquisition and integration of all forms of knowledge through a performative interface, and that the knowledge is chiefly conveyed in verbal art that might or might not assume a permanently visible form such as manuscript.*

In a fashion similar to the way in which a person's degree of literacy among the elite classes of imperial China was chiefly judged by an ability to write good calligraphy and to demonstrate a thorough grounding in Confucian learning,[22] singing has been a conventional means by which to display a person's knowledge in non-Han

[19] Although I use 'performative', it has very little to do with the 'speech act theory' formulated by John Langshaw Austin (J. L. Austin), in which he highlights the acting power of words. See J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (eds) (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1976[1955]).

[20] Holm also points out that synonym substitution is common in the recitation of Zhuang manuscripts as well as in the performance of traditional songs. See David Holm, *Mapping the Old Zhuang Character Script: A Vernacular Writing System from Southern China* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 61-63.

[21] With reference to Sheridan Blau, 'Performative Literacy: The Habits of Mind of Highly Literate Readers,' *Voices from the Middle*, 10/3 (2003), 18-22 at 19.

[22] Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy in Ch'ing China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 5.

Chinese societies. The difference is that what a person needs to display is not good calligraphy or exegetical skills pertaining to the Confucian classics, but that a person's degree of 'literacy' is measured by having a good voice and being well-versed in a wide variety of genres in folksongs. In these societies, 'singing contests' (*geshi*) have been prevalent in many different contexts. In an entry in *Notes on Lingnan* by Li Diaoyuan, several lines that describe a 'singing contest' at a wedding ceremony read:

> Therefore, a singing contest is often held to decide who sings the best. The best contestant will be admired and awarded the title Master of Singing. Before they go to fetch the bride, the groom must invite several others who are of similar age and appearance to him [to accompany him]. Among them, the one who displays the most creativity and is quick and clever will be appointed best man. When the side of the bride demands poems and songs while blocking their entry, the groom will compose poems and songs himself or let the best man act on his behalf. The poems and songs might or might not have literary merit. The most important thing is to spout them spontaneously without thinking to show the elegance and beauty of (the groom's side's) artistic talent.
>
> 故嘗有歌試以第高下。高者受上賞，號為歌伯。其娶婦而親迎者，婿必多求數人與己年貌相若。而才思敏給者。使為伴郎。女家索攔門詩歌，婿或捉筆為之，或使伴郎代艸。或文或不文，總以信口而成，才華斐美者為貴。[23]

This description of a 'singing contest' at a wedding ceremony that takes places as the spouse-taker group enters the natal village of the spouse-giver's can still be witnessed at contemporary Mun weddings.[24] The only difference is that, because nowadays the younger generation does not usually know how to sing traditional songs, neither the groom nor the best man engages in the 'singing contest'. Instead, the contest is performed between four female singers, aged between thirty and seventy, called 'the women who block the road' ([Ch] *lanlunü*), from the spouse-giver group, and one of the two leading male seniors from the spouse-taker group, called 'great tea lad' ([Ch]

[23] Li Diaoyuan (ed.), *op. cit.* 9.
[24] On 15 November 2012, I participated in a Mun wedding ceremony between a He family, the spouse-taker side, from Dingcao and a Deng family, the spouse-giver side, from one of the neighbouring villages, Milü. The following description is extracted from my fieldwork notes about the wedding.

da chalang), who are in their sixties and have acquired an impressive repertoire of songs.[25] Most importantly, as indicated by the historical account, the two sides exchanged poems and songs either from their memory of lyrics fit for the occasion or by improvising on the scene.

To sum up, singing as a form of 'performative literacy' has an identical function and value to literacy that emphasizes the ability to read and write. A commentary contained in a version of *The Biography of the Immortal of Singing, Liu Sanmei* (*gexian Liu Sanmei zhuan*) accurately characterizes what place singing occupies in the perceptions of people in Guangdong and Guangxi, and hence provides an apt conclusion for this section: 'However, in the eyes of people in Guangdong and Guangxi, singing is literacy. This can be ascertained from Yao folksongs, because certain lyrics state that Liu Sanmei is [the embodiment of] literacy'.[26]

1.2 Rituals as Singing Events

If we understand singing as 'performative literacy', it follows that rituals and ceremonies must be one of the major interfaces at which different kinds of knowledge can be displayed, obtained and integrated, chiefly via singing. The performance of rituals as singing events in Yao society has given rise to a host of arguments. One is that, in conceptual terms, certain rituals and events are regarded as 'antiphonal singing' (*duige*) activities, traditionally referred to as 'sitting in the hall and singing' (*getang* or *zuogetang*). Compared to the 'antiphonal singing' that occurs spontaneously when people are at work in the mountains and entertain themselves by singing, the 'sitting in the hall and singing' has more ritualistic and ceremonial implications.[27] One ritualistic aspect of 'sitting in the hall and singing' is that the singing takes place at a certain point in a ceremony. Taking singing at a wedding as an example, in the section of 'Fondness for Singing in Lingnan' from *Notes on Lingnan*, Li Diaoyuan has described: 'On the eve of the wedding ceremony, the

[25] The four female singers cannot be widows.
[26] Sun Fanggui and Zhi Xingfu, *Gexian Liu Sanmei zhuan* 歌僊劉三妹傳 (Biography of the Immortal of Singing, Liu Sanmei), in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu bubian* 四庫全書存目叢書補編 (Jinan City: Qilu shushe, 2001), 79-380/381 at 381. The text in Chinese reads: '然粵人即唱歌為讀書。徭歌云讀書便是劉三妹可徵矣'.
[27] Zheng Changtian, *Yaozu 'zuogetang' de jiegou yu gongneng*, 56.

households of both groom and bride hold a *jiao* [a Daoist sacrificial ritual]. All of the relatives who attend the feast sing folksongs. This is called "sitting in the hall and singing"'.[28] William W. Chiang gives another example in his study of the female script (*nüshu*) in southern Hunan. Chiang describes a form of 'sitting in the hall and singing', also known as 'the sad house' (*chouwu*), in which the unwed sisters and ritual sisters (*tongnian*, literally 'same year') of a prospective bride gather at the bride's house for a period of singing within a month before the marriage date.[29]

Writing about the Yao, Zheng Changtian elucidates that there are two kinds of 'sitting in the hall and singing': one is a secular 'sitting in the hall and singing', for instance, the 'talking and laughing' ([Mi] *gangjie*) activities found among the Mien in southern Hunan; the other is a religious 'sitting in the hall and singing' that both Mien and Mun perform, for instance, in the ritual of 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan', also called 'Honouring a Vow by Sitting in the Hall and Singing' (*huangetang liangyuan* or *huanyuan getang*).[30]

The other reason a ritual can be regarded as a singing event is that the performance of many large-scale rituals, such as 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan' and ordination and wedding ceremonies, involves singing that features various forms of musicality.[31] In principle, there are three performative acts present in Yao rituals and ceremonies: 'reading' (*du*), 'intoning (*jiang*) and 'singing' (*chang*).[32] The first two styles are interchangeable, referring to a performative act falling between 'singing' and 'intoning'. This style of 'singing' features long melodies, free rhyming, repetitive

[28] Li Diaoyuan (ed.), *op. cit.* 9. The sentences in Chinese are '先一夕男女家行醮。親友與席者，或皆唱歌，名曰坐歌堂'.
[29] William W. Chiang, *"We Two Know the Script; We Have Become Good Friends": Linguistic and Social Aspects of The Women's Script Literacy in Southern Hunan, China* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1995), 18-19.
[30] Zheng Changtian, *op. cit.* 57.
[31] Some exceptions include 'Ancient Incense-Burning Programme' (*huashen xiangyi*) and 'The Vow-Honouring Ritual of Half of the Compensation for the Village' (*banbuzhan yuan*). These two vow-honouring rituals do not require any singing performance. See Zhang Shengzhen (ed.), *Huan Panwang yuan* 還盤王願 (Ritual for 'Honouring a Vow for King Pan') (Nanning: Guangxi shaoshu minzu guji zhengli chuban guihua bangongshi, 2002), 564. Wu Ninghua, 'Yishi zhong de shishi: "Panwangge" yanjiu' 儀式中的史詩─《盤王歌》研究 (Epic in Ritual: A Study of the 'Song of King Pan'), PhD thesis (Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music, 2012), 15.
[32] Pan Jinsheng and Pan Wenxiu (eds), 'Yaozu minsu' 瑤族民俗 (Folk Custom of the Yao), in *Changning Wang Guayuan Pan Shenghua zongpu* 常寧王瓜源盤生華宗譜 (Genealogy of Wang Guayuan and Pan Shenghua in Changning) (unpublished manuscript, 2004), 122.

lyrics, and supporting tunes and words (*chenchiang chenci*).[33] In a secular *gangjie* singing activity, the 'intoning' and 'singing' styles take precedence;[34] whereas, in the ritual performance of 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan', all three performative acts are present. Whereas the ritual masters generally prefer to resort to the styles of 'reading' and 'talking', the female and male singers tend to utilize the style of 'singing'.[35] The reading and intoning by ritual masters should be understood to resemble a 'mumble' (*nan*), a privileged form of communication between priest and god, in which the utterances are intentionally barely audible to others, and 'reciting' (*song*) a manuscript out loud. The pace of the mumbling is usually faster than the recitation. This is because the former act does not necessarily involve reading from a text; ritual masters usually 'mumble' the texts they have learned by heart. The latter act usually includes reciting while progressing through a manuscript page by page.[36] Whatever the form chosen, rituals and ceremonies never involve the silent reading of a manuscript, but utilize all three styles of performative acts. Even while engaging in reading manuscripts, they involve performances of musicality to varying degrees. Therefore, it is not surprising that Liu Xifan should state that, '[…] even the books of Daoism and shamanism can be seen as folksongs', because the books are in most cases *sung out* rather than *read out* in performance.

In other words, the interchangeability of writing and singing is present in both conceptual and performative terms. On the one hand, singing is a form of 'performative literacy' in that a person's proficiency is judged by how well he or she can compose songs and perform them. Most importantly, this 'performative literacy' is no less significant than the literacy of writing and reading. On the other hand, rituals in which Daoist and shamanistic books are present are also regarded and performed as singing events. The implication of the interchangeability of writing and singing is therefore: many folksongs composed and sung for secular purposes, for

[33] Wu Ninghua, *op. cit.* 73-74.
[34] Zheng Changtian, *op. cit.* 120-121.
[35] Wu Ninghua, *op. cit.*
[36] Fieldwork observations in Weihao (since 1999-) and Dingcao (3-15 Nov. 2012). See Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao rende goucheng yu shengming de laiyuan* 從命名談廣西田林盤古瑤人的構成與生命的來源 (Conceptualizations of Personhood and the Origins of Life as Seen in Naming Traditions among the Pangu Yao of Tianlin, Guangxi) (Taipei: Tangshan, 2003), 134-154. Wu Ninghua, *op. cit.* 26-43. Zhang Shengzhen (ed.), *op. cit.*

instance, courtship and marriage, might have been adopted into the ritual repertoire so as to entertain the deities. If the narratives about courtship and marriage contained in ritual texts might have originated from the tradition of folksongs, the women's leading position in the composition of folksongs and singing could at least hint at the possibility of women's participation in the authorship of ritual texts, even though they were not literate. As will be argued below, women—represented by the Immortal of Singing in mythic terms and the 'mother of singing' in actual performance—enjoy a prominent role in Yao 'performative literacy,' namely, singing.

2. Women as Inventors of Singing

'Antiphonal singing' or 'sitting in the hall and singing' events usually involve both genders.[37] Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that both men and women create folksongs, and there is textual evidence describing both men and women composing songs. For example, in the Mien epic *The Great Song of King Pan*, we find such statements as 'women create songs and poems',[38] and 'men create the lyrics, women compose the melodies'.[39] Nevertheless, many non-Han peoples, including the Yao, believe that the ultimate 'inventor' of the singing tradition was not a man but an intelligent woman with a beautiful voice. The Yao, for instance, worship Liu Sanjie (Liu Sanmei or Liu San) as the Immortal of Singing (*gexian*).

Whether Liu Sanjie was a historical figure or a mythical being and has a Han Chinese origin or non-Han Chinese roots is beside the point here. The important point is that the Yao people have believed that Liu Sanjie composed and passed down to the mortal world all of the songs sung to invoke deities, detailing their biographies and the events in which they have demonstrated their divine powers. In a section from *The Great Song of King Pan*, entitled 'Women's Singing' (*nüren changge*), that is to be sung by a 'mother of singing' in the ritual of 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan', the lyrics state that, 'the third [sister] with family name Liu passed the songs down

[37] Zheng Changtian reports that there are three fundamental rules pertaining to the selection of *duige* participants. One is that the two parties have to be a combination of a man and a woman (Zheng Changtian, *op. cit.* 26).
[38] Zhang Shengzhen (ed.), *op. cit.* 347. The text in Chinese reads: '女人作歌詩'.
[39] Ibid, 569. The text in Chinese is '男人出唱歌詞，女人出唱曲子'.

directly to humans. The songs were left in the mortal world to be used as an invitation to saintly deities/ladies'.[40]

Another example is from the lines of 'mumbled lyrics' (*nanci*) to be recited by the 'chief ritual master' (*shizhu*) at the beginning of the 'Feast for King Pan' (*Panwang yan*) in the second part of 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan'. They refer to the story of Liu Sanjie creating the songs offered to please the invited deities.

> In the beginning there were the songs and melodies of Liu Sanjie, but I [the chief ritual master] just sing a few simple words and discordant sentences. I am afraid that the Sacred Emperor King Gao will not be satisfied. […] The sixth lad at the beginning of a song, the seventh lad at the end of a song, they open the vine chest with a bamboo splint and hat. They invite Liu San[jie] out to sing the introduction to a song and its lyrics.
>
> 當初劉三姊妹歌章，劉三姊妹歌曲，且唱三句賤言粗語，又怕不滿龍城高王聖帝之意…歌頭六郎，歌尾七郎，打開籐箱篾篢，請出劉三歌頭，劉三歌曲，…。[41]

Between the lines of these lyrics, Liu Sanjie is not only referred to as the creator of the songs sung at the ritual, she has also acquired some male acolytes to assist her in the rendition of the songs. Moreover, the chief ritual master expresses the worry that his rendition of her songs might be too discordant and unsophisticated to represent the original beauty of the songs, and that this might displease the ears of the deities.[42] In other words, the stories about Liu Sanjie in Yao religion suggest that women, represented by the Immortal of Singing, enjoy a relatively leading, not to say major status when it comes to singing. Most importantly, Liu Sanjie's story opens up the interpretative possibility that Yao women might have been anonymous authors of songs written down to be sung in ritual settings.

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[40] Dong Shengli (transcribed), '*Nüren changge'* 女人唱歌 (Women's Singing), in Yoshirô Shiratori (ed.), *Yao Documents* (Yôjin monjo 傜人文書) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1975), 282-290 at 283. The sentences in Chinese are '劉三直下千歌曲 留把凡間賀聖神/娘'.

[41] Zheng Changtian, *Yaozu 'zuogetang' de jiegou yu gongneng*, 352.

[42] Because of the celestial quality of her voice, there is scholarly work arguing that Liu Sanjie was herself a sorceress. See Huang Dawu, 'Liu Sanjie de shuangchong shenfen--Gexian he wushen' 劉三姊的雙重身分—歌仙與巫神 (The Dual Identity of Liu Sanjie: An Immortal of Singing and a Sorceress), *Zhongnan minzu xueyuan xuebao* (中南民族學院學報 Bulletin of the South Central Nationalities College), 4 (1990), 56-60.

As Paul Cohen concludes, 'Historical reconstruction, direct experience, and mythologization are, after all, all operations that every one of us performs every day of his or her life'.[43] The focus on Liu Sanjie as the creator of ritual songs in Yao text and performance can be interpreted as a historical reconstruction of past events in which Yao women composed the songs used to celebrate the divine deities. The story of Liu Sanjie might have also been a mythologization of people's direct experiences of witnessing women composing songs that embody sacredness.

In the pages to follow, I elaborate on women's prominence in 'performative literacy' by depicting the role of the 'mother of singing'. In this, I argue that, even though all of the rituals and ceremonies in Yao society are performed and led by male ritual specialists who are literate in Chinese and possess a Daoism-influenced ritual repertoire, the role of the 'mother of singing' nevertheless points to women's significance in transmitting local knowledge via singing.

3. 'Mother of Singing'

In many large-scale rituals, the participation of female singers is an absolute necessity. So far, the role of Mun female singers in ordination rituals has remained a relatively unexplored topic.[44] In contrast, Mien female singers, particularly in the ritual 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan', have received plenty of scholarly attention. Unavoidably, the following discussion of Yao female singers will therefore rely largely on the research conducted among female singers in this particular Mien ritual in different localities.

Before commencing, it might be helpful to recount the basic storylines of the ritual 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan' to explain why the Yao people perform it. King Pan, usually called Panhu in the myth, was a heroic ancestor of the Yao. His veneration and worship are closely related to a myth narrating the Yao diaspora. The myth 'Ferrying across the Ocean' (*piaoyao guohai*) contains a collective social

[43] Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), XV.
[44] So far the only available literature on Mun female singers is an article by Wu Ninghua and He Mengmeng, 'Menren nüxing gechang chuantong bianqian yanjiu' 門人女性歌唱傳統變遷研究 (A Study of Transitions Regarding Traditional Mun Female Singing from Shangsi County in Guangxi, China), *Kundu yinyue xuekan* (關渡音樂學刊 Kuandu Music Journal), 20 (2014), 43-66.

memory of a forced migration. Despite the fact that there are various versions of this migration story, the fundamental narrative elements consist of Panhu as the heroic ancestor, malicious Han Chinese officials, a cruel military invasion and the Yao in flight. At the climax of this story, the Yao people travelling across the ocean in seven boats run into a disastrous storm. The people in four of the seven boats drown. In desperation, the people in the remaining three boats seek help from Panhu. Each boat makes a ritual contract with Panhu, promising to offer the sacrifices he requires. The three remaining boats reach dry land safe and sound soon afterwards.[45] Since then, the myth states, the surviving Yao people and their descendants have kept their promise and regularly offer the sacrifices Panhu requested. Significantly, in the past women might have been one of the sacrifices offered to Panhu.

A tale told by Mien ritual masters in Lanshan County, Yongzhou (on the border of Hunan and Guangdong Provinces) recounts that before the late Qing women, particularly 'unmarried girls'—or to be more explicit, 'virgins'—used to be kidnapped and offered as a 'human sacrifice' to Panhu. It is also said that having reflected on the brutality of making human sacrifices, the Mien community later transformed the role of women from sacrificial offerings into 'singers', offering up their beautiful voices for Panhu's enjoyment instead. Four females, one older 'mother of singing' and three 'unmarried girls', who are usually in their teens, are invited for the ritual. Although all of them can be referred to as 'singing ladies' (*genü*), the 'mother of singing' takes the lead and plays a special role.[46]

The 'mother of singing', called dzuŋ$^{33\text{-}31}$ ma^{22} (dzuŋ$^{33\text{-}31}$: song; ma^{22}: mother) in everyday Mien language, tɕuŋ^{31} dʑuŋ^{24} mam^{33} (tɕuŋ^{31} dʑuŋ^{24}: singing; mam^{33}: mother) in everyday Mun language, refers to a woman who has a good voice and a wide repertoire of songs.[47] As noted above, the beauty of her singing is equal to female's intact regenerative power that can be offered to Panhu.[48] As will be shown

[45] Takemura Takuji, *Yaozu de lishi yu wenhua* 瑤族的歷史與文化 (The History and Culture of the Yao), Zhu Guichang and Jin Shaoping (trans.) (Nanning: Guangxi minzu xueyuan minzu yanjiusuo, 1986[1981]), 270-295. Huang Yu and Huang Fangping, *Guoji yaozu gaishu* 國際瑤族概述 (Introduction to the Yao Worldwide) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1993), 71-72. Chiao Chien, *Piaobozhong de yongheng* 漂泊中的永恆 (An Eternity in Wandering) (Jinan: Shangdong huabao chubanshe, 1999), 57-62.
[46] Huang Huali, 'Yaozu huan panwangyuan'.
[47] Zheng Changtian, *Yaozu 'zuogetang' de jiegou yu gongneng',* 218.
[48] Wu Ninghua, 'Yishi zhong de shishi', 43-45.

below, the singing of the 'mother of singing' has more than just a religious prominence, it is also culturally significant because she acts as a ritualistic matron who takes charge of transmitting her singing repertoire, and very importantly her ritual knowledge, to the younger generation, represented by the 'unmarried girls' and 'singing youths'.[49]

Another tale told by Mien ritual masters in Hezhou, eastern Guangxi, illustrates the leading role of a 'mother of singing' and her relationship with three 'unmarried girls' and with her counterparts, the 'singing youths' (*gelang*), a reference to men who know how to sing Yao songs.[50] Interestingly, the story also has it that in the past the role of 'singing youths' was initially non-existent. Performing an 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan' ritual is a large social event; people come from far and wide to congratulate the host family on holding the ritual. It was said that distant guests used to arrive in the Yao village late at night because they had travelled such a long way. A traditional way for the Yao to show hospitality to guests from faraway places is to hold a 'sitting in the hall and singing' (*zuogetang*) that will highlight courtship and potential marital alliances. In accordance with the tradition, the host family will invite several 'unmarried girls' to sing with the guests. Nevertheless, because the 'unmarried girls' are usually too young to know how to sing, the host family also asks a 'mother of singing' to lead and teach them and even sing in their place.[51]

In actual performance, the role of a 'mother of singing' in leading, teaching and helping the singing is also extended to and manifested in her relationship with 'singing youths'.[52] Wu Ninghua reports that the 'mother of singing', Huang Sanmei, whom she interviewed in Hezhou said, 'I am "mother of singing", and I sing with the "singing youths". The reason I sing with them is they are ignorant of how to sing properly. So I teach them, lead them and help them with singing'.[53] Wu Ninghua

[49] Zheng has adduced a similar argument about the significance of the 'mother of singing' in transmitting singing repertoire and ritual knowledge. See Zheng Changtian, *op. cit.* 218-221.
[50] In this case, there are three 'singing youth' participants. They act interchangeably with the other role of 'unmarried boys' (*tongnan*). See Wu Ninghua, *op. cit.* 20.
[51] Wu Ninghua, *op. cit.* 20.
[52] Wu Ninghua, ibid., 105-106.
[53] The statement in Chinese reads: '我是歌母，我和歌郎一起唱，意思是他們不會唱，我教他們唱，我帶他們一起唱，幫他們唱'. See Wu Ninghua, ibid., 106.

argues that it is not really that the 'singing youths' really do not know how to sing; instead, the statement made by Huang Sanmei reflects a common practice observed at a 'sitting in the hall and singing' held with the intention of entertaining guests, but also holding out the prospect of courting and eventual marriage. The practice is to 'help singing' (*bangchang*). That is, whenever either of the two sides, the host family/village or the guests, fails to respond to their turn to sing, someone with more experience can join in and help. As 'singing youth' refers to a 'young man' (*housheng shaonian*) in ritual texts, supposedly they are not as experienced as the 'mother of singing' in terms of performance.[54] Therefore, in a similar vein to the relationship the 'mother of singing' has with the three 'unmarried girls', she also symbolically supervises the singing of the 'singing youths'.

Here it is useful to point out two significant differences between the ritual master and the 'mother of singing', namely, the different ways in which they obtain their knowledge and the languages they use in ritual. Pu Hengqiang adopts the term 'learning through imitation' (*piaoxue*) to describe a way of learning in which a learner's active engagement plays a large part in his or her acquisition of the intended knowledge. Any formalities with respect to content, purpose, setting and time in such a learning method are extremely flexible.[55] Indeed, unlike the knowledge that a male acquires to become a ritual specialist through the holding of an ordination, there is neither a formal ritual nor a clear genealogy of transmission manifested in the training of a 'mother of singing'. Occasionally, the transmission of the status of a 'mother of singing' can be traced through the maternal line. Pan Simei (1913-2002), a late Mien 'mother of singing' in the Changning area of southwest Hunan, inherited her singing skills from her mother and grandmother.[56] Moreover, in contrast to ritual specialists who obtain ritual repertoires from their masters by reciting the texts at ritual and ceremonial sites and copying the ritual manuscripts, a 'mother of singing' builds up her singing repertoire largely by way of observing, memorizing and imitating. In other words, becoming a 'mother of singing' is primarily based on an individual

[54] Wu Ninghua, ibid..
[55] Pu Hengqiang, 'Piao xue: zhide zhuyi de minjian yinyue chuancheng fangshi' 剽學—值得注意的民間音樂傳承方式 (Piao Xue: A Way of Transmission Worth Studying in Folk Music), *Zhongguo yinyue* (中國音樂 Chinese Music) 3 (2002), 23-24.
[56] Zheng Changtian, *op. cit.* 219.

female's avid interest in and enthusiasm for singing; recognition is often culturally determined.

A highly praised 'mother of singing' invariably learns her singing repertoire orally. However, nowadays women's exposure to the Yao written tradition has initiated the process of writing down the folksongs they know. The aforementioned 'mother of singing', Pan Simei, knew over 2,000 songs, including those sung at both secular and religious 'sitting in the hall and singing'. She knew all the songs she sang by heart and was not literate in Chinese. Aware of her shortcoming, in order to transmit the repertoire of songs sung specifically for vow-honouring rituals, she asked literate men to write down her songs.[57] This is one of the reasons so many women now own books, in most cases, a 'book of singing'. For instance, in Dingcao, there is a group of women aged between fifty and seventy, who are gifted with beautiful voices and possess a religious songbook entitled *Songbook of Relieving People in the Red House* (*honglou duren geshu*). The lyrics written in the songbook are openings to and descriptions of different ritual programmes conducted in the ordination ceremony. The significance of the specific songbook is that, whenever an ordination ceremony is to be held, two of these women who possess such a 'book of singing' must be invited and included.

The second point here is about the respective languages a ritual master and a 'mother of singing' use in ritual performance and their significance. As Webb Keane reveals, the shift in languages used in religious performance denotes different characteristics of the deities invoked in the eyes of performers.[58] The language a Yao ritual master uses is 'religious language' that is believed to be closely related to Chinese (see Chapter 2). The language is referred to as [Ch] *guihua* by the ritual masters themselves and literally means 'ghost language'. Since the term for ghosts and deities is the same in Yao daily language (*mien*[53]), 'ghost language' can be broadly understood as the language utilized to communicate with otherworldly beings.

[57] Zheng Changtian, ibid., 217-221. It is noteworthy that the Yao women are indeed able to commit their stories to paper themselves nowadays. He Guangjuan, a Mun woman who is in her fifties I met in Dingcao, showed me many seven-syllable texts she has composed herself. One of the texts is entitled 'Song of a Bitter Life' (*kumingge*) and describes her past experience of being severely ill and her appreciation for the doctor who saved her life.

[58] Webb Keane, 'Religious Language', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26 (1997), 47-71.

'Ghost language' is used to chant and recite ritual texts and invoke such Daoist deities as the Three Pure Ones (*sanqing*), among many others, for it is understood that these 'Chinese' deities do not know the Yao language.

In contrast, the 'mother of singing' uses 'folksong language' (*geyaoyu*). Unlike religious language that can only be utilized in ritual settings, 'folksong language' is commonly used in secular folksong settings as well as ritual settings among the Yao. What is most significant is that, compared with the religious language associated with non-Yao entities (Chinese, Daoist deities and so on), the voices of 'folksong language' are strongly associated with Yao identity. Moreover, women, represented by the 'mother of singing', are assigned a leading role in claiming Yao identity, particularly in the ritual of 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan'.

The ritual of 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan' includes two main segments: one is the 'Vow of the Primary Basin' (*yuanpenyuan*), also called the 'Vow of Ancestors' (*zuzongyuan*); the other is the 'Vow of Singing Hall' (*getangyuan*), also referred to as the 'Vow of King Pan' (*panwangyuan*).[59] According to Wu Ninghua, there are obvious differences between the two segments both in the purposes of the ritual segment and in the languages and the music the performers use.[60] The purpose of the 'Vow of Primary Basin' is to invite ancestors and the deities of foreign origin (*waishen*) to come to act as witnesses to ensure the efficacy of the ritual; most of the language and music used for this segment are 'religious language' and Daoist music. Conversely, the aim of the 'Vow of Singing Hall' is to invite and entertain the Deities of Three Temples (*sanmiaoshen*) and King Pan, who are regarded as Yao deities; the principal language used for this segment is Yao folksong language accompanied by Yao tunes.[61]

It is in the second segment that the 'mother of singing' begins to play a prominent role. In this section, the non-Yao people present at the ritual have to wear

[59] The 'Vow of the Primary Pot' consists of three sub-segments, namely: 'Inviting the Deities' (*qingsheng daotan*), 'Opening the Altar and Honouring the Vow' (*kaitan huanyuan*), and 'Offering Sacrifices to the Soldiers' (*jibing shangbing*). The 'Vow of the Singing Hall' is the final sub-segment of the ritual, called 'Honouring A Vow to King Pan'. It takes one and a half days to perform the 'Vow of Primary Basin', and one day to perform the 'Vow of Singing Hall'. For more details about the ritual, see Wu Ninghua, *op. cit.* 33-43.
[60] Wu Ninghua, 'Yishi zhong de shishi', 44.
[61] Ibid.

Yao turbans and are forbidden to speak other, non-Yao languages.[62] Obviously, to have an absolutely Yao environment is a way to welcome and show respect to the Yao's own deities. Moreover, the Yao people believe that only the voice of the 'mother of singing' and her actual singing are beautiful and powerful enough to entertain them. Therefore, rather than a ritual master, the 'mother of singing' has to be the first one to sing when the section of the programme dedicated to the Yao mythic ancestor Panhu commences. Although she has to sing a fixed repertoire of songs – in this case the 'Song for Worshipping the Sacred Kings of Three Temples' (*sanmiao wang baishensheng ge*), that has been written down in texts – she is at liberty to sing 'supporting lyrics and melodies' before she begins singing the set texts. Wu Ninghua has called these improvised lyrics and melodies 'praying by singing' (*gehua de daoci*). The lyrics are nowhere to be found in ritual texts.[63] And this is exactly where the singing style and religious significance of the 'mother of singing', or the voice of the female, are so different from those of the ritual master.

To sum up, by placing a focus on 'women' in the religious domain, this section has revealed the ritual and cultural prominence of the 'mother of singing'. Mythically, women's intact regenerative power is accentuated, namely a virgin as a human sacrifice for Panhu. Later in the ritual, the emphasis on women is focused more on their beautiful singing. In an actual performance, the role of the 'mother of singing' and her relationships with the 'unmarried girls' and 'singing youths' indicate her leading status as a matron in the transmission of ritual and cultural knowledge through the medium of singing. Presumably, as awareness of literacy grew, competent female singers would ask people with the knowledge of Chinese literacy to write down their songs. Most significantly, the respective languages a ritual master and a 'mother of singing' use and the main deities with whom they engage show that women play a crucial role in delimiting the boundaries between the Yao and non-Yao. To a certain degree, women's singing reconfirms Yao identity in the presence of the language and deities of foreign origin.

[62] Ibid., 40.
[63] Ibid., 125-127.

Reviewing these examples, it is worth considering the proposition that women are the probable authors of ritual texts involving narratives about courtship and marriage. Moreover, as will be argued in the following section, these narratives might point to the different ways in which women express their subjectivities. This is a point of departure I have chosen to take in making a textual analysis of the narratives of six female fertility deities—'roaming deities' (*youshen*) and 'flower names' (*huaming*), in which the former describe women's reflections on and resistance to the social structure of a patrilineal descent and virilocal residence; the latter illustrating women's active religious engagements, in next section.

Females' Subjectivities: Women who Died Young

To discuss the ways in which Yao women have embodied their subjectivities in a religious domain that revolves around an androcentric ideology, I have chosen the narratives of twenty-four female fertility deities for analysis. Despite the fact that the texts are now in the repertoire of ritual masters, to be sung by male ritual specialists in religious settings that involve asking for children, I suggest these texts be read from a 'gendered' perspective. That is, I propose viewing these narratives of female fertility deities as folksongs, in both their colloquial and literary forms, originally composed and sung in the secular settings in which women might have acted as the composer and performer.

In a ritual context, these narratives are invocations that call upon the deities to manifest themselves through the ritual specialist. Kristofer Schipper argues that, 'They are, in fact, short epic ballads, describing the attributes of the god and the events during which he or she demonstrated supernatural powers'.[64] If these narratives can be viewed as short epic ballads, the rendering of the histories of these female fertility deities is hardly one of any miraculous deeds. Instead, most of the texts, particularly those in colloquial form, designated 'roaming deities' (*youshen*), are permeated with women's outright resistance to marriage pattern that is focused on

[64] Kristofer Schipper, 'Vernacular and Classical Rituals in Taoism', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 45/1 (1985), 21-57 at 31.

patrilineality.[65] Furthermore, some of the texts, especially in literary form, entitled 'flower names' (*huaming*), have depicted women as active actors in their pursuit of transcendental experiences.

Though both the Mun and the Mien have similar fertility deities and flower cosmogenesis (Flower Mountain for the Mun; Peach Spring Grotto for the Mien), in terms of the textual material of performances, these texts are more commonly found among the former than the latter. In practice, these texts are in the process of becoming 'decontextualized texts', because the performance of rituals asking for children is in decline.[66] Therefore, my knowledge of how the fertility deities are summoned and how the texts are sung in actual performance is largely based on interview materials. Several Daoist priests and ritual masters in Dingcao and two Mun scholars, Deng Wentong and Huang Guiqian, have stated that these texts should be sung when the Mother of Emperors is invoked in such large-scale rituals as an ordination, in which a section dedicated to asking for children is included. In previous times, a ritual whose purpose was to ask for children could be a large-scale ritual as it could last for up to five days. Nowadays, at least among the Mun communities in western Guangxi, an independent ritual asking for children is seldom held. Should they be sung, the texts will be sung in the ritual master's religious language. Given the inaccessibility of actual performances of the texts, my analysis draws heavily on textual representation, even though it does posit the texts in a larger regional context. The texts are from a specific manuscript: UB 2004-15 Folder 1 (Leiden Collection) with an unspecified title (as the cover page is lost).[67]

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[65] 'Roaming deities' (*youshen*) can also refer to an annual ritual ceremony addressed to a female deity, Liu Daning (the First Lady with the Family Name Liu). It is commonly practised among the Shanzi Yao (another ethnonym for Mun people), the Chashan Yao, the Ao Yao and the Hualan Yao in Jinxiu Yao autonomous county, Laibing city, eastern Guangxi. See Quanguo renmin daibiao dahui minzu weiyuanhui bangongshi (eds), *Guangxi Dayaoshan Yaozu shehui lishi qingkuang diaocha wuzhong* 廣西大瑤山瑤族社會歷史情況調查五種 (Five Surveys of Social and Historical Conditions of the Yao People in the Big Mountain of the Yao) (unspecified publisher, 1958), 74-75.

[66] My own fieldwork experiences in Dingcao and the interviews with Deng Wentong have both confirmed the decline in the ritual performance of 'asking for children' rituals. It is not absolutely clear when the decline began but, according to Zhang Daogui, one of the reasons for the decline of such a ritual might be partly attributable to the birth-control policy initiated after the 1950s.

[67] When I showed the texts to Zhang Daogui, he suggested the title of this manuscript be *Ritual of the Red-Fertility Building* (*honglou ke*). Many Yao ritual-master manuscripts contain similar narratives of 'women who died young'. In comparison, in the Munich Collection a manuscript is entitled *Ritual of the Flower Hall* (*huatangke*) (589 Cod. Sin. 765).

There are two categories of female fertility deities who were recruited by the Flower Matron (*huapo*) to assist the Mother of Emperors in taking care of the flower cosmogenesis and sending children to parents who longed for them. One group is invariably named after a combination of a specific womanly task and a general referent for women. Womanly tasks might be 'borrowing clothes' (*jieyi*), 'arranging clothes' (*zhengyi*), 'escorting guests' (*guoyou*), 'putting on make-up' (*tiaofen*), 'hanging the mirror' (*guajing*) and 'brewing wine' (*zaojiu*). General referents for women include 'lady' (*niangzi*), 'lady sister' (*niangjie*), 'mother' (*mu*), 'female' (*nü*), 'grandmother' (*po*), 'mistress' (*furen*) and 'young lady' (*xiaoniang*). One example of a deity named in this way is 'the lady who borrows clothes' (*jieyi niangzi*). She is responsible for the clothing of the deities invoked. To a certain degree, the ritual tasks these female fertility deities have been assigned are associated with womanly tasks, for example, embroidering, performed in a daily context.[68]

The other is a group of female spiritual acolytes who are referred to as 'spirits' (*yao*). There are two subgroups in this category: 'roaming deities' (*youshen)* and 'flower names' (*huaming*). They have been recruited by the Flower Matron to assist the Mother of Emperors in governing different parts of Flower Mountain. To a certain degree, in the ritual tasks they have been assigned, they bear a strong resemblance to the thirty-six Pojie (grandmothers and sisters) of the cult of the Lady of Linshui in southern Fujian and Taiwan or the Six Holy Ladies who assist the Queen Mother of the West in Guangdong.[69]

Above all, the Chinese character *yao* 妖 used for this group of female fertility deities is particularly telling and requires further exploration. The common meaning of *yao* is demon. However, if we read the character as a combination of its radical *nü* 女 (woman) on the left side and the character *yao* 夭 (to die young) on the right side, there is another way this character can be understood, namely, as a reference to 'women who died young'. In a sense, these female fertility deities can be regarded as

[68] Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
[69] For the cult of the Lady of Linshui, see Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult*, Kristin Fryklund (trans.) (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008[1988]), 123-141. For the Queen Mother of the West, see Qu Dajun (1630-1696), 'Shenyu' 神語 (Miscellany on Deities), *Guangdong Xinyu* 廣東新語 (Guangdong Miscellanies) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1934), 214.

possessing supernatural power in the way a demon does. Nevertheless, the meaning of 'women who died young' is closer to what the texts have conveyed.

Undoubtedly the richness in meanings of these narratives cannot be reduced to one single monolithic interpretation. Nonetheless, one feature that stands out is that they demonstrate women's discontent with the marriage pattern enshrined in an androcentric ideology, namely patrilineal descent and virilocal residence. This is in fact a fairly prominent theme in folksong culture across different ethnicities and localities in China.[70] These dissatisfactions are invariably expressed in accordance with the different stages of women's lives and the auxiliary roles they are expected to fulfil, requiring them to be dutiful daughters, loyal wives and loving mothers.[71] As will be revealed below, I argue that in these texts there are two sorts of narrative describing women who either want to break free from their given destiny and social roles, particularly as wives and mothers, or do not fulfil these anticipated roles. One narrative pattern is that of women who have died a 'bad death'. The other narrative pattern is that about women who cultivate themselves into a transcendental state.

1. 'Bad Deaths': Discontented Marriage

Out of twenty-four narratives, thirteen describe a 'bad death' (for a full list of the twenty-four narratives, see Appendix 1). The causes of death are quite various, and inlcude being eaten by a tiger, committing suicide, succumbing to an illness and being accidentally killed by one's parents. Among them all, the following three narratives, those of the third and the sixth 'roaming deities', and the sixth 'flower

[70] Relevant literature on this topic is plentiful. To name just a few examples: Li Zhao-hong, 'Shaanxi jindai geyao zhong de nüxing hunyin shijie' 陝西近代歌謠中的女性婚姻世界 (Female Marriage Reflected in Modern Shaanxi Folksongs), *Xi'an wenli xueyuan xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* (西安文理學院學報 [社會科學版] Journal of Xi'an University of Arts and Science [Social Sciences Edition]), 15/3 (2012), 1-5. Chen An-ling, 'Yuyan pingjia jieshi minnanyu geyao de nüxing jiazhiguan' 語言評價揭示閩南語歌謠的女性價值觀 (A Study of Female Values in Ballads in Southern Min Dialect in the Light of Language Appraisal), *Fujian yike daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* (福建醫科大學學報 [社會科學版] Journal of Fujian Medical University [Social Sciences Edition]), 9/2 (2008), 29-33. Rubie S. Watson, 'Chinese Bridal Laments: The Claims of a Dutiful Daughter', in Bell Yung, Evelyn S. Rawski, and Rubie S. Watson (eds), *Harmony and Counterpoint: Ritual Music in Chinese Context* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 107-129. Liu Fei-Wen, 'Literacy, Gender, and Class: Nüshu and Sisterhood Communities in Southern Rural Hunan', *Nan Nü*, 6/2 (2004), 241-282. Anne E. McLaren, *Performing Grief: Bridal Laments in Rural China* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

[71] Rubie S. Watson, 'Chinese Bridal Laments', 107-129.

name', clearly reveal a mentality of resistance to marriage and childrearing. The three women in these stories chose to liberate themselves from wifehood and motherhood by committing suicide.

The story of the third 'roaming deity' reads as follows:

> In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked the third. The lady was surnamed Tan, and her family name was written on a white sheet of paper. [It is said that] the lady had made countless mistakes during her lifetime. [One example recounting one such mistake was as follows.] [One day,] after the Tan lady had eaten dumplings for breakfast, she left home and went to the riverside to do the laundry.
>
> She carried the firewood on one end of her shoulder pole and her baby on the other end. The Tan lady arrived at the riverside and began to do the laundry. She washed the clothes [of the whole family] until her loins began to ache and her eyes blurred. [These arduous household chores caused her to ponder:] how much she had been suffering [from the marital life and the various duties that it entailed].
>
> After musing a long while, she decided to commit suicide by throwing herself straight into the nine-layered river. After the Tan lady died, the Immortal Matron [took pity on her because of her arduous life,] and recruited her into her flowery pantheon to take up duties on Flower Mountain. The Tan lady was processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes [to take care of the flower-garden and the flower-souls].

彩花楼上娘第三 白紙寫書妹姓譚
千錯萬錯娘自錯 莊果小娘去洗衫

早間喫餃出門去 一頭担樵一頭嬰
去到江边娘洗濯 濯得腰痛眼都班

仔細思良成耐耐 將身直落九重灘
死了官道娘成鬼 太婆招妹管花山

The story of the Tan woman vividly illustrates the hardships entailed for a female in household chores: doing the laundry, collecting firewood, childrearing and, by extension, marital life. The Tan woman decided to escape from all of the duties involved in wifehood and motherhood by committing suicide.

If the story of the Tan woman has not made women's outright resistance to patrilineal descent and virilocal residence clear, then the story of the sixth 'roaming deity', the Hua woman, will certainly drive the point home. Her story goes as follows:

> In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked the sixth. The lady was surnamed Hua, and her family name was written on a white sheet of paper. [It is said that] the lady made countless mistakes during her lifetime. [An example recounts one such mistake happened as follows.] When the Hua girl reached the age of fifteen, her parents had accepted a marriage proposal for her. The Hua girl had to drink the tea sent by the male side and this act symbolized that the marriage bargain was settled.
>
> So the Hua girl was married at the early age of fifteen. As a consequence of her early marriage, she suddenly found herself an outsider in another family. The Hua girl tried her best to attend to every need of her parents-in-law and her sisters-in-law.
>
> Every day she helped in preparing the meals, beginning with pounding the grain and washing the rice. [The household chores consumed all of her time so] she was never able to spin even one hemp thread, [as she used to do at home]. She had to fetch the water from the river outside the village as well. [These burdensome household chores made her ponder:] how much she had been suffering [because of her marital life and the various duties that accompanied it]. After brooding a long while, she decided to commit suicide by throwing herself straight into the nine-layered river.
>
> The Hua girl was willing to go to the river in the Netherworld but not the river on the edge of the village again. After the Hua lady died, the Immortal Matron [took pity on her because of her unfortunate marital life,] and recruited her into her flowery pantheon to take care of the flower-basket. The Hua lady was processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes [to take care of the flower-garden and the flower-souls].

彩花楼上娘第六 白紙寫書妹姓華
千錯萬錯娘自錯 妹年十五領人茶

十五領喫人茶定 少年十五嫁人家
嫁落人家為外客 服侍公婆及妹夫

日里倒米并倒碓 不曾緝得一條蔴
嫂娘思良成耐耐 抛身直落九重江

担甕下江去取水 都向黄泉条路灵

It is noteworthy that the Yao practise diverse marriage patterns that allow for bilateral descent and both virilocal and uxorilocal residence.[72] Therefore, a Yao woman is not necessarily destined to be married out and be an 'outsider' in the family of her husband, as is illustrated in the last story. Nevertheless, the marriage pattern of the androcentric ideology leaves one in no doubt that this is identified as the source of the lamentations expressed in the song. Again, thinking about her arduous marital life and her invidious status as an 'outsider', the Hua woman decided to release from the roles assigned to her by committing suicide.

The story of the sixth 'woman who died young' in the subgroup of 'flower names' is rendered in a similar fashion as the above two narratives, only the woman in this particular story decided to free herself from the restraints imposed by a patrilineal lineage even before she entered the marital life. The story reads as follow:

> In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked sixth, surnamed Xiu. She was originally from the Peach Spring Grotto and her original surname was Zhou. The flower that symbolized the sixth girl would bloom before all the other species of flower did. The sixth girl was indeed charming and refined.
>
> The sixth girl was also humorous and easygoing. No one was able to outwit her in anything. [Even so, such a clever girl was still destined to be married out. When she came of age,] her father agreed to a marriage deal proposed by a Lei family. He happily received the tea and the gifts that symbolized the confirmation of an engagement. [But he was not to know this was the beginning of a tragedy.]
>
> [On the wedding day,] the Lei family sent a sedan chair to pick up the sixth girl. The sixth girl ascended the sedan chair and arrived at the Lei family. [While people were still celebrating her marriage,] the sixth girl decided to hang herself with three feet of thin red silk cord. [Deep down her heart,] she knew that it would be better to die early than to struggle all her life to be free of the duties imposed by the patrilineal lineage.
>
> After the sixth girl died, she was processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes in the Peach Spring Grotto. Today a talented man (the ritual specialist) issued an official document to summon the sixth girl to descend to the household. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the sixth girl knew

[72] Chen Meiwen, *Cong mingming tan Guangxi Tianlin Panguyao,* 44-53.

> it was time to send the white flower-soul (boy) to the couple [who sponsored the ritual.] and join the feast.

影花弟六妹姓休 出在桃原妹姓周
百花未綻娘花綻 小娘媚兒自風流

說若小娘真好笑 別人不庇妹花油
爺領雷家人茶定 雷家茶礼歡來收

雷家轎子人來迎 小娘轎□坐門樓
三尺紅羅吊頸死 不如早死免宗由

小娘死了娘成鬼 化作奠桃花不來
今日才郎有狀請 入筵送子与郎夫

As can been seen, despite how clever and outstanding the sixth 'flower name' might have been in her mortal form, she was destined to be married out. Even though she decided to fulfil the duty of a filial daughter, she rejected assuming the roles of wife and mother.

In summary, the narratives of the third and sixth 'roaming deities' and the sixth 'flower name' expose a strong layer of discontent with their given fate in wifehood and motherhood in general and of married life in particular among women. The only way for them to transcend their bitter destiny was to die a 'bad death'. Why do so many narratives of female fertility deities recount 'bad deaths'? In particular, why does there appear to be a strong warning about and resistance to a marriage that is a patrilineal-oriented arrangement? The answers to these questions need to be sought in a regional context. Brigitte Baptandier says that a 'bad death' is a way to achieve 'individualization':

> In general a bad death has the effect of individualizing the deceased, for whom ritualized mourning becomes impossible… Someone who has died a bad death is no longer a link in the unbreakable line of ancestors, but rather an individual, a sort of free electron, condemned to wander, sterile and ostracized. He or she is thus impossible to mourn.[73]

[73] Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshu,* 87.

Whether the 'bad deaths' are caused by an accident or are the result of a suicide, the 'individualization' of these female fertility deities among the Yao has made their worship similar to the worship of 'women who died young' (*guniang*) among other populations in southeastern China and in Taiwan. Research on the topic reveals that the worship serves as an important mechanism to amend the fate of these women who had not been able to fulfil their given roles in a patriarchal society. By worshipping them, the potential danger with which this ambiguous sexual category might threaten social order is transformed into something visible and positive. Most importantly, because they were freed from the moral and cultural expectations of ordinary women, their autonomy in their sexual pursuits and their ability to ensure birth and pregnancy is often heightened.[74] In other words, on the one hand the textual representation of female fertility deities in the Yao religious tradition is very much in line with the other forms of 'woman who died young' worship in southeastern China and in Taiwan. These female deities all suffered different forms of 'bad deaths' but eventually gained the power to give or protect children.

Following the logic of 'individuation', the other way Yao women are able to go beyond their given fate as wives and mothers is to seek spiritual cultivation. Among the twenty-four narratives, some of the stories told in a much more literary style depict different images of women pursuing transcendental experiences. In a similar vein to the narratives of Guanyin, Mazu and the Eternal Mother—the three most important female deities in Chinese culture who emphasize the unambiguously positive quality of purity and legitimize their liberation from wifehood and childbirth—women, as represented by female fertility deities, can be independent actors on their way to a transcendental state.[75]

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[74] For example in Fujian, see Brigitte Baptandier, *The Lady of Linshui.* In Taiwan, see Huang Pingying, 'Taiwan minjian xinyang guniang de fengsi-yige Taiwan shehuishi de kaocha' 臺灣民間信仰「孤娘」的奉祀—一個臺灣社會史的考察 (The Worship of Women who Died Young in Taiwanese Popular Belief: A Study on the Social History of Taiwan), MA thesis (National Central University, 2000). Yang Shuling, 'Tainan diqu guniangma xinyang yu chuanshuo zhi yanjiu' 台南地區姑娘媽信仰與傳說之研究 (Research on the Belief and Tales of Women who Died Young in the Tainan Area), MA thesis (National Cheng Kung University, 2006). Lin Fu-shih, *Guhun yu guixiong de shijie-bei Taiwan de ligui xinyang* 孤魂與鬼雄的世界—北臺灣的厲鬼信仰 (The World of Wandering Souls and Ghostly Heroes: The Belief in Vicious Ghosts in Northern Taiwan) (Taipei: Taipei xianli wenhua zhongxin, 1995).

[75] P. Steven Sangren, 'Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu and the Eternal Mother', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* 9/1 (1983), 4-25 at 11.

2. Women's Cultivation and Transcendence

In the same manuscript are some narratives of 'women who died young' that use literary metaphors and assign women the names of different kinds of fruit-bearing flowers. The latter aspect has given rise to the title 'flower names'. With the exception of the above-mentioned sixth 'flower name' who died a 'bad death', most of the other narratives tend to describe how beautiful and fruitful the flowers/girls are. Among them all are two narratives that interestingly depict women who are in pursuit of cultivation and transcendence by performing good deeds and reading the Classics. The text about a woman strenuously dedicated to cultivating herself reads as follows:

> Deep in the East Mountains grew a camellia flower that was actually a celestial maiden ranked first [in the heavenly world]. The first celestial maiden sometimes wandered up into the mountains; sometimes down inside the fences of the village households. The camellia flower would usually bloom before all the other flowers had opened their petals, [attributable to the wondrous power the first celestial maiden possessed.] In one of her previous lives, the first celestial maiden had been a mortal and she was born into a family surnamed Pan.
>
> Three preceding generations of the Pan family had all performed good deeds. It was a truly blessed family in which the Pan girl was steadily able to cultivate herself in her mortal guise. [After a life-time of strenuous cultivation,] the Pan girl was able to be elevated into the highest heaven of the Grand Veil (*Daluo tian*).[76] Diligently indeed had she cultivated herself. This was why her good deeds had been reported to the deities in the heavenly realm.
>
> Whoever said that the camellia flower cannot produce seeds? Can you not see how the seeds produced by the camellia flower have spread far and wide from up in the mountains and to down inside the fences of the village households? Therefore, the believers who were present at the household altar were left in no doubt. The celestial maiden being summoned was in the form of a camellia flower and was once a cultivated mortal woman surnamed Pan.
>
> Among the crowd gathered in front of the household altar was present a talented man (the ritual specialist). The talented man issued

[76] *Daluo tian* is the highest heaven of the permanent realm of the Primordial Beginning, one of the highest deities among the Three Pure Ones in the Daoist pantheon. See Livia Kohn (ed.), *Daoism Handbook* (Brill, 2000), 247.

an official document to summon the first celestial maiden to descend to the household. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the first celestial maiden knew it was her duty to send the flower-souls of the children asked down to the household [that had sponsored the ritual].

東浚山茶妹弟一 半在高山半在欄
百花未綻娘花綻 昔日原來妹姓潘

三代祖宗娘修善 穩身直上大羅天
元是上界天仙女 三度修身奏上方

誰說山茶不結子 山茶結子滿山欄
眾信在壇你莫怪 妹是山茶本姓潘

今日才郎有狀請 妹來送子入家門

The story depicting a woman studying the Classics reads,

In the kingdom governed by Confucius lived a very chaste girl ranked the eleventh [in her family], surnamed Zong. The Zong girl was said to have been born with an upright spirit. The legend has it that she began to chant the scriptures when she had just turned seventeen.

People said that she chanted thousands of scrolls of scriptures per day and she always had the scriptures by her side from dawn to dusk. The reason she was so diligent in chanting the scriptures was she was destined to reveal this method of [self-]cultivation to the mortal world. After fulfilling her purpose in this world, she had been transformed into a flower by the Buddha so that people could worship its chaste spirit.

Each leaf and every branch of the chaste flower produced only one pod of seeds. It had worried the people greatly [that the chaste flower might not flourish and therefore not produce the seeds]. But the crowd gathered at the household altar need not have worried, for the chaste flower not only bloomed but also produced seeds.

Among the crowd gathered in front of the household altar was present a talented man (the ritual specialist). The talented man issued an official document to summon the chaste flower/the Zong girl to descend to the household. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the chaste flower/the Zong girl knew it was her duty to send the flower-souls of the children asked down to the household [that had sponsored the ritual].

南貞十一妹姓宗 正是仲尼国里人
小娘生來多端正 年登十七念經文

一日念經得萬卷 念經日夜不离身
昔日小娘身有道 变佛南貞花一根

一葉一枝生一束 小妹花發好愁人

今日才郎有狀請 妹來送子与才君

Compared with the largely marginalized status of women in the Yao religious domain, these two narratives have surprisingly depicted women as prominent actors in their pursuits of cultivation and transcendence. The second story of the eleventh 'flower name' even employs narrative elements with Buddhist and Confucian associations. The Confucian ideology of a patriarchal society is often blamed as the source of women's subordinate status in China.[77] Be that as it may, in this particular case, reading the Classics of Buddhism and of Confucianism is represented as a way for women to cultivate themselves. By doing so, women are then able to transcend and become immortal beings who can grant life to parents who yearn for children.

To sum up, if we accept the proposition that these ritual texts could be understood as products of female singing, there is a strong possibility that female singers were expressing women's general attitudes towards their anticipated roles as wives and mothers. By expressing female anxieties about a patrilineal marriage, as well as by committing suicide to escape from wifehood and motherhood, these songs symbolically act as a weapon women wield to embody their subjectivities in the face of the intrusion of a patrilineal ideology and its concomitant marital arrangements. The cultivated image of women, on the other hand, tellingly indicates the Yao women's possible engagement in religious conduct, albeit the narratives might also possibly have been generated on the basis of the Yao women's existing awareness and knowledge of the dominant religious-cultural traditions, Confucian and Buddhist teachings.

[77] Dorothy Ko, Jahyun Kim Haboush, and Joan R. Piggott, 'Introduction', in Dorothy Ko et al. (eds), *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1-24. Shanshan Du and Ya-chen Chen (eds), *Women and Gender in Contemporary Chinese Societies: Beyond Han Patriarchy* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 2011).

Conclusion

This chapter suggests the importance of a 'gendered' perspective including two dimensions that should be borne in mind when investigating Yao religious practices and textual representations. In the first section, by placing the focus on 'women' specifically, I have probed the possibility of women sharing the authorship of songs written down in the manuscripts utilized by ritual masters. My purpose is to demonstrate that, even though males sing most of the texts, a 'gendered' perspective is urgently needed in the reading of the contents. Most significantly, women's centrality in singing has served as a very important means to sustain and proclaim a Yao identity in the face of Chinese language and deities.

Secondly, by suggesting that these texts should be read as literary products of female singing, I interpret the narratives of female fertility deities as expressions of 'female subjectivities'. I argue that Yao women have used them to express their anxieties about patrilineal-biased marriage in general. To escape from their assigned fate as wives and mothers, the female authors have depicted two different yet correlated images of women: one is women enduring 'bad deaths'; the other is women cultivating themselves into a transcendental state. Both are ways of 'individuation' open to women to divert them from the given roles a patrilineal society expects of them.

In conclusion, the Yao women do share a situation similar to that of women in other societies, as 'the marginality of woman to the written tradition contrasts sharply with her centrality in the realm of social and corporeal practice'.[78] This chapter reveals that Yao women have embodied a reflexive voice in the face of the importation, if not to put too fine a point on it, intrusion, of an androcentric ideology enforced through the practice of religion that has been infused with imperial metaphors. By wielding singing and songs as weapons, the Yao have sustained their indigenous ways of claiming who they are in the face of the powerful Other, the Chinese imperial state.

[78] Dorothy Ko et al. (eds), *Women and Confucian Cultures*, 20.

Chapter 6. Conclusion: A View From Below

This research has presented a number of Yao perspectives in their historical encounters with the others, especially the successive Chinese imperial states, by exploring a gendered dimension of the Yao ritual tradition. The purpose of the research has been to investigate the Yao religious domain as an interface at which the Chinese imperial state attempted to assert its civilizing projects, a male-privileging Daoist ordination in this case, by incorporating local society into official governance. Conversely, the Yao religious domain also proved to be a place at which the Yao assimilated and then transformed the religious-cum-imperial interventions in the light of their own cultural values. Most intriguingly, the research has shown that the positions of women and the agency of female singing have been appropriated into Yao's struggle to claim their autonomy in their negotiations with the Chinese civilizing projects on ritual terms.

Besides its introduction and conclusion, the research has devoted four chapters to discussions of Yao perspectives in their local reactions to the Chinese imperial state incorporation. Chapter Two begins by discussing the ways in which the Yao have projected and imagined the Chinese imperial states, especially those embodied in texts and oral stories. It points out that the Yao people have a bifurcated perception of the Chinese imperial system: the more distant and the higher the authority, the greater auspiciousness it embodies, that is, the emperors; the nearer the imperial system draws to the everyday experiences of the Yao, the more tangibly dangerous it becomes, that is, the local officials. Consequently, even though the Yao discussed here characterized a 'society of escape' and might have consciously kept a geographical and political distance from the grasping hands of Chinese imperial governance, paradoxically they do seem to have embraced the symbols relating to and radiating from the emperors. This discovery has paved the way to problematize the simplistic view of sinification in the discussion of Yao ritual tradition that implicitly treats the Yao's reception of Daoism, a religious tradition that vividly features the Chinese bureaucratic system, as a homogenous location reaction. These findings

provide the introduction to the collections of Yao ritual manuscripts to be studied in this research. The exploration of their textualites, that is, how the texts are made, in association with Yao manuscripts, has pointed out how the tradition of folksongs, especially those with reference to female fertility, has found its way to be integrated into the written tradition of ritual masters. This conclusion has opened a new window through which to explore the probability of women's engagement, in particular that of the female singer, in the making of Yao ritual texts.

Chapter Three discusses the different ways in which the Daoist ordination should be regarded as a civilizing project that is equipped with the mechanism and ideologies to make the Yao more subject to Chinese state governance. It explores two dimensions of the encompassments of the imperial ideologies and local cultural logic, examining their social consequences for gender relations at the religious interface. The emphasis on the father-son relationship, surname identity and an ideological basis, filial piety, to sustain the performance of the ritual, has made the Yao ordination almost interchangeable with patrilineal ancestor worship, that has been an important religious mechanism in facilitating the development of a lineage society. The cases of ordination found among the She and Hakka have indicated that the change or the decline in the performance of ordination had a close connection with the extent to which the two communities had been incorporated into Chinese state governance. On the face of it, on account of the taboos surrounding female pollution beliefs, the agency of Yao women seems to have been largely, if not completely, submerged in the civilizing project of the Chinese imperial state. Yet, the discussions of the pros and cons of the position of the wives of ritual specialists and their parents have opened the possibility that the Yao might well have reflected upon the social consequences of state intervention via the position of women.

Since the female pollution beliefs seem to have been a major factor in marginalizing the positions of women in Yao ritual tradition, Chapter Four has zoomed in to investigate the various levels on which the female fertility is culturally and ritually constructed. The chapter addresses three aspects of Yao personhood, including a corporeal, a cosmological and a cultivated dimension, and gender relationships constructed at different stages of a person's life cycle. It reveals that the

significance of female fertility and of the deities associated with fertility is highlighted more intensively before the onset of puberty, but the symbolic importance of female fertility has gradually been naturalized by the practice of the patrilineal Daoist ordination. At face value, it would seem that the significance of female fertility powers has been totally subsumed by a state civilizing project. And yet, when we turn our attention to the divine level and delve deeper into the stories of a locally respected female fertility deity, the Mother of Emperors, we find that the textual and ritual constructions of her deification and worship have actually helped in creating a symbolic space in which the Yao can negotiate with the cultural interventions of the others. Significantly, it has also represented a negative attitude towards the intervention of state power and shown the Yao's struggles in claiming their autonomy when faced with the powerful Other, the Chinese imperial state.

Chapter Five has paid close attention to a reading of the narratives of a group of female fertility deities, called 'roaming deities' (*Youshen*), who are acolytes of the Mother of Emperors, assisting in the protection of women and children. Unlike the Mother of Emperor who is inherently a divine being, the stories of these 'roaming deities' present different ways by which a person becomes a deity, albeit in one of the ways she might have to undergo a violent death. Having established the close association of women with 'singing', defined as 'performative literacy', and based on the understanding of the leading position of a 'mother of singing' in rituals dedicated to indigenous deities, the chapter suggests viewing these narratives of 'roaming deities' as probable products of female singing that in the past were integrated into ritual master manuscripts. In so doing, I argue that the female authors have used this rhetorical device to express their anxieties about patrilineal-biased marriage in general. Cogently, two different yet correlated images of women are depicted: one is of women enduring 'bad deaths'; the other is of women cultivating themselves into a transcendental state. Both are considered ways of 'individuation' open to women to divert them from the given roles a patrilineal society expects of them. In other words, these narratives suggestively points to the ways in which female authors express female subjectivities as well as conveying a collective criticism made by the Yao of the Chinese patrilineal ideology.

To conclude, by combining the methods of textual analysis and fieldwork investigation, with a focus on the narratives and practices surrounding female fertility and female fertility deities, the present study has been able to reveal that the Yao had actually utilized the positions of women and the act of female singing in their negotiations with and remodelling of the external religious-cum-imperial power. More importantly, it has also attempted to offer a 'gendered perspective', which I dub a 'view from below', revealing the human agency and dynamisms embedded in the transcultural dimension of Yao ritual tradition. The results of the present research are therefore highly relevant to two fields of study: the state and society, and gender and religion.

The State and Society: The Position of Women

The history of a non-Han Chinese minority society found in Chinese official historical documentation has invariably been written from the perspective of the state. This poses the dilemma of how is it possible to write a history of a minority society from that people's own point of view, particularly as they had not invented a writing system of their own? In this research, my intention has been to reconstruct a minority history from a local viewpoint by analysing the ritual texts and folksongs composed by the minority people themselves—even though the texts and songs were composed in the margins of the same religious culture that had initially been taken over from or influenced by the dominant Chinese culture.

Unquestionably, both the dating and authorship of the ritual texts and folksong are difficult to determine with any certitude, and undeniably the contents are also open to different ways of interpretation. Consequently, the narratives and information recounted in the texts and songs still remain partially elusive in any attempts to link them to any given historical events as these are recorded in official Chinese-language documents. Be that as it may, a reconstruction of an event-centred past for the Yao has never been the utmost concern for this study. Instead, being acutely aware of the limitations as well as the potential inherent in Yao ritual manuscripts and female singing, all this study intends to do is to underline the importance of the position of

women in understanding the historical interaction between the successive Chinese imperial states and a minority society.

As Paul Cohen has indicated in his dual approaches to the history of the Boxers, the term 'history' he uses sometimes 'refer[s] to the formal process of reconstruction of the past that is the historian's characteristic function....', and at other times 'encompass[es] the variety of ways, including experience and myth, in which people in general think about and relate to the past.'[1] The materials utilized in my analysis throughout this study might not be enough to be submitted to 'a formal process of reconstruction of the past', but they definitely encapsulate abundant information recounting the Yao's experiences and mythical concepts revealing how they think about and relate themselves to the past.

The present study has concentrated on exploring the cultural constructions of female fertility and female fertility deities in Yao ritual manuscripts. It has shown the potential offered by these locally phrased ritual documentations, in either oral or written form, for more thematic analyses of Yao history and religion.

Gender and Religion: Seeking Women's Hidden Agency

This research commenced with a quest to contextualize the female fertility associated texts and folksongs contained in Yao ritual master manuscripts. Its initial intention was to discover the hidden significance of female gender and female fertility deities. At first, any bid to make enquiries about the agency of women in Yao religion seemed to be a mission impossible, as neither the ethnographic present nor the Chinese-written historical documentation seemed to offer sufficient clues on which to base such an investigation. Fortunately, the prominence of female singers in ritual performance and village life and the close relationship between women and singing all hinted at a direction in which to look in order to find out the different ways in which women's agency has been embodied. What is even more intriguing, the agency of female fertility, as anthromorphized in locally respected female fertility deities, and

[1] Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), XV.

female singing have also been positioned and appropriated in the Yao's historical reactions to the state's incorporation agenda.

Ho Ts'ui-p'ing has concluded that 'the goddesses of the southwest empower not the deprived second gender but the conquered communities and the lost kingdom in the historical process of making China'.[2] In the case of the Yao, the construction of the goddesses has not empowered the conquered communities or the lost kingdoms in the historical process of making China, but it certainly does vividly represent the human agency and dynamisms present in local reactions to the process of Chinese imperial state expansion. In the course of that process, Yao women have not only helped to maintain the Yao cultural tradition and identity through their singing and songs, they have also succeeded in casting doubt on and levelling criticism at the emphasis on patrilineal ideology and descent, so prevalent in the making of Chinese society.

In conclusion, my study of the Yao religious culture and ritual manuscripts has shown the need to position an enquiry into a specific group of minority people in a historical, regional and cross-ethnic context. It has detailed a transcultural dimension in Yao religion by highlighting the significance of female fertility deities and in the act of female singing. In a broader sense, the outcome of the research has also strongly indicated the importance of a 'gendered perspective' in any future investigation of the relationship between the Chinese imperial state and minority society, and a religious tradition with a long history of male-orientation.

[2] Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, 'Gendering Ritual Community across the Chinese Southwest Borderland', in David Faure and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing (eds), *Chieftains into Ancestors: Imperial Expansion and Indigenous Society in Southwest China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 206-246 at 239.

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Glossary

aiqing xinge	愛情信歌
Ao Yao	坳瑤
Baidi Tianwang	白帝天王
baihua	白話
baihua geyao	白話歌謠
Baimiaotu	百苗圖
baitongnian	拜同年
baiyiren	白衣人
banbuzhan yuan	半補寨願
Ban Yao	板瑤
bangchang	幫唱
baodian	寶殿
Beifu Linggong	北府令公
beihangming	輩行名
biao	表
biaozou	表奏
Bixia yuanjun	碧霞元君
Bolo	博羅
caichan	財產
Cengcheng	增城
chaihuahuang	拆花皇
chang	唱
Changnin	常寧
Changsha	長沙
chao	朝
chaotian baibai ke xiaozui	朝天百拜科削罪
chaqin xinge	查親信歌
Chashan Yao	茶山瑤
chenchiang chenci	襯腔襯詞
chengnianli	成年禮
Chen Jinggu	陳靖姑
Chen Shidao	陳師道
chouwu	愁屋
chuandu	傳度

chuanjiabao	傳家寶
chuanjia guibao	傳家貴寶
chushishou, lang zai Hunan wei zai zhou	初世收，郎在湖南未在州
cunben yu erzisun	存本與兒子孫
da	大
da chalang	大茶郎
dadaolu	打道籙
dagongde	大功德
daliao liaoguo guanxia liushiliu nian dingsi sui ba yue ershi’er ri	大寮寮國管下六十六年 丁巳歲八月二十二日
Daluo tian	大羅天
Dao	道
daode jiaohua lei de shu, yuyan jiaoke shu ji cidian	道德教化類的書、語言教科書及辭典
daogong	道公
daogong jinshu yiben zainei	道公金書一本在內
daogongshu	道公書
dashifu	大師父
datengxia zhiyi	大藤峽之役
dazhou	大州
Deng Wentong	鄧文通
Deng Xuanhe	鄧玄和
di	帝
diaowutai	掉五台
diaoyuantai	掉雲台
die	牒
dimu	帝母
dimuke	帝母科
dimuyuan	帝母願
Dingcao, Zhao Chun	趙春
Dong Yong	董永
du	讀
duige	對歌
dujie	度戒
duoyuan yiti	多元一體
dushen	度身
dushui	度水

Erhai	洱海
Ershi si huaming	二十四花茗
fa	法
faming	法名
fangkuai yaowen	方塊瑤文
feng	鳳
fenxiang	分香
Fujian	福建
furen	夫人
gaitu guiliu	改土歸流
Gaoshang yuhuang benxing jijingjuan zhong	高上玉皇本行集經卷中
geben	歌本
gehua	歌花
gehua de daoci	歌化的禱詞
gelang	歌郎
gemu/geniang	歌母/歌娘
genü	歌女
geshi	歌試
geshu	歌書
getang	歌堂
getangyuan	歌堂願
gexian	歌仙
gexian Liu Sanmei zhuan	歌僊劉三妹傳
geyaoyu	歌謠語
gu	骨
guajing	掛鏡
guan	官
Guangdong	廣東
guangjue	官爵
Guangnan	廣南
Guangong	關公
Guangxi	廣西
Guangxu	光緒
gui	鬼
guihua	鬼話
guijiaoke	鬼腳科
Guizimu	鬼子母

guniang	孤娘／姑娘
guofa	過法
guoshan bangwen	過山榜文
guoshan wenshu	過山文書
guoyou	過油
guyan geyao	古言歌謠
Hakka	客家
Hanshu	漢書
hanyu pinyin	漢語拼音
He	何
He Decai	何德才
He Guangjuan	何廣娟
Hejia Daxiao Benming Xingjun	闔家大小本命星君
Helidi mu	訶利帝母
Helidi mu zhenjing	訶利帝母真經
Hezhou	賀州
Hezhou, Guangxi	廣西賀州
honglou duren geshu	紅樓度人歌書
honglouke	紅樓科
Houshan Congtan	後山叢談
housheng shaonian	後生年少
hua	花
Huagen Fumu	花根父母
Huagenmu	花根母
Huagong Huamu	花公花母
huahuan	花魂
huahuang	花皇
Huahuang Fumu	花皇父母
huahun	花魂
Hualan Yao	花籃瑤
Hualin	花林
hualong	花龍
huaming	花茗
Huang Daoping	黃道平
Huang Guiquan	黃貴權
Huang Jingui	黃金貴
Huang Sanmei	黃三妹
huangetang liangyuan	還歌堂良願

Huangmuniang	皇母娘
huangtaihou	皇太后
Huang Tiao Sha	黃條沙
huanyuan	還願
huanyuan getang	還願歌堂
huapo	花婆
huashan	花山
huashen xiangyi	花深香儀
huatangke	花堂科
huawang	花王
Huawang Fumu	花王父母
Huawang Shengmu	花王聖母
Huawang Shengmu zhi shenwei	花王聖母之神位
huawenhuaquan	花文化圈
Hubei	湖北
Hunan	湖南
hunheyu	混合語
jiang	講
Jiangsu	江蘇
Jiangxi	江西
jiao	醮
jiapu	家譜
Jiawu	甲午
jiaxian	家先
jiaxiandan	家先單
jibing shangbing	祭兵賞兵
jielaotong	結老同
jieyi	借衣
jieyi niangzi	借衣娘子
jihui	忌諱
jilu wenjian	記錄文件
jimi	羈縻
jin	筋
jindian	金殿
Jing	經
jingshu	經書
Jinhua Furen	金華夫人
Jinping	金平

Jinxiu	金秀
jizu	祭祖
jundie	券牒
kaitan huanyuan	開壇還願
ke	科
keju zhidu	科舉制度
kumingge	苦命歌
kuqing xinge	苦情信歌
Kuomintang	國民黨
Laibin	來賓
lang	郎
langbing	狼兵
lanlunü	攔路女
Lanshan	藍山
Laojun	老君
laojunchang	老君唱
Laojun shi’er jiemen	老君十二街門
leifa	雷法
Li Caiyou	李才有
Li Decai	李德才
Li Jing	李靖
Linshui	臨水
Li Xuanlian	李玄蓮
Li Yongxiang	李永祥
lianguanke	煉關科
Lianzhou	連州
lijia	里甲
ling	靈
Lingbao	靈寶
Linggong	令公
Linshui Pingyao Chuan	臨水平妖傳
Liu Daning	劉大娘
Liu San	劉三
Liu Sanjie	劉三姊
Liu Sanmei	劉三妹
liuguan	流官
liushu	六書
liyi	禮儀

long	龍
longhushan	龍虎山
Longmen	龍門
Lu Daode	盧道德
Luoxiang	羅香
Luoyun	羅運
lüshan	閭山
Mashan	馬山
Maguan	馬關
man	蠻
mei	梅
min	民
Meishan jiao	梅山教
Meishan daojiao	梅山道教
Meishandong	梅山洞
Meishan sanshiliu dong	梅山三十六洞
meishan sanshiliudong ke	梅山三十六洞科
Meishan wenhua	梅山文化
miao	妙
Miao	苗
Mile Pusa	彌勒菩薩
Milü	米律
Min	閩
Min Yao	民瑤
minzu shibie yundong	民族識別運動
miyu	祕語
mu	母
nage	那個
nan	喃
nan	男
nanci	喃詞
Nanzhao Dali	南詔大理
nei	內
niang	娘
niangjie	娘姐
niangniang	娘娘
niangzi	娘子
Nong Zhigao	儂智高

nü	女
Nuogong	儺公
Nuomu	儺母
nüshu	女書
Pan Chaozheng	盤朝正
Pan Dalan	盤達蘭
Pan Gu	盤古
Pan Simei	盤四妹
Pan Yuanji	盤院機
Panhu	盤瓠
Panhuang shenchang	盤皇神唱
panwang dage	盤王大歌
panwang ge	盤王歌
Panwang yan	盤王宴
panwangyuan	盤王願
piaoxue	剽學
piaoyao guohai	飄遙過海
Pingle	平樂
Pingdi Yao	平地瑤
pinhuang juandie	評皇券牒
po	婆
Pojie	婆姐
powang	婆王
Powang Huagen Fumu	婆王花根父母
poyuke	破獄科
pwang ko	封科
Qianjiadong	千家峒
qianxi xinge	遷徙信歌
Qin Qixian	覃啟賢
qing huahuang guanshen jie xiaoguan duhua duanshan	請花皇關神解小關度花度暗山
qingsheng daotan	請聖到壇
Qirenqu	七任曲
Qiubei	丘北
qiuliange	秋蓮歌
qiyan yunwen	七言韻文
qiyueshu	契約書
Quanzhen	全真

richangyu	日常語
rou	肉
rulu	入籙
Sanlang	三郎
sanmiao wang baishensheng ge	三廟王拜神聖歌
sanmiaoshen	三廟神
Sanqing	三清
sanwen	散文
sanyuan menxia xinen/xiuzhen dizi	三元門下新恩/修真弟子
shang	上
Shanggong Dongdou Huahuang Fumu Taibai Tianniang	上宮東斗花皇父母太白天娘
Shanggong Donghuanggong Dadao	上宮東皇公大道
Shanggong Xiguo Huangmu Furen	上宮西國皇母夫人
Shanglou Huagen Fumu	上樓花根父母
shangqing tianshi menxia chuzhen dizi	上清天師門下初真弟子
She	畲
Sheminshi	畲民詩
shen	神
shentoudai	神頭帶
sheng	生
shengmu	聖母
shengmuke	聖母科
shenhua shishi lei wenben ji geben	神話史詩類文本及歌本
shenshu	神書
shi	氏
Shier Youshen	十二遊神
shifu	師父
shigong	師公
shigongshu	師公書
Shijiamoni	釋迦牟尼
Shijing	詩經
shipai zhidu	石牌制度
shipaiwen	石牌文
shiren	士人
Shiwan Dashan	十萬大山
shizhu	師主

shoufa	受法
shu	書
shu	熟
shuji	書記
shuming	書名
sishu jiaoyu	私塾教育
song	誦
Taishan niangniang	泰山娘娘
Taishang Laojun	太上老君
taishang fengxing beiji quxieyuan chuantong lümei erjiao sanjie shengming jiazhi dizi	太上奉行北極驅邪院川通閭梅二教三戒陞明加職弟子
Taishang she zhushengmu huawang miaojing	太上設諸聖母花王妙經
taishang shuo huawang miaojing	太上說花王妙經
taishang shuo shengmu miaojing	太上說聖母妙經
Taishang shuoxie huawang liuhai miaojing	太上說謝花王六害妙經
Tangwang Wupo	唐王五婆
tanxiao	談笑
tao	桃
Taoyao	桃夭
taoyuandong	桃源洞
tiandidong	天地動
tiangan dizhi	天干地支
tianniang	天娘
Tianxin Zhengfa	天心正法
tianzi	天子
tiaofen	調粉
tongnan	童男
tongnian	同年
tongnü	童女
tusi	土司
tusuzi	土俗字
waishen	外神
Wang Meigui	王美桂
Wang Shizhen	王世貞
wang	旺

wangbing	王兵
weigetang	圍歌堂
weiji	偽技
wen	文
Wenshan	文山
wenyan	文言
wenyan geyao	文言歌謠
wu	巫
wu	武
Wuchang	五猖
Wudang	武當
wufomao	五佛帽
Wuying	五營
wuzhou hua	梧州話
xia	下
Xialou Gudu Xianpo	下樓孤獨仙婆
Xianfeng	咸豐
xianfeng shi’er nian	咸豐十二年
xianyouyao houyouchao	先有瑤 後有朝
xiao	小
xiaofa	小法
xiaoming	小名
xiaoniang	小娘
xiaoshun	孝順
xiaoyao kuaile	逍遙快樂
xie	血
Xihuangmu	西皇母
xinge	信歌
Xinning	新寧
xinku	辛苦
xianpo	仙婆
xiong	兇
Xinsi	辛巳
Xiuzhai jiexun	秀齋解玄
Xiwangmu	西王母
Xuan	玄
Xuande	宣德
Xuanzang	玄奘

xuetang	學堂
Xundu	訓讀
xx dao xx fu zhengren zhifu zhiguan tianxia guishen changsheng leileng lingying wuzi weihao	某某道某某府正任之府旨管天下鬼神長生雷應五字為號
yangnai	養奶
yangnaiqian	養奶錢
Yangshuo	陽朔
yao	夭
yao	妖
yaochuan daojiao	瑤傳道教
yaoguan	瑤官
yao qiu	瑤酋
Yaosuzi	瑤俗字
yiben shoujie miyu jiedushi Jiang Xuanhong geifu dizi Deng Xian/Xuan-Cai yongying shifang shangdao	一本師授械（受戒）祕語械度（戒度）師蔣玄弘給付弟子鄧顯／玄財用應十方上道
yiliao xing wenben	醫療性文本
yindian	銀殿
Yindu	音讀
Ying	應
Yinghuajiaqiao	迎花架橋
yinyangju	陰陽據
yinzhang	印章
yixueshu	醫學書
yizhang	儀仗
Yongzheng	雍正
Yongzhou	永州
You Ling	油嶺
youdao shentoudai ge zhi touhua yong	又到神頭帶歌執頭話用
youdao taoyuan ge yiduanci	又到桃園歌一段詞
youshen	遊神
yuanguge	鴛姑歌
yuanpenyuan	元盆願
Yuanshi tianzun	元始天尊
Yuesu Haoge	粵俗好歌
Yuhuang zhongjuanjing	玉皇中卷經

Yunnan	雲南
Yunnan sheng shehui kexue yuan	雲南省社會科學院
zanbu wenben	占卜文本
zaojiu	造酒
zashu	雜書
zhaidao	齋刀
zhandao	戰刀
Zhang Daogui	張道桂
Zhang Wulang	張五郎
Zhang Youjun	張有雋
Zhang Zehong	張澤洪
Zhang Zhenzhen	張振針
Zhang-Zhao Erlang	張趙二郎
zhaoshu	詔書
Zhengyi	正一
zhengyi	整衣
zhenjie	貞節
zhenyi chuzhen shoujie ke	正一初真受戒科
Zhengyi dao	正一道
Zhengyi jiao	正一教
Zhengyi pai	正一派
zhongguo daojiao	中國道教
Zhonglou Liuguo Huawang	中樓六國花王
zhouqing shuben	奏請書本
Zhou Yingmei	周應枚
Zhuang	壯
Zhupinjing	諸品經
zongjiao jingshu	宗教經書
zongjiaoyu	宗教語
zongzibu	宗支簿
zu	族
zuogetang	坐歌堂
zuojiao	做醮
zuzongyuan	祖宗願

Manuscripts Utilized in This Thesis

For this thesis, I have consulted three European collections of Yao manuscripts stored in the East Asian Library of Leiden University, the Bavaria State Library in Munich and the Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford, as well as collections I have made during my various fieldwork trips to Yunnan and Guangxi in China between 1999 and 2015. The classification of Yao manuscripts is still a moot point. In order to give readers a general picture of the genres of Yao manuscripts, I have adopted a broad categorical concept, proposed by certain Chinese scholars of Yao studies, such as Xu Zhuxiang, Huang Guiquan and Pan Jinxiang, that divides Yao texts into two main categories: 'books for gods and spirits' (*shenshu*) and 'songbooks' (*geshu*). In the category of 'books for gods and spirits', there are three sub-categories, namely: Daoist Priest Manuscripts (*daogongshu*), Ritual Master Manuscripts (*shigongshu*) and Miscellaneous Books (*zashu*). A detailed description of the Yao manuscripts in terms of their scriptural and ritual characteristics, temporal, textual and linguistic features can be found between pp. 57 and 82. Seventeen manuscripts have been chosen and utilized for different purposes in the argumentation of this dissertation. In the following table I give a brief introduction to each of these 17 manuscripts: to which collection it belongs (with call no.), its title, a brief description of its genre and ritual purpose, the pages on which it has been mentioned in this thesis, and certain ancillary information concerning the manuscript in question.

	Collection	Call no.	Title	Brief Description	Mentioned in	Notes
1	Leiden	UB 2004-15 Folder 1	Unspecified.	-A Mun ritual-master manuscript. -Chanted during rites asking for children or in an ordination ceremony to invite the Mother of Emperors (*dimu*)	Pp. 175-185 and Pp. 235-280 (Appendix 1)	Judging from its contents, the manuscript might originally have borne the title *Ritual of the Red-Fertility Building* (*honglou ke*) (more details see p. 175, Fn 67).
2		UB 2004-15 Folder 2	*The Middle Chapter of the Jade Emperor* (*Yuhuang zhongjuanjing*)	-A Mun Daoist-priest manuscript (Scripture for Daoist sacrificial rites and regimen practices).	Pp. 75	-Copied by Li Xuanlian in the first year of the Xianfeng reign of the Qing dynasty (1851)
3		UB 2004-15 Folder 23	*Scripture of Miscellaneous Kinds* (*Zhupinjing*)	-A Mun Daoist-priest manuscript (Scripture for Daoist sacrificial rites and regimen practices).	P. 75	-Copied by Deng Xuanhe (year of composition unclear)
4		UB 2004-15 Folder 25	*Esoteric Words of Heavenly Secrets for the Dead on the Hazardous Road (Xionglu zhaiwang tianji miyu)*	-A Mun Daoist-priest manuscript (Esoteric words for funerary rites).	P. 71	This copy was completed on the tenth of July, the twentieth year of Guangxu reign (the year of Jiawu) by lunar calendar (1894)
5		UB 2004-15 Folder 116	*A Book of Esoteric Words*	-A Mun Daoist-priest	P. 111	This book was completed on

			for Ordination, Given by the Master of Ordination, Jiang Xuanhong, to the Disciple Deng Xian/Xuan-Cai to Be Applied Intensively to Attain the Way (*yiben shoujie miyu jiedushi Jiang Xuanhong geifu dizi Deng Xian/Xuan-Cai yongying shifang shangdao*)	manuscript (Esoteric words for ordination ceremony).		the twentieth of September, the fifteenth year of Guangxu reign (the year of Yichou) by lunar calendar (1889)
6		UB 2004-15 Folder 216	*Ritual for Bowing a Hundred Times Facing Heaven for the Expiation Sins* (*chaotian baibai ke xiaozui*)	-A Mun Daoist-priest manuscript (Ritual for Daoist sacrificial rites and regimen practices).	P. 110-111	-Copied by Pan Chaozheng (year of composition unclear) -The following words are inscribed on the last page: 'This book is preserved for the sons and grandsons' (*cunben yu erzisun*)
7	Oxford Collection	S3252	*The Great Learning (Daxue shupian)*	Miscellaneous Book	P. 73 Fn 120	The book was said to have been copied in the twelfth year of the Xianfeng reign, although in fact the Xianfeng reign lasted for only eleven years

						(1851-1861).
8		S3254	*Yin-Yang Cosmic Certificates for Ancestor Worship (Du jiaxian yinyang erju)*	Miscellaneous Book	P. 73 Fn 120	The book was said to have been copied in the twelfth year of the Xianfeng reign, when in fact the Xianfeng reign lasted for only eleven years (1851-1861).
9		S3523	*Precious Heirloom (chuanjia guibao)*	Miscellaneous Book	P. 110 Fn 75	
10	Munich Collection	293 Cod. Sin. 463	*Rituals for Traversing the Thirty-Six Caves in Plum Mountain* (*meishan sanshiliudong ke*)	-A Mien ritual-master manuscript (Ritual for funerary rites)	P. 126 Fn 18	
11		589 Cod. Sin. 765	*Ritual of the Flower Hall* (*huatangke*)	-A Mun ritual-master manuscript -Chanted during rites asking for children or the ordination ceremony to invite the Mother of Emperors	P. 175 Fn 67	With similar content as Leiden collection, UB 2004-15 Folder 1
12		330 Cod. Sin. 500	*The Song of King Pan* (*Panwang ge*)	-A Mien ritual-master manuscript -Chanted during rites of 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan' (*huan*	p. 104-105	

				panwang huan)		
13		177 Cod. Sin 347	The *Big Book of Songs*	-A Mien ritual-master manuscript -Chanted during rites of 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan'	p. 114-116	
14		291 Cod. Sin. 461	*Received in the first generation, the lad was in Hunan and not in the prefecture* (*chushishou, lang zai Hunan mei zai zhou*)	-A Mien ritual-master manuscript -Chanted during rites of 'Honouring a Vow to King Pan'	P. 116-118	The title was taken from the first sentence on the first page, as the cover page is lost.
15	Guangxi and Yunnan Collection	/	*Ritual for the Mother of Emperors* (*dimuke*)	-A Mun Daoist-priest manuscript from Yunnan --Chanted during the ordination ceremony to invite the Mother of Emperors	P. 68, 142	Copied by Lu Daode in 1814.
16		/	*Inviting the Flower King and the God of Passes to Clear the Road and Let Us Pass through the Dark Mountain and the Water-lily Pond* (*qing huahuang guanshen jie xiaoguan duhua du'anshan*)	-A Mien ritual-master manuscript from Guangxi -Chanted during healing rituals for children	P. 76	Copied and owned by Li Decai.
17		/	*Book that Solves Mysteries*	-A Mun ritual-master	P. 102 Fn 58	Copied and owned by Pan

			(Xiuzhai jiexun)	manuscript from Yunnan (Ritual for miscellaneous purposes)		Yuanji.

Notes on Terminologies and Languages

Throughout this book, I have preferred to use the term 'manuscript' for it expresses the most prominent material characteristic of Yao texts, because most of them have indeed been written by hand; only a very few texts composed after the mid-twentieth century have been reproduced by the more modern techniques of ink-printing and photocopying. Among the many genres of Yao manuscripts, I have chosen to concentrate on manuscripts employed in ritual performances, that I refer to as 'ritual manuscripts'.

The term 'Yao' is an umbrella exnonym applied by the Han Chinese. As an ethnic label in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the people it designates actually have a diversity of languages, histories and cultures. For the sake of convenience, in this thesis the label 'Yao' is used when referring to the people classified or recognized as Yao in a variety of geographical localities. When it comes to addressing the two Yao groups most concerned here specifically and respectively, I prefer to use the autonyms Mien and Mun.

Unless otherwise specified, the romanization used is the *hanyu pinyin* 漢語拼音 system of Mandarin Chinese. This will be presented as [Ch], whenever the identification is absolutely necessary. To present Mien and Mun languages, I use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). They are abbreviated as [Mi] and [Mu] respectively, whenever the clarification is absolutely essential. Diacritics and tone marks are omitted in most cases for sake of simplicity, but will be shown when considered impossible to overlook.

Appendix 1: Twenty-four narratives, including twelve 'roaming deities' and twelve 'flower names'[1]

[1] I have tried to keep the entries of the twenty-four narratives faithful to the original texts as they appeared in the specific manuscript, UB 2004-15 Folder 1 (Leiden Collection), with an probable title *Ritual of the Red-Fertility Building* (*honglou ke* 紅樓科). The upshot is that, although some of the characters are markedly miswritten, such as 要 (*yao*, demand, request), sometimes representing 邀 (*yao*, invite) or 腰 (*yao*, waist), I have not corrected them. The reason is that it shows how the Yao employed Chinese literacy. In this case, they used Chinese characters only phonetically. Another note relevant to the entries is that the Yao created demotic characters. One of the principles is that they used radicals to combine a character of phonetic value closer to the original character. The example is 胸 (*xiong*, chest). The Yao used the radical 月/肉, (*rou*, flesh), and 兇 (*xiong*, fearful) to represent 胸. At this stage, I have simply bracketed the two characters, for instance [月兇], to indicate they form a Yao demotic character. There are also Yao demotic characters using radicals to combine characters of pictographic value. One of the examples is 爹 (*die*, dad). The Yao would write this character with a combination of the 父 (*fu,* father) radical in the upper part and a 車 (*che,* vehicle) in the lower part. For sake of simplicity, I have entered the resultant character 爹 and make a note of it.

A. Twelve Roaming Deities (Shi'er Youshen 十二遊神)

A1

In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked first. The lady was surnamed Xiao, and her family name was written on a sheet of white paper. [It is said that] the lady had made countless mistakes during her lifetime. [One example that illustrates such mistake was as follows.] [One day,] the Xiao lady was invited by her close girlfriends to collect firewood deep on the mountain. [The Xiao lady did not pay any heed to how deep/wild the mountain was.]

The girls were pretty lucky and each girl had collected at least three to five loads of mountain firewood. [But their collecting seems to have disturbed a man (or a deity) named the Fifth Lad who governed the mountain. In a fit of anger,] the Fifth Lad let loose the mountain tiger and the tiger bit the Xiao lady at her waist. Upon seeing such a horror, the close girlfriends of Xiao lady fled for their lives. They rushed home to report the incident to the Xiao lady's brothers. Upon hearing the news, the older brother hurried to seize the crossbow and the younger brother rushed to take the quarrels/bolts.

The two brothers went deep into the mountain searching for the Xiao lady. Alas, what they found was only her breastbone and few bones from other parts of the Xiao lady's body. Wracked with grief, the two brothers cremated the bones and dug a grave to bury Xiao lady's ashes.

Miraculously, within half a year after the incident had occurred, the Xiao lady revealed herself to people. People saw that she had achieved enlightenment and sat in the heavenly hall. The Holy Mother knew that the Xiao lady had been admitted to the priesthood so she dispatched the Messengers of Flowery Forest to recruit the Xiao lady. The Xiao lady was appointed to take charge of the flower seedlings.

載花楼上娘弟[2]一 白紙寫書妹姓肖
千錯萬錯娘自錯 姐妹相要[3]去彩樵

[2] The character 弟 should be 第, a prefix indicating ordinal number.
[3] The character 要 should be 邀, meaning 'to invite each other'.

彩[4]得山蕉三五担 五郎放虎咬娘要[5]
同行姐妹回家報 大哥担弩弟担標

二弟去到山中看 空克故骨兩三條
一兄要把火來化 二兄要把火來燒

葬墳未經得半載 現身得道坐朝堂
聖母見娘身有道 林曹差妹管花苗

[4] The character 彩 should be 採, meaning ‘pick’.
[5] The character 要 should be 腰, meaning ‘waist’.

A2

In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked second. The lady was surnamed Tang, and her family name was written on a sheet of white paper. [It is said that] the lady had made countless mistakes during her lifetime. [One example that recounts such a mistake is as follows.] [One day,] the Tang lady was invited by her close girlfriends to collect firewood deep on the mountain. [The Tang lady did not stop to think how deep/wild the mountain was.]

The girls were fairly lucky and each girl had collected at least three to five loads of mountain firewood. [But their collecting must have disturbed a man (or a deity) named the Fifth Lad who governed the mountain. In a fit of anger,] the Fifth Lad let loose the mountain tiger and the tiger seized the Tang lady by her waist. Upon seeing such a horror those close girlfriends of Tang lady fled for their lives. They rushed home to report the incident to the Tang lady's brothers. Upon hearing the news, the older brother hurried to fetch the crossbow and the younger brother rushed to take the quarrels/bolts.

The two brothers went into the deep into mountain searching for the Tang lady. Alas, all they could find left was the breastbone and few bones from the other parts of the Tang lady's body. Overcome with grief, the two brothers cremated the bones and dug a grave to bury Tang lady's ashes.

Miraculously, within half a year after the incident had occurred the Tang lady revealed herself to people. People saw that she had achieved enlightenment and sat in the heavenly hall. The Holy Mother knew that the Tang lady had been admitted to the priesthood so she dispatched the Messengers of Flowery Forest to recruit the Tang lady. The Tang lady was appointed to take care of the flowering pine.

彩花楼上娘弟二 白紙寫書妹姓湯
千錯萬錯娘自錯 姐妹相要彩英雄

彩得英雄三五担 五郎[6]放虎咬娘[月兇][7]
同行姐妹回家報 大兄担弩弟担弓

二兄去到山中看 空克頭髮及闌胸
一兄要把火來化 二兄要葬在山中

葬坟未經得半載 現身得道坐朝中
聖母見娘身有道 招帰楼上管花松

[6] *Da xiong* 大兄 (big brother) is also written alongside *wulang* 五郎 (the Fifth Lad). Judging from the context of the story, the Fifth Lad makes more sense as the one who set the tiger loose.
[7] A Yao demotic character represents 胸 (*xiong*, chest).

A3

In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked the third. The lady was surnamed Tan, and her family name was written on a white sheet of paper. [It is said that] the lady had made countless mistakes during her lifetime. [One example recounting one such mistake was as follows.] [One day,] after the Tan lady had eaten dumplings for breakfast, she left home and went to the riverside to do the laundry.

She carried the firewood on one end of her shoulder pole and her baby on the other end. The Tan lady arrived at the riverside and began to do the laundry. She washed the clothes [of the whole family] until her loins began to ache and her eyes blurred. [These arduous household chores caused her to ponder:] how much she had been suffering [from the marital life and the various duties that it entailed].

After musing a long while, she decided to commit suicide by throwing herself straight into the nine-layered river. After the Tan lady died, the Immortal Matron [took pity on her because of her arduous life,] and recruited her into her flowery pantheon to take up duties on Flower Mountain. The Tan lady was processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes [to take care of the flower-garden and the flower-souls].

栽花楼上娘第三 白紙寫書妹姓譚
千錯萬錯娘自錯 莊果小娘去洗衫

早間喫餃出門去 一頭担蕉一頭嬰
去到江边娘洗濯 濯得腰痛眼都班

仔細思良成耐耐 將身直落九重滩
死了官道娘成鬼 太婆招妹管花山

A4

In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked fourth. The lady was surnamed Yin, and her family name was written on a sheet of white paper. [It is said that] the lady had made countless mistakes during her lifetime. [One example that illustrates such a mistake was as follows.] She had married a husband when she was still very young. [And she did not yet know how to fulfill her duty as a wife properly.]

People said that she took her husband to bed when it was not yet evening. They had intercourse three times and both of them were extremely exhausted afterwards. Although it was not out of the ordinary that a wife slept with her husband at night, [the Yin lady's behaviour was nevertheless considered not to comply with the cultural norms governing sex and marriage.]

After the Yin lady died, the Immortal Matron [took pity on her because she was blamed for her ignorance of cultural norms concerning sex and marriage] and recruited her into her flowery pantheon. The Yin lady was processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes to take care of the flower-souls.

彩花樓上娘弟四 白紙寫書妹姓銀
千錯萬錯娘自錯 嫁落丈夫細倫倫

黃昏抱郎上床睡 三竭修身成死人
夜裡共郎遇相合 [个氐庇相馬蹄倫] [8]

死了官道娘成鬼 仙婁招妹管花魂

[8] This specific sentence I have bracketed is too obscure, so the interpretation offered here is just a suggestion.

A5

In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked fifth. The lady was surnamed Pan, and her family name was written on a sheet of white paper. [It is said that] the lady had made countless mistakes during her lifetime. [An example that recounts such a mistake is as follows.] [When she had not yet reached the age of marriage], she was invited by her close girlfriends to the riverside [outside the precincts of the village] to watch the boat-racing [for the celebration of Dragon Boat Festival].

[The Pan girl dressed herself up carefully for this event]. She shaded her head with a parasol trimmed with gauze; she tucked a green damask fan inside the front of her dress. She walked slowly [and elegantly]. In the company of her girlfriends, the Pan girl arrived at the riverside. They watched the boat-racing with people from all walks of life, including local officials and ordinary people. Everyone was very excited about the boat-racing.

[Then the Pan girl had an unexpected encounter.] From amidst the crowd, a young man who was a complete stranger to the Pan girl suddenly drew closer to her. He grabbed her arm in an intimate manner and said that they were sworn friends of the same age who were meant to be bound together. [Though surprised,] the Pan girl did not immediately scold the young man for his inappropriate behaviour [for touching her and showing affection for her in public without her permission]. Afterwards people laughed out loud at the Pan girl [but not at the man], when they saw how the Pan girl had reacted to the young man. [Mysteriously], she fell very gravely ill three days after her encounter with the young man at the boat-racing.

[To discover the cause of her sudden illness, her parents] took a handful of uncooked rice and hurried to consult the fortune-telling ‘Seer’. From the result of the divination, the ‘Seer’ concluded that the Pan girl’s illness was caused by neither deities nor demons, but was because the girl had mistakenly run into a Military Inspector surnamed Li.

[The family prepared] three gifts of meat, including chicken and duck, and three rolls of paper horses and copper money as sacrifices. [They asked the ritual specialists to perform

the healing rituals for the Pan girl. But the rituals were not efficacious enough to alleviate the illness with which the Pan girl was plagued. The Pan girl died.] After the Pan girl died, the Immortal Matron [took pity on her for her ill-fated encounter with the young man who was a stranger,] and recruited her into her flowery pantheon to care for the flower-fence. The Pan girl was processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes [to take care of the flower-garden and the flower-souls].

栽花楼上娘弟五 白紙寫書妹姓潘
千錯萬錯娘自錯 姐妹相要去看船

罗傘遮頭娘慢去 青綾扇子叉胸前
去到江边看[木琵]競 官員百姓鬧連連

有个後生不識妹 近來把臂叫同年
妹也不曾當面罵 过後別人笑万千

帰家三日就得病 領米去尋观公占
观公卜卦無神鬼 說娘衝若李都天[9]

鳰鴨三生[10]來祭說 輦馬三副及銅錢
死了官道娘成鬼 仙婆招妹管花蘭

[9] Judging from the title from the other narratives, such as the story of the Wen girl that will be shown below, the *Dutian* 都天 might be a miswritten title for *Duxun* 都巡. *Duxun*, or *Duxunjian* (***tū hsân-chiĕn***) 都巡檢, is an official title that began to be used in the Song, namely, a 'Chief Military Inspector, designation of the heads of some regional military inspectorates *(hsŭn-chien ssu* [*xunjianshu*]), more prestigious than *hsun-chien* (*xunjian*) (Military Inspector); also awarded to the chiefs of some southwestern aboriginal tribes.' See Charles Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 539.

[10] The character 生 should be 牲, meaning sacrificial animal.

A6

In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked the sixth. The lady was surnamed Hua, and her family name was written on a white sheet of paper. [It is said that] the lady made countless mistakes during her lifetime. [An example recounts one such mistake happened as follows.] When the Hua girl reached the age of fifteen, her parents had accepted a marriage proposal for her. The Hua girl had to drink the tea sent by the male side and this act symbolized that the marriage bargain was settled.

So the Hua girl was married at the early age of fifteen. As a consequence of her early marriage, she suddenly found herself an outsider in another family. The Hua girl tried her best to attend to every need of her parents-in-law and her sisters-in-law.

Every day she helped in preparing the meals, beginning with pounding the grain and washing the rice. [The household chores consumed all of her time so] she was never able to spin even one hemp thread, [as she used to do at home]. She had to fetch the water from the river outside the village as well. [These burdensome household chores made her ponder:] how much she had been suffering [because of her marital life and the various duties that accompanied it]. After brooding a long while, she decided to commit suicide by throwing herself straight into the nine-layered river.

The Hua girl was willing to go to the river in the Netherworld but not the river on the edge of the village again. After the Hua lady died, the Immortal Matron [took pity on her because of her unfortunate marital life,] and recruited her into her flowery pantheon to take care of the flower-basket. The Hua lady was processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes [to take care of the flower-garden and the flower-souls].

栽花楼上娘第六 白紙寫書妹姓華
千錯萬錯娘自錯 妹年十五領人茶

十五領喫人茶定 少年十五嫁人家
嫁洛[11]人家為外家客 伏侍公婆及妹夫

日里倒米并倒碓 不曾[木昜]得一條蔴
嫂娘思良成耐耐 抛身直洛九重江

担甕下江去取水 都向黃泉条路灵
死了官道娘成鬼 仙婁摘妹管花罗

[11] The character 洛 should be 落, meaning to fall or drop.

A7

In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked seventh. The lady was surnamed Ou, and her family name was written on a sheet of white paper. [It is said that] the lady made countless mistakes during her lifetime. [An example recounting one such mistake is as follows. It was indeed her own misfortunate that she lost her parents at a young age.] When she looked back at her own life, she could not help but grow sad.

Her father died when she was only one year old. Her mother also died when she reached two. After both of her parents had died, she was taken to live with her bother and his wife. She had lived with them ever since while many years passed.

Her brother and his wife were both good at bargaining. They were eventually able to open a restaurant at a crossroads. [And the restaurant was famous for its homemade wine.] [The Ou lady helped in the restaurant as bookkeeper.] The Ou lady had to keep a financial record of the money the wine transactions had made. One day, one hundred coins was mysteriously lost and the financial accounts did not tally with the amount of money earned that day. The Ou lady's brother and sister-in-law falsely accused the Ou lady of stealing the money.

The Ou lady shouted that she had not stolen the money and she ran back to her own room. The Ou lady was said to have been born with an upright spirit. So being falsely accused of a being thief in public was a huge humiliation for her. She could never accept such a humiliation. [She then turned to blame the heavenly gods for treating her unfairly.] So she stepped out of the door and pointed her fingers at the sun, scolding and complaining. It turned out that the sun was a natural form assumed by a martial deity called the Father of Commands. Full of anger, the Father of Commands decided to punish the disrespectful Ou lady by claiming her life and the Ou lady's soul was sent forthwith to the land of deceased.

After the Ou lady died, the Immortal Matron took pity on her because of her unfortunate orphaned life, and recruited her to take care of the flowery prefecture. The Ou lady was

processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes in the flowery pantheon.

栽花楼上娘弟七 白紙寫書妹姓歐
千錯萬錯娘自錯 想若身中心自愁

一歲生來爹[12]先死 二歲生來母先休
父母二人都死了 共娘兄嫂在三秋

只有兄嫂灵計較 十字路头起酒楼
做酒得禾妹記取 打失百錢賴妹偷

百錢不是七娘取 七娘行過妹床头
父母生來心里直 今日被人當面羞

從此小娘心不伏 走出門前指日頭
日頭正是令公鬼 收娘魂魄入泉州

死了官道娘成鬼 太婆招妹管花州

[12] The original character is written by a combination of the 父 (*fu*, father) radical in the upper part and a 車 (*che*, vehicle) in the lower part.

A8

In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked eighth. The lady was surnamed Shi, and her family name was written on a sheet of white paper. [It is said that] the lady made countless mistakes during her lifetime. [An example recounts one such mistake as follows.] People said that the Shi lady should have never punted a boat, accompanied by her close girlfriends, over the river to pick [something] on that side of riverbank.

It is said that the Shi lady had her breakfast before she embarked on the boat trip. People did not see her return when the sun set, [so people knew something might have happened to her.] [On that side of the river grew many big trees.] The Shi girl claimed that she was good at climbing trees so she showed off and jumped between the treetops. She succeeded in jumping from the first tree to the second one.

Over-confident, she failed to jump from the second tree over to the third one. She fell down onto the ground and died immediately on the spot. The Shi lady's close girlfriends hurried back to tell her parents about what had happened. Upon hearing the sad news, her parents cried so heartbrokenly.

After the Shi lady died, the Immortal Matron took pity on her because of the unfortunate incident that had befallen her. So the Immortal Matron recruited her to take care of the flowery branches. The Shi lady was processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes in the flowery pantheon.

彩花楼上娘弟八 白紙寫書妹姓施
千錯萬錯娘自錯 撐船過水彩糠莉

早朝喫飯出門去 日落西山不見帰
妹在樹頭稱教手 跳過一枝到二枝

弟三不慎跌落死 忽然到地死無知
同行姐妹回家報 爺娘聞說淚涕啡

A9

In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked ninth. The lady was surnamed Wen, and her family name was written on a sheet of white paper. [It is said that] the lady had made countless mistakes during her lifetime. [One example of such a mistake is as follows.]

The parents of the Wen girl had nine daughters. The parents bought a long hemp cloth and gave one-ninth of it to each of their daughters. [Upon seeing how short the piece of cloth she had just received was,] the Wen girl wondered how she would be able to make it cover her body. So the Wen girl decided to go to the foot of the South Mountain to look for wild hemp. [She planned to make more cloth with the hemp she was able to collect and to sell it for money.] She collected two to three catties of the hemp in one day. After returning home, she put the hemp into a frying pan. She dried the hemp patiently and carefully. She used only the bast, not the core of the hemp.

The Wen girl wove the treated hemp fibre and made a box of clothes. She then went to Yangzhou, [a prosperous trading city as well as a symbolic afterlife world to which the soul of the deceased will go] to sell the clothes for silver. [Unfortunately,] no one in the streets of Yangzhou bought the clothes she had made. [So she decided to go home.] On her way back, the Wen girl ran into a young man who had attained the title of Cultivated Talent.[13] Cultivated Talent asked the Wen girl how much her clothes cost. The woman answered three hundred cash of copper money. Cultivated Talent [was willing to buy them] but asked for a fifty cash reduction. The Wen girl agreed to the discount and gave the clothes to him. [To show his

[13] A common variant of *shengyuan* 生員, a 'Government Student, generic designation of students entitled to state stipends; in early usage it referred to students of many kinds, including Sui dynasty students of calendar-making, astrology, water clocks, etc.; but in Ming and Ch^ing [Qing] normally referred to fully subsidized students in Confucian schools (*ju-hsŭeh* [*ju xue*]) at prefectural *(fu)* and lower levels of territorial administration, …,anyone eligible to participate in the Provincial Examinations *(hsiang-shih* [*xiang shi*]*),* the first major stage in the civil service recruitment examination sequence.' (Charles Hucker, *op. cit.*, 420-421).

fondness for the Wen girl,] Cultivated Talent separated the subtracted fifty cash into equal halves and gave half of the subtracted money to the Wen girl. In the exchange for the money and clothes, Cultivated Talent deliberately brushed against the Wen girl's body with his sleeve.

[Mysteriously], the Wen girl fell very severely ill three days after her encounter on the road with Cultivated Talent. [To discover the cause of her sudden illness, her parents] took a handful of uncooked rice and hurried to consult the fortune-telling 'Seer'. From the result of the divination, the 'Seer' concluded that the Wen girl's illness had been caused neither by deities nor demons, but because the girl had mistakenly run into Li Duxun.

[The family prepared] three gifts of meat, including chicken and duck, and three rolls of paper horses and copper money as sacrifices. [They asked [the ritual specialists] to perform the healing rituals for the Wen girl. But the rituals were not enough to assuage the illness with which the Wen girl was plagued. The Wen girl died.] After the Wen girl died, the Immortal Matron [took pity on her for her ill-fated encounter with the strange young man,] and recruited her into her flowery pantheon to take care of the flower-roots. The Pan girl was processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes [to take care of the flower-garden and the flower-souls].

栽花樓上娘第九 白紙寫書妹姓文
千錯萬錯娘自錯 娘今耐耐就思量

父母長生九姐妹 買取長蔴九拿分
仔細思良成耐耐 个養如何遮得身
蔦蔴出在南山腳 一日彩得兩三斤
想帰便放鐺中煮 只取柴皮不用心

小娘緝得一廂布 便去陽州賣取銀
陽州街头無人取 回帰逢若秀才君

秀才問娘布爭賣 娘講銅錢三百文
秀才[糸克]还二百五 向有五十兩平分
秀才交錢娘交布 便把衫袖勿娘身

帰家三日就染病 拎米去共覌公尋
先生卜卦說無鬼 說娘衝若李都巡

鳰鴨三生來祭說 輦馬三副及銅錢
死了官道娘成鬼 仙婁招妹管花根

A10

In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked tenth. The lady was surnamed Chang, and her family name was written on a sheet of white paper. [It is said that] the lady had made countless mistakes during her lifetime. [One example of such a mistake is as follows.] It was indeed the Chang lady's mistake that she brought tea and salt as gifts when visiting her two sisters-in-law in another village, [for the tea and salt were tokens of a marriage deal and should not have been sent by her].[14]

The older sister-in-law had two sisters and the younger sister-in-law did not have any. The Chang lady enjoyed spending time with them and they would weave hemp together. [As a girl from the other village, the Chang lady was potentially a courting partner for the boys in that village.]

The problem was that the boys in that village did not know how to approach the Chang lady properly. A boy [with the intention of courting] walked by the front door of the house in which the Chang lady was weaving hemp with her sisters-in-law. The boy saw the Chang lady and winked at her, hinting to her to come closer to talk with him. The Chang lady did not think twice before she set aside her weaving work and came to the door to talk with the boy for a long while.

[As the older women in that village saw them talking so intimately, they gossiped about it.] The older women knew the Chang lady's parents so they went to embellish [the story] about how the Chang lady had misbehaved with stranger boys. Upon hearing this, the parents of the Chang lady were worried and wanted to remind the Chang lady about the etiquette of courting and marriage, so they composed a letter to be sent to the Chang lady.

[14] On 15 November 2012, I participated in a Mun wedding ceremony between a member of the He 何 family, the wife-taker side, from Dingcao and a member of the Deng 鄧 family, the wife-giver side, from one of the neighbouring villages, Milü. Among all the gifts sent by the wife-taker group, there was a gift called 'six tea and six salt' (*liuchaliuyan* 六茶六鹽) in Chinese. Each package contains some tealeaves and salt, which are wrapped by bamboo leaves. Two cents of RMB are placed on the surface of the bamboo leaf and tied up again with red thread, symbolizing the female, and white thread, symbolizing the male. When ready, the 'six tea and six salt' would be put inside a handkerchief with a Chinese character 囍 (*xi*, happiness) on it. (Fieldwork notes.) In other words, the combination of tea and salt symbolizes a marriage deal.

The older sister-in-law received the letter and read it as she was soaking white rice in water, before grinding it with a pestle and making round flat cakes. Meanwhile, the Chang lady rode on a pony with a golden saddle to go to take a bath in the nearby river.

The Chang lady did not return until the older sister-in-law had made three to five buckets of the round flat cakes from the white rice. Just as the Chang lady arrived and dismounted from the pony, the older sister-in-law came to her straightaway and showed her the letter. The older sister-in-law rebuked the Chang lady, saying, "When you were enjoying your bath in the Yangzi River, your parents were fuming with rage, gritting their teeth because of your misbehavior."

Upon hearing all this, the Chang girl, [greatly humiliated], remounted the pony that was still saddled and directed him to jump over the fence. The Chang lady went into a forest behind the village and decided to hang herself from the third big tree she had come across with a three-foot thin red silk cord.

The Immortal Matron [took pity on her for the unfortunate mistakes she had made about the etiquette in courting and marriage] so she recruited the Chang lady to her flowery pantheon. After the Chang girl died, she was processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes to take care of the flower-sprigs.

栽花楼上娘弟十 白紙寫書妹姓常
千錯萬錯娘自錯 錯買茶盐送大娘

大嫂家中兩姊妹 小嫂家中不見□[15]
兩个女娘兩个嫂 共妹緝蔴時過時

那村後生心不好 行過門前［答丨]眼眉
小娘也愛貪花色 去共後生說一時

[15] □ indicates the character in the original text is missed out.

那村姑婆心不好 搬言造語報爺娘
妹爺得聞如此語 [口声][口声]囑報小妹知

大嫂接得書來看 白米浸來碓作[米慈]
白米做[米慈] 三五担 金[車安]細馬與娘騎

帰到家中娘下馬 大嫂出來報娘知
爺娘家中咬齒恨 妹去長江洗身時

妹就得聞如此語 帶馬連鞍跳過籬
三尺紅羅掉頸死 後蘭樹上弟三枝

官道死了娘成鬼 天婁招妹管花枝

A11

In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked eleventh. The lady was surnamed Liang, and her family name was written on a sheet of white paper. [It is said that] the lady made countless mistakes during her lifetime. [An example recounting one such mistake is as follows.] As the old saying goes, if a child has to lose one of his/her parents, it is better for the mother to live than father, because a stepmother's heart is just like a poisonous snake or the sting from a queen bee's tail. [Consequently, it was indeed an ill-fated circumstance that the Liang lady was a motherless child].

Whatever the Liang lady did, the stepmother always rebuked her for being sluggish. Whenever the Liang lady took a rest, the stepmother beat her with a stick, wounding her. Everyday the stepmother would think up something about which to boss the Liang lady around.

[One day,] the stepmother ordered the Liang lady go to shovel up some old rice seedlings on the farm deep on the South Mountain. Upon hearing this order, the Liang lady dared not delay. She quickly went to take her straw hat and clothing, and set out. [But as she stepped out of the house,] an old crow on the opposite side of the street cawed in her direction three times. The Liang lady was uncertain whether the crow cawing was an auspicious or an ominous sign, she suddenly felt uneasy in her heart of hearts. [She embarked on the journey to the South Mountain anyway.]

The Liang lady managed to reach the farm deep on the South Mountain. She began to shovel/dig up the old rice seedlings. After she managed to deal with half the farm, a malevolent tiger of the South Mountain suddenly sprang out of the wilderness and bit the Liang lady in her neck. [The Liang lady unfortunately died on the spot.]

After three days when the Liang lady was not seen to have returned from the mountain, her sister-in-law mentioned this to her husband. She was suspicious that the Liang lady might have taken advantage of the stepmother's order and run

away from home. The Liang lady's brother refuted the suggestion, saying that his sister was of an upright character.

The brother went on to say that his sister was not an ungrateful person who only drank and ate by taking from others without recompense. Having worried about the whereabouts of the Liang lady, her brother and sister-in-law decided to look for her on the South Mountain. When they arrived at the farm they did not find the Liang lady; instead, they saw a pile of white bones. [So they realized that the Liang lady must have died.]

[The Immortal Matron took pity on the Liang lady for her motherless life.] After the Liang lady died, she was processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes to take care of the flower-roots in the flowery pantheon.

彩花樓上娘十一 白紙寫書妹姓梁
千錯萬錯娘自錯 自古死爺莫死娘

後娘肚裏如蛇毒 正相[虫王]蜂尾下鎗
十將一時說妹懶 十坐一時棒就傷

每日後娘想白柙 叫去南山伐老秧
妹就得聞如此語 手拎笠子及衣裳

首拎笠子出門去 老鴉対面叫三場
不知叫凶是叫吉 弄得小娘心里荒

去到南山秧地里 拨得一个半边秧
南山虎兒心不好 跳出荒來咬頸娘

大嫂答言老兄道 妹去三日不回鄉
老兄得聞大說便 [口声][口声]叫做妹罡強

我娘不是空閒妹 領人老酒及肥羊

兄嫂去到南山看 空克白骨不見娘

官道死了娘成鬼 仙婆招妹管花根

A12

In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked twelfth. The lady was surnamed Peng, and her family name was written on a sheet of white paper. [It is said that] the lady made countless mistakes during her lifetime. [An example of one such mistake is as follows.] The Peng lady erroneously reported that the mountains would be abound in bamboo shoots in December.

The Peng lady's parents had five daughters, including the Peng lady. All of the five daughters were fond of weaving hemp. They would stay up weaving hemp until dawn. That was when they talked about the Peng lady's rumour that the South Mountain was teeming with bamboo shoots.

When their parents heard this news, they decided to go collect some bamboo shoots the first thing the next morning. They ate rice for breakfast and they went off together at an early hour. They went to the East Mountain and they saw the bamboo sprouts had not even emerged. Then they went to the South Mountain and they saw the bamboo sprouts were just beginning to grow.

Their father began to scold the Peng lady to her face as he saw they would not obtain any bamboo shoots after such a long journey. The Peng lady did not yield to her father's anger, she talked back to her parents, [arguing it was not her fault.]

In a fit of anger, the parents lost their inhibitions about doing evil deeds. They picked up bricks and threw them straight at the Peng lady [to show how angry they were.]

The bricks unfortunately hit the Peng lady hard and her flesh and bone were smashed. The Peng lady's head and legs were all broken and she died on the spot.

[The Immortal Matron took pity on the Peng lady because of her misfortunate death.] After the Peng lady died, she was processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes to take care of the registration of flower-souls in the flowery pantheon.

彩花樓上娘十二 白紙寫書妹姓彭
千錯萬錯娘自錯 十二月天將笋粳

父母長生五姐妹 黃昏緝蔴至五更
姐妹緝蔴對面說 人設南山笋正生

爺娘得聞如此語 明朝煮飯早同行
去到東山笋不出 去到南山笋正生

不得笋來爺正罵 娘共爺娘對面爭
爺娘性炁又能惡 执起磚頭對面轟

一身骨肉都轟拆 腳拆妹把脬頭行

官道死了娘成鬼 天婁招妹管花生

B. Twenty-four Flower Names (Ershi si huaming 二十四花茗)[16]

[16] Although it is said there are twenty-four flower names, there are actually only twelve narratives recorded in the specific manuscript stored in UB 2004-15 Folder 1 (Leiden Collection).

B1

Deep in the East Mountains grew a camellia flower that was actually a celestial maiden ranked first [in the heavenly world]. The first celestial maiden sometimes wandered up into the mountains; sometimes down inside the fences of the village households. The camellia flower would usually bloom before all the other flowers had opened their petals, [attributable to the wondrous power the first celestial maiden possessed.] In one of her previous lives, the first celestial maiden had been a mortal and she was born into a family surnamed Pan.

Three preceding generations of the Pan family had all performed good deeds. It was a truly blessed family in which the Pan girl was steadily able to cultivate herself in her mortal guise. [After a life-time of strenuous cultivation,] the Pan girl was able to be elevated into the highest heaven of the Grand Veil (*Daluo tian*). Diligently indeed had she cultivated herself. This was why her good deeds had been reported to the deities in the heavenly realm.

Whoever said that the camellia flower cannot produce seeds? Can you not see how the seeds produced by the camellia flower have spread far and wide from up in the mountains and to down inside the fences of the village households? Therefore, the believers who were present at the household altar were left in no doubt. The celestial maiden being summoned was in the form of a camellia flower and was once a cultivated mortal woman surnamed Pan.

Among the crowd gathered in front of the household altar was present a talented man (the ritual specialist). The talented man issued an official document to summon the first celestial maiden to descend to the household. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the first celestial maiden knew it was her duty to send the flower-souls of the children asked down to the household [that had sponsored the ritual].

東浚山茶妹弟一 半在高山半在蘭
百花未綻娘花綻 昔日原來妹姓潘

三代祖宗娘修善 穩身直上大羅天
元是上界天仙女 三度修身奏上方

誰說山茶不結子 山茶結子滿山蘭
眾信在壇你莫怪 妹是山茶本姓潘

今日才郎有狀請 妹來送子入家門

B2

The second flower to bloom was cherry blossom. The girl the cherry blossom had represented was originally a plum tree planted in ten thousand households. In another of her previous lives, she had been a celestial maiden. She did not forget about the mortal world and told the people to worship her by planting a cherry blossom in their households.

The cherry blossom would usually bloom before all the other flowers blossomed, [attributable to the wondrous power possessed by the second celestial maiden.] The blooming of ten thousand other species of flowers was incomparable to the beauty of the flower of cherry blossom. This was because the cherry blossom was originally a celestial maiden who descended to the mortal world after she had cultivated herself diligently for three lifetimes.

Two brothers from the household [that sponsored the ritual] went to pick two of the flowers from the cherry blossom tree. They put the flowers on both sides of the household altar [that was symbolically connected to the Peach Spring Grotto].

Amongst the crowd gathered in front of the household altar was present, a talented man (the ritual specialist). The talented man issued an official document to summon the second celestial maiden to descend to the household. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the second celestial maiden knew it was her duty to send the flower-souls of the children asked down to the household.

弟二嬰[17]桃花色開 小娘本是萬家梅
一生本是諸仙佛 此花不忘世人栽

千花未綻娘花綻 萬花不过妹花開
元是上界天仙女 三代修身降下凡

仙花我兩為兄弟 兩边岗口出香坛

[17] The character 嬰 should be 櫻. The combination of 櫻桃 (*yingtao*) means cherry.

今日才郎有狀請 妹來送子入房來

B3

The flower name of the third girl was plum blossom. Her beauty surpassed even that of the gorgeous weaving girl of the Northern Star. The plum blossom would usually flower before all the other flowers had bloomed. The flowers of plum blossom would sway in the spring breeze.

The plum tree would also yield abundant fruit. A girl in a red dress passed by the tree and saw the fruit, she picked some of it back home. The girl examined the plums carefully in her hands. She knew that she could dry them into delicious fruit that could only exist in heaven.

The girl laid out half a plate of the dry plum fruit when guests visited. She kept the other half of it for herself. Among the guests, an old man ate the dry plum fruit and his eyes became blurred, as if he was drunk. A young man ate the dry plum fruit, and he felt like all of his troubles had vanished. [These examples have showed how wonderful the fruit had tasted.]

Amongst the crowd gathered in front of the household altar was present a talented man (the ritual specialist). The talented man issued an official document to summon the third girl to descend to the household. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the third girl knew it was her duty to send the flower-souls of the children asked down to the household.

梅花花茗妹弟三 勝如織女出天樞
百花未綻娘花綻 春時樹表自相推

結子樹头清梁梁 紅花女子搞帰來
搞上手中仔細看 將帰里內作天梅

人客到家裝半碟 小娘自為小安排
老人喫若双髮翳 後生吃若不思量

今日才郎有狀請 小娘送子入房來

B4

The fourth girl was a peony flower. The red colour of the peony flower had the power to make people feel all their troubles had vanished. All the other species of flower could not compare to the peony flower; everyone admired the beauty of the peony flower more than anything. When the young men saw the beauty of the fourth girl/peony flower, they were so happy that they could not help but try any means to approach her/it.

[The reason the fourth girl was so adorable] was she was originally a celestial maiden descended from the heavenly realm. She had cultivated herself diligently for three lifetimes so she was qualified to enjoy the treasured incense offered by the mortal world. Today a talented man (the ritual specialist) issued an official document to summon the fourth girl to descend to the household. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the fourth girl picked the white flower-soul (boy) and sent him to the household [that sponsored the ritual.]

妹是莊丹娘弟四 此花紅色不思良
萬花不庇娘花惜 後生得見歡偷娘

妹是上界天仙女 三度修身領宝香
今日才郎有狀請 妹來托选貴琇璋

B5

The fifth flower to bloom was a lotus blossom that symbolized a girl surnamed Peng. The fragrance of the lotus blossom (the Peng girl) attracted bees and butterflies (symbolically, the young men) to come and they sparkled around her. The bees (the young men) admired her beauty. The butterflies (the young men) lingered in the vicinity of the blooming lotus blossom/girl and competed for her attention.

These bees and butterflies (the young men) showed off all kinds of literary and martial skills to gain the lotus blossom's (the Peng girl's) affection. But the lotus blossom would wither when a month came to an end and then she would reborn again. It was only natural that the lotus flower (the Peng girl) would wither and be reborn. Upon realizing this, people [represented by a ritual specialist] wrote the girl's family name, Peng, on a sheet of white paper (to invite her to come to the household altar).

Today a talented man (the ritual specialist) issued an official document to summon the fifth girl to descend to the household. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the Peng girl picked the white flower-soul (boy) and sent him to the household [that sponsored the ritual.]

弟五荷花妹姓彭 到被蚟蜂湖蝶[口爭]
蚟蜂也愛妹端正 蝶鳴朝朝樹上[口爭]

花枝樹上[口爭]文武 匏匏含花望月生
葉落還根娘本命 白紙寫書妹姓彭

今日才郎有狀請 妹來托送貴琇璋

B6

In the Pavilion of Coloured Flowers lived a girl ranked sixth, surnamed Xiu. She was originally from the Peach Spring Grotto and her original surname was Zhou. The flower that symbolized the sixth girl would bloom before all the other species of flower did. The sixth girl was indeed charming and refined.

The sixth girl was also humorous and easygoing. No one was able to outwit her in anything. [Even so, such a clever girl was still destined to be married out. When she came of age,] her father agreed to a marriage deal proposed by a Lei family. He happily received the tea and the gifts that symbolized the confirmation of an engagement. [But he was not to know this was the beginning of a tragedy.]

[On the wedding day,] the Lei family sent a sedan chair to pick up the sixth girl. The sixth girl ascended the sedan chair and arrived at the Lei family. [While people were still celebrating her marriage,] the sixth girl decided to hang herself with three feet of thin red silk cord. [Deep down her heart,] she knew that it would be better to die early than to struggle all her life to be free of the duties imposed by the patrilineal lineage.

After the sixth girl died, she was processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes in the Peach Spring Grotto. Today a talented man (the ritual specialist) issued an official document to summon the sixth girl to descend to the household. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the sixth girl knew it was time to send the white flower-soul (boy) to the couple [who sponsored the ritual.] and join the feast.

影花弟六妹姓休 出在桃原妹姓周
百花未綻娘花綻 小娘媚兒自風流

說若小娘真好笑 別人不庇妹花油
爺領雷家人茶定 雷家茶礼歡來收

雷家轎子人來迎 小娘轎□坐門樓

三尺紅羅吊頸死 不如早死免宗由

小娘死了娘成鬼 化作奠桃花不來
今日才郎有狀請 入筵送子与郎夫

B7

Now we came to sing the story of the seventh girl who was symbolically represented by a peach blossom. The peach flower (the seventh girl) could be seen blooming amongst the bulrushes and the orchids. The peach flower (the seventh girl) was born with a colour of a swallow. Her petals flourished lushly on every sprig, casting a red shadow all over the mountain.

The peach tree (the seventh girl) would yield fruit when summertime arrived. The peach fruit would then be ripe and its colour was red. People should be cautious not to eat the peach fruit so early when one has hunger pangs in June. If you pick the peach fruit too early the fruit will wither quickly. Even if the men who picked the peach fruit too early were full, the heart of the peach flower (the seventh girl) [would be sad.]

Today a talented man (the ritual specialist) issued an official document to summon the seventh girl to descend to the household. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the seventh girl knew it was time to send the flower-souls to the household [that sponsored the ritual.]

桃花七妖過相逢 小娘花發蒲蘭中
生娘一自燕子色 枝枝生葉影山紅

若逢夏月娘結子 桃花菓子熟紅紅
六月肚飢莫吃妹 桃飢李飽妹心漾

今日才郎有狀請 妹來送子入房中

B8

Now we moved on to sing the story of the eighth lady who descended to the altar set up by a talented man (a ritual specialist). First the talented man (the ritual specialist) had to offer fruit and treasured items for her to enjoy. The eighth lady had originally served wine in the Immortal Matron's flowery palace. Even the book about how the Heaven and Earth came into being mentions the eighth lady's origin.

When the spring came, it was time the flower that symbolically represented the eighth girl bloomed. The blooming flowers were all white coloured. Because of the extraordinary beauty of the flowers, old men passing by felt it was improper to look at them, so they would lower down their heads and walk away quickly. [Conversely,] as the young men saw the beautiful flowers, it was proper for them to pick one of them and insert it into their hair, [which symbolically refers to courtship activity].

When the summer came, it was time for the flower that symbolically presented the eighth girl to yield fruit. As the people who passed by the abundant fruit hanging from the treetop, they could not help but sneak a peek at it, thinking about stealing some of them to eat. People did eventually take some of the fruit to eat. It turned out that the fruit tasted sour and the people began to blame at the eighth girl. [The people did not know the sour taste was to keep people from taking the fruit prematurely.]

Today a talented man (a ritual specialist) issued an official document to summon the eighth girl to descend to the household. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the eighth girl knew it was time to send the flower-souls to the household altar.

娘子弟八赴郎壇 果珠李樹取為先
愿在貧婁酒店上 天地書中說出言

歡到春天娘花發 小娘花發白連連

老人得見低頭過 後生得見插眉边

總逢夏天娘結子 樹頭閒看又偷連
手把彩來口中吃 [口声][口声]罵妹苦了天

今日才郎有狀請 妹來送子下壇前

B9

The ninth girl produced flowers and she was surnamed Cheng. Thousands of other species of flowers were incomparable to the beauty of the flowers the ninth girl had produced.

The flower of the ninth girl bloomed only once annually. The flowers would temporarily vanish from mortal eyes as the winter set in in October. When the autumn festival came, it was time for people to fill their golden vases with the ninth girl's flowers.

[The flowers the ninth girl produced were so adorable that] the queen invited the ninth girl to her palace. [The queen asked the ninth girl to bring the flowers with her.] When the queen saw how beautiful the flowers were, she could not help but take a close look at them. The flowers were of the colour of swallows. Every sprig and every petal of the flowers was so elegantly developed.

The time was ripe to send the flowers (the flower-souls) to the household altar where the bothers from the household and their relatives were praying. Today a talented man (a ritual specialist) issued an official document to summon the ninth girl to descend to the household altar. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the ninth girl answered that her family name was Cheng and she was sending the flower-souls to the household hall [where the ritual was held.]

弟九彩花妹姓程 千花不庇妹花伶

一年娘花發一度 冬天十月暫藏形
仲秋便吃谷花酒 小娘花發滿金瓶

小娘得对皇后坐 皇后把看就來迎
生花一自燕子色 枝枝葉葉自輕成

奠怪在壇兄弟眷 妹刘答花本姓程

今日才郎有狀請 妹來選子下郎庁

The jade girl/flower ranked the tenth had descended to the household altar where the talented man [the ritual specialist] was present in front of it. The jade girl/flower was aged only seven, but she had already grown so beautiful, just like the blooming jade flower [planted outside of the house of her parents]. Her beauty had brought happiness to everyone. The time has come to recount the birth of the jade girl/flower. The family into which the jade flower/girl was born was surnamed Mao.

The blooming jade girl/flower was so exceptional compared to other girls/species of plant. People would feel sad whenever they saw the jade girl out of spirits. [Metaphorically, people lamented whenever the jade flower defoliated and was found lying on the ground.] In the first lunar month of the year when the jade girl reached the age of fifteen, she was married with a man surnamed Le. [Symbolically, the jade flower was replanted in the soil on which the household of the Le family was situated.]

After the jade girl had married, the people who previously admired her beauty turned to gossiping about her marital life; they said that her exceptional beauty would only bring misfortune to her marriage. Compared to the eternity of the ever-running Yangzi River, people's minds could change in such a drastic way. The life experiences of the jade girl/flower caution us not to point the finger at someone who has not done anything wrong.

Amongst the crowd gathered in front of the household altar, a talented man (the ritual specialist) was present. The talented man issued an official document to summon the jade girl/flower to descend to the household. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the jade girl/ flower knew it was her duty to send the flower-souls of the children asked down to the household [that sponsored the ritual].

瑁花第十下郎壇 小娘七歲好花乐
且唱小娘身出處 本姓瑁花是妹家

朝朝樹上称文武 脫開落地口含花
正月十五娘本命 此時郎種妹姓乐

不喫世人笑得尽 被有蚊蜂螐蝶多
人情不庇長江水 莫作狂風吹落花

今日才郎有狀請 妹來送子入郎家

B11

In the kingdom governed by Confucius lived a very chaste girl ranked the eleventh [in her family], surnamed Zong. The Zong girl was said to have been born with an upright spirit. The legend has it that she began to chant the scriptures when she had just turned seventeen.

People said that she chanted thousands of scrolls of scriptures per day and she always had the scriptures by her side from dawn to dusk. The reason she was so diligent in chanting the scriptures was she was destined to reveal this method of [self-]cultivation to the mortal world. After fulfilling her purpose in this world, she had been transformed into a flower by the Buddha so that people could worship its chaste spirit.

Each leaf and every branch of the chaste flower produced only one pod of seeds. It had worried the people greatly [that the chaste flower might not flourish and therefore not produce the seeds]. But the crowd gathered at the household altar need not have worried, for the chaste flower not only bloomed but also produced seeds.

Among the crowd gathered in front of the household altar was present a talented man (the ritual specialist). The talented man issued an official document to summon the chaste flower/the Zong girl to descend to the household. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the chaste flower/the Zong girl knew it was her duty to send the flower-souls of the children asked down to the household [that had sponsored the ritual].

南貞十一妹姓宗 正是仲尼国里人
小娘生來多端正 年登十七念經文

一日念經得萬卷 念經日夜不离身
昔日小娘身有道 变佛南貞花一根

一葉一枝生一菊 小妹花發好愁人

今日才郎有狀請 妹來送子与才君

B12

The chaste girl had returned to the [flowery] palace. She was destined to become the girl ranked the twelfth. [When she was still a mortal being,] she lived by the river in Caohua County. She had originally been born into the Zhu family living in that county. [The incident that led to her death was as follows.]

In the first year of the Zhenguan reign (AD 626), the world was plagued by a terrible drought. It was also the year in which the chaste girl reached the age of sixteen. [She did nothing wrong, but unfortunately,] she encountered the wrath of the gods as they roamed around the devastated mortal world. In a fit of anger, the gods randomly grabbed hold of the soul of the chaste girl and mistakenly sent her to the land of the deceased. [Therefore, she had died because of her unfortunate encounter with the unruly and disastrous gods.]

After the chaste girl died, the Immortal Matron [took pity on her for her ill-fated encounter with the unruly gods and] recruited her into her flowery pantheon to take care of the flower-ladies. The chaste girl was processed according to the official rules and became one of the female acolytes. Among the crowd gathered in front of the household altar was present a talented man (the ritual specialist). The talented man issued an official document to summon the chaste girl ranked the twelfth to descend to the household. [Upon receiving the official invitation,] the chaste girl ranked the twelfth knew it was her duty to send the flower-souls of the children asked down to the household [that sponsored the ritual].

南貞十二回宮去 妹結[18]元來十二娘
住在水冊曹華縣 我母元來祝家娘

正觀元年天大焊 嫂是十六去賢娘

[18] The character 結 should be 姊 (*jie*), meaning sister.

逢若神行神天患 收娘魂魄入泉鄉

死了官道娘成鬼 天婆招妹管花娘
今日才郎有狀請 妹來送子貴琇璋

Summary

This research presents a number of Yao perspectives, especially those embodied in their ritual tradition and in their historical experiences of encountering other political and cultural systems. Since the 1980s, their Daoism-inspired ordination ceremony and their ritual manuscripts written in Chinese have often been singled out to support scholarly discussions about Yao sinification. It has been argued that the imperial Chinese state's expansion into South China that began in the Song (960-1279) was the major driving force in the Yao's conversion to Daoism and their subsequent sinification. In this sense, the Daoist and the Chinese religious and ritual heritage can be considered to have been the result of a 'civilizing project' whose aim was to draw the Yao closer to the centre of Chinese state civilization. The goal of this research is to explore a further dimension to the discourse of Yao sinification by adding a 'gendered perspective' to the understanding of Yao ritual tradition. It also details the dynamics and the presence of human agency in the historical processes of transcultural communication between the Yao and their powerful Other, the Chinese imperial states.

The study is divided into six chapters. Chapter One offers an introduction that sets out the fundamentals of the intended research. Chapter Two situates Yao religious culture and manuscripts in the broader regional and historical context. Chapter Three reveals that religion has been an important interface at which the patrilineal ideology, an ideological basis for the development of lineage society and the facilitation of integration into the Chinese state, had been enforced in Yao society. Nonetheless, it also shows that this is where the Yao have assimilated and transformed the religious-cum-imperial influences in the light of their own cultural schema. Chapter Four addresses the cultural and political significance of the goddesses of fertility among the Yao in a regional context. It elucidates the different forms of gender ideal and gender relationship articulated in Yao cultural norms and religious performance. It also offers a close reading of the narratives surrounding a prominent female fertility deity, the Mother of Emperors, showing why the construct of the Mother of Emperors could be regarded as a manifestation of the Yao's struggles to claim their autonomy in their

encounters with the civilizing value of patrilineal ideology. Chapter Five suggests the concept of 'performative literacy' in order to explore the significance of Yao female singers in a ritual setting. Commencing by viewing the narratives of the twenty-four assistant female fertility deities as the probable product of female singing, the chapter goes on to illustrate the different forms of expression and action assumed by women in the face of the imposed patrilineal ideology channelled through the Yao religious interface. On the basis of my analysis, I hypothesize that the Yao women have assumed crucial positions through which the Yao were able to voice their criticisms of the social consequences of imperial Chinese state governance, imposed in the form of patrilineal ideology and a lineage society. Chapter Six is a conclusion that recapitulates the highlights of each chapter and proposes potential related topics for future research.

Samenvatting

In dit onderzoek worden een aantal gezichtspunten gepresenteerd van de Yao, in het bijzonder die welke ingekapseld zijn in hun rituele tradities en in hun historische ervaringen met andere politieke en culturele systemen. Sinds de jaren tachtig van de twintigste eeuw worden hun door het Taoïsme geïnspireerde wijdingsceremonie en hun in het Chinees geschreven geschriften vaak uitgekozen om de wetenschappelijke discussie over de sinificatie van de Yao te ondersteunen. Er wordt gezegd dat de uitbreiding van het Chinese keizerrijk in zuidelijke richting – die begon tijdens de Song-dynastie (960-1279) – de belangrijkste drijvende kracht was in de overgang van de Yao naar het Taoïsme en hun daaropvolgende sinificatie. In die zin kunnen de taoïstische en Chinese religieuze en rituele erfenis worden beschouwd als het resultaat van een 'beschavingsproject' waarvan het doel was om de Yao dichter bij het centrum van de Chinese beschaving te brengen. Het doel van deze studie is een extra dimensie te onderzoeken van de dialoog over de sinificatie van de Yao, namelijk door een gender-dimensie toe te voegen voor inzicht in de rituele traditie van de Yao. Het laat ook in detail de dynamiek en de menselijke tussenkomst zien in de historische processen van transculturele communicatie tussen de Yao en hun machtige Ander, de Chinese keizerrijken.

Deze studie is verdeeld in zes hoofdstukken. Hoofdstuk 1 is een introductie die de basis van het onderzoek uiteenzet. Hoofdstuk 2 plaatst de religieuze cultuur en geschriften van de Yao in een bredere regionale en historische context. In het derde hoofdstuk wordt duidelijk gemaakt dat religie een raakvlak was waarop de patrilineaire ideologie, een ideologische basis voor de ontwikkeling van een lineaire maatschappij en de facilitering van integratie in de Chinese staat, doorgevoerd werd in de Yao-samenleving. Desalniettemin, laat dit ook zien dat juist dáár de Yao assimileerden en de religieus-keizerlijke invloeden aannamen en transformeerden in het licht van hun eigen cultuur. Hoofdstuk 4 behandelt de culturele en politieke betekenis van de vruchtbaarheidsgodinnen van de Yao in een religieuze context. Het verklaart de verschillende vormen van het gender-ideaal en de gender-verhoudingen die tot uitdrukking komen in de culturele normen en religieuze voorstellingen van de

Yao. Het biedt daarnaast ook een tekstanalyse van de vertellingen rond een belangrijke vrouwelijke vruchtbaarheidsgod, de Moeder van Keizers, die laat zien waarom de constructie van de Moeder der Keizers kan worden beschouwd als een manifestatie van de strijd van de Yao om hun autonomie op te eisen in hun ontmoetingen met de beschavende waarde van een patrilineaire ideologie. Hoofdstuk 5 introduceert het begrip 'performatieve geletterdheid' om de betekenis van de Yao-zangeressen in religieus verband te bestuderen. Vanuit de vertellingen over de vierentwintig hulp-vruchtbaarheidsgodinnen als een mogelijk voortbrengsel van het zingen door vrouwen, laat het hoofdstuk verder de verschillende vrouwelijke uitingsvormen en handelingen zien in het licht van de opgedrongen patrilineaire ideologie geleid door de religieuze interface van de Yao. Op basis van mijn analyse is mijn hypothese dat de Yao-vrouwen cruciale posities hebben ingenomen waardoor de Yao hun kritiek op de sociale gevolgen van de overheersing door de Chinese keizerlijke staat – opgedrongen in de vorm van een patrilineaire ideologie en een lineaire samenleving - kunnen verwoorden. Hoofdstuk 6 is een conclusie die de belangrijkste punten van elk hoofdstuk recapituleert en potentieel gerelateerde onderwerpen voor verder onderzoek voorstelt.

Curriculum Vitae

Chen Meiwen was born on May 11th, 1975 in Taipei, Taiwan. In 1998 she received a bachelor's degree in Religious Studies (with a minor in English literature) from the Catholic Fu-Jen University, Taiwan. In 2002 she obtained her master's degree in anthropology from the National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan. Her master thesis has been published by Tangshan publishing under the title *Conceptualizations of Personhood and the Origins of Life as Seen in Naming Traditions among the Pangu Yao of Tianlin, Guangxi* in 2003. Between the years of 2003 and 2005, she had worked as research assistant (Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica), adjunct teacher, and radio program host.

She first started her doctoral study at the Institute of Anthropology, National Tsing Hua University in 2005. To deepen the historical depth of anthropological research, she decided to study Sinology at the Leiden Institute for Area Studies at Leiden University in 2009. She was employed by Leiden University to instruct a Bachelor-level course on Chinese Ethnic Minorities in the Spring 2013. She has finished her Leiden doctoral thesis in 2016. She is expected to finish her Tsing Hua doctoral thesis in 2018. She is doing research on the Mien and the Mun (Yao) across the borderlands of southwest China and the highland Southeast Asia. Her publications have appeared in *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology*, *China Information*, *Leidschrift* and *Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore*. She also has web articles on the 'Villages' website (administered by the Institute of History and Philosophy, Academia Sinica, Taiwan). She will be assuming an adjunct lecturer position at the Department of Religious Studies, Catholic Fu-Jen University in Taiwan beginning from February 2017.

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My decision to go to Leiden University was initiated by Professor Emeritus Wang Chiu-kuei, who introduced me the collections of Yao ritual texts kept in Europe and put me into contact with Professor Barend ter Haar, who eventually became my PhD supervisor. Dr Robert Parkin from the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at University of Oxford became my second supervisor in the latter stage of my PhD study. Leiden University regulations do not permit me to thank my advisors, but, of course, it goes without saying that I am immensely grateful for their help and support. The tutorial meetings I had with Barend once a fortnight helped me enormously. His tutorials equipped me not only with the knowledge of Chinese history and religion that are his specialties, but also with a critical mind-set that enabled me to think out-of-the-box. Bob's broad knowledge of anthropological theories in general and the area of South Asia (especially India) in particular has assisted me greatly in formulating the theoretical framework of this dissertation. I thank both of them for their detailed and critical readings of each chapter at different stages in the course of my research.

This research has utilized mixed methodologies, but above all library survey and fieldwork investigation. While conducting my library surveys, I visited four

European libraries and universities so as to consult different collections of Yao manuscripts. Mr Koos Kuiper and Mrs A. J. D. L. Sison of the East Asian Library, Leiden University, Mr David Helliwell of the Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Mr Hanno Lecher of the Institute of Chinese Studies, University of Heidelberg, and Mrs Lucia Obi at the Bavarian State Library in Munich have been truly helpful in aiding my consultation of the collections. I would like to express my gratitude to them.

In the method of fieldwork investigation, the people from the two Yao villages in west Guangxi, Weihao and Dingcao, have been the inspiration for this study. I have known the people in Weihao since 1999. The family of one ritual specialist, Li Decai, has invariably treated me as one of their own. I first made the acquaintance of the people in Dingcao, in 2012. During my fortnight's stay in this village, I enjoyed the women's beautiful singing and the hospitality of many ritual specialists. I would like to express my deep gratitude to the people in these two villages for sharing their pearls of wisdom with me during the course of my fieldwork investigation. Outside the villages, the interviews I had with Chinese scholars of Yao origin, Deng Wentong, Huang Guiquan and Pan Meihua in particular, have helped me in many ways to approach my topic from a local point of view. I thank them for providing me with fresh new insights into the ethnographic materials I had been able to collect. Their assistance has helped me enormously to construct the arguments in this thesis.

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I shall end this acknowledgement by quoting Frank Herbert—an American science fiction writer: ‘There is no real ending. It’s just the place where you stop the story.’