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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 daoja 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 bianqian* 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] *zuo jiao* (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 lai yuan* 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 dao jiao 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*.

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.

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 tan* (men marrying out; permanent uxrilocal residence) and [Mi] *i pun tin* (men marrying out; first uxrilocal 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 uxrilocal 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 uxrilocal 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 uxrilocal 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 Meiwèn, *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 *zuojiang*, *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:

⁴⁴ From ‘The Customs of the She People’ (*Fengsu: Shemin fu* 風俗：畬民附) in Zhu Huang (revised) 朱煌 修 and Zheng Peichun (redacted) 鄭培椿 編, *Suichang xianzhi* 遂昌縣志 (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 Nineteenth 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, ‘Zhejiang Wenzhou Chuzhou jian tumin sheke shulue’ 浙江溫州處州間土民畬客述略 (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.

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 Hjørleifur 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 周鼎 and Guo Zhichao 郭志超, *Shezu pudie zhong de huaxia renting—yi Zhangpu zhongyutang Lanxing Shezu weili 畬族譜牒中的華夏認同—以漳浦種玉堂藍姓畬族為例* (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, *Jianguo zongzu de shehui yinsu tanxi: yi Zhangpu Lanshi Shezu de zongzu jiangou weili 建構宗族的社會因素探析—以漳浦藍氏畬族的宗族建構為例* (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 Hjørleifur 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 dayao shan 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.

桃源崗口七條路。三條修劃四條慌。
三條修劃桃源路。四條修劃上閩山。

娘姐問郎去樣早。早上閩山看學堂／生。

閩山學堂魯班造。留把先生過路居。
三百學生共凳坐。一個先生教導真。

閩山學堂魯班造。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／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 tradition⁶⁶—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 Pangu 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 ²²²	tu ²²²	tu ²²²
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.lʰok	duwk	du ³⁵
Writing	*s-qʰAʔ	sjæX	xiɛ 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’ (*sanzheng*) 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 tushuguangang 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* (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, ‘瑤人...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 uxori-local 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* (Stanford, CA: Stanford 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—《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: Inupiat and Anthropological Models of Gender,’ *Études/Inuit/Studies* 14/1/2 (1990), 55-74.

⁸⁸ Li Yan 李彥, 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 he 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。嫁落師人若鬼靈。
師人家中靈若鬼。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.

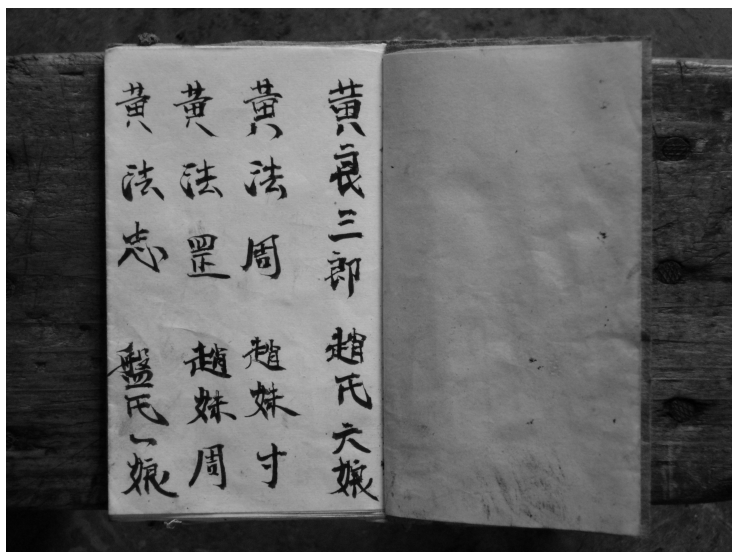


Illustration 3. *Jiaxiandan* of Huang Jingui, Jinping County, Yunnan. Photo by Chen Meiwen.

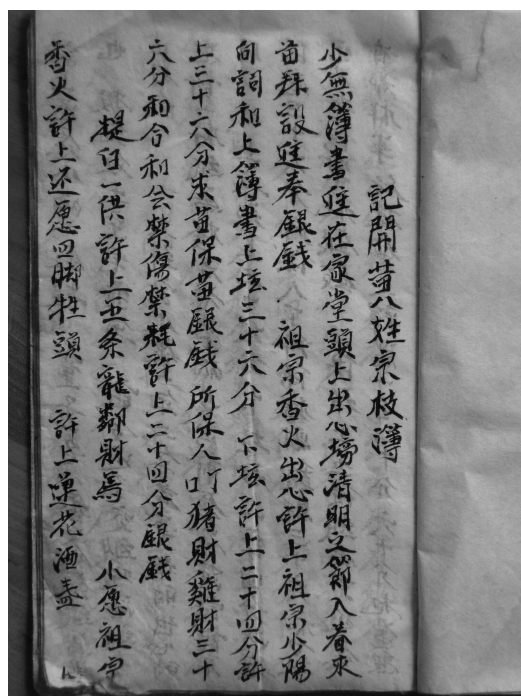


Illustration 4. *Zongzhibu* of Huang Jingui, Jinping County, Yunnan. Photo by Chen Meiwen.