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

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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.’