

## FOREWORD

Writing a foreword to a book that one would have loved to write oneself is something of a challenge. Let me begin by telling something of the string of coincidences which led up to this book.

In 1992, a Dutch tourist guide who regularly visited Thailand came to me with a pile of Chinese manuscripts that turned out to be Yao ritual texts. My response was one of tremendous excitement. In the following months, we succeeded in persuading the Leiden Ethnographic Museum (Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde) to buy roughly half of the complete set of manuscripts, and two complete sets of ritual paintings from one single Yao priest who had lived and worked in Laos. The other half of the manuscripts was later acquired by the Sinological Seminar at Heidelberg University. The importance of the collection is that it all stemmed from one and the same ritual specialist, unlike most of the other material available for scholarly inspection. This discovery sparked my interest in Yao culture in a way that would have been impossible without such artifacts, although I never got around to studying them in real depth. Similar collections of texts exist at other places in Europe and no doubt elsewhere, but apart from a voluminous catalogue of the material preserved at the

Bavarian State Library in Munich (Germany), little to no work is being done on these materials.

Thanks to email and the Internet, Eli Alberts became aware of my own work in the late 1990s and before he knew it he was swept up into the study of the Yao. This book is the fruit of the conversation that followed, which he carried out in China, Thailand, the Netherlands, and the United States.

A major obstacle to initially pursuing work on the Yao ritual texts themselves was the lack of proper background research on the Yao from a social, cultural, and religious historical perspective. There is now a substantial amount of sound Western and Chinese ethnographical research, by Peter Kandre, Ralph Litzinger, and Hjørleifur Jonsson, as well as by Chinese scholars such as Pu Chaojun and Guo Zhu, to mention only a few. By contrast, serious research on the different historical dimensions of the Yao is virtually absent, except for an excellent 1970 dissertation—never published—by Richard Cushman. Until the present book by Eli Alberts, we were stuck with the impressionistic comments of Michel Strickmann on the possibly ancient roots of Yao religious culture in new Daoist traditions of the Song period. Despite early attempts to bring together international research at conferences devoted to Yao studies, actual research is still hampered by a serious language barrier (numerous Western ethnographers who do not use modern and/or classical Chinese resources, Chinese scholars ignoring Western research, and sufficient command of the Yao languages), as well as by a lack of expertise and sympathy among Chinese scholars with respect to the religious dimensions of Yao culture.

The present book by Eli Alberts is therefore the first in-depth survey in any language that is based on a broad survey of Chinese, Japanese, and Western research on issues of Yao identity and religious culture. Topics covered are the discovery of Yao Daoism (which antedates by decades the well-known comments by Michel Strickmann, but was ignored by subsequent scholarship), the history of the Yao as a cultural and religious entity, the relationship between the Yao and older cultural groups in southern China, and the origins

and significance of their use of Daoist ritual traditions. As he shows, the “Yao” as a people are very much the result of interaction with and construction by imperial Chinese politics and culture. The modern category of the Yao as an ethnic group is the result of recent political events following 1949, but the same is true of past definitions as well. The very name “Yao” reflects the concerns of Han-Chinese officials, as well as of the groups themselves with freedom of taxation and labor service. Luckily, the name itself did not have strong pejorative connotations, as is also demonstrated by the author on the basis of careful analysis of the Chinese characters for Yao. This is an interesting difference with that other major southern culture, who are known to students of Chinese culture as “Miao” and who call themselves Hmong. “Miao” is undoubtedly derived from the name of one of the mythological enemies of the Yellow Emperor, the Sanmiao (Three Miao). The name Miao implies an abomination, which is indeed how Chinese officials perceived of local groups sharing this culture. Names matter, but not always in the way that we are accustomed to look at them! Now that Alberts has demonstrated that the name Yao is just one, albeit important, attempt at classification from a certain perspective, this should enable the future researcher to look at the historical as well as the ethnographical record in ways much less hampered by convention and tradition. It should enable us to see crucial similarities and differences between the Yao and other southern cultures, such as the Miao, the Hakka, or the She. In fact, it should free up researchers to look at all kinds of local cultural formations in a much more open way.

What we usually call “Daoism” played a crucial role in the formation of a Yao ethnicity, but not in the sense of the adoption of a “foreign” (exogenous) religious culture by an already existing local group/culture. A definitive analysis of the overall process for all southern Chinese cultures is not yet possible at the present stage of our knowledge of local Daoist traditions in the Yuan, Song, and preceding periods. Nonetheless, Alberts’ analysis suggests to me that in understanding the creation of southern Chinese groups such as the Hakka or the Cantonese, we need to take their use of

politico-religious culture extremely seriously. As he points out very convincingly, the very history of Daoism since the Celestial Master's first revelations is intimately tied to the adoption of sinic political ideals, of what we might call Mandate of Heaven lore, by local cultures. These cultures are conventionally constructed as "ethnic," but the differences with so-called Han cultures probably were only a matter of degree.

Hakka culture could be studied as the outcome of a very similar evolutionary process, in which the adoption of Daoist culture also took place, but was then given up to some extent in exchange for Christian and Confucian inspired ideologies. Here we can expect to profit from the ongoing project led by John Lagerwey and others on Hakka culture in southern China (especially in Jiangxi province). A similar project is required for Cantonese and Minnanese cultures, in order to establish the precise ways in which they eventually became "Chinese." Preliminary historical work here has been carried out by David Faure and Michael Szonyi, but much still remains to be done.

The adoption by the Yao of what we call "Daoism" did not signify simply the taking over of a religious culture, as much as it was the acceptance of a politico-religious system with the Son of Heaven as the central representative and bestower of crucial rights. As such it gave these local cultures a whole new set of rights. Given the fact that "Daoism" is a modern term to begin with, these cultures undoubtedly did not think of the event as a religious conversion. Indeed, as demonstrated by Eli Alberts, they thought of it primarily in political terms. And to be honest, since the Yao were able to survive into the twenty-first century, it might be argued that their adoption of this political culture was quite successful for a long period of time.

To me, therefore, this book is not only the history of Daoism in connection with the creation of a Yao cultural identity, which eventually shaped an ethnic one; it also points to the importance of understanding this Daoism as both a religious and a political religious enterprise. This brilliant study by Eli Alberts has now cleared away much of the cloud that has been caused by previous, mostly impressionistic

scholarship on the “Dao of the Yao.” The following step that needs to be taken is to study what remains of the religious and scriptural culture of the Yao, as well as its more recent past, not only on the basis of the extant ritual and other types of manuscripts, but also based on their living culture.

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While time limitations have made it impossible to contact past scholars, those based on space are now easily overcome thanks to email. It is because of email that I first met Barend ter Haar. As he mentions in the Foreword to this book, I contacted him in the late 1990s with myriad questions about Yao religion and culture, and that initial email led to a conversation that eventually brought me to Leiden, where we collaborated for almost a year. During that time, ter Haar exposed me to most of the secondary literature on Yao in Chinese, Japanese, and Western languages. He also helped me to grasp the significance of Yao culture, formulate questions about it, and chart the course of my dissertation, which has resulted in this book.

I must also thank Victor Mair and Paul Goldin of the University of Pennsylvania. It was during a seminar offered by Mair that I first became interested in the question of the Dao among the Yao, and when I wrote the paper that became the nucleus around which this book took its form. Goldin helped me to transform a collection of disparate chunks into a cohesive narrative. He also led me to reread what I had written from the perspective of the potential reader.

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A HISTORY OF DAOISM  
AND THE YAO PEOPLE  
OF SOUTH CHINA



# INTRODUCTION

## THE DISCOVERY OF YAO DAOISM

The term “Yao” (瑶, 猺, 徭, 徭)<sup>1</sup> refers to a non-sinitic<sup>2</sup> speaking, southern “Chinese”<sup>3</sup> people who originated in central China, south of the Yangzi River. Peoples identified as Yao, whose cultures, until recently, were characterized by a reliance on swidden or slash and burn agriculture, upland habitation, and widespread migratory patterns, live in the southern Chinese provinces of Hunan, Guangdong, Guangxi, and Yunnan; in Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand; and in the last few decades, in Europe and North America. Despite categorization by Chinese and Western scholars of Yao as an ethnic minority with a primitive culture, it is now recognized that not only are certain strains of religious Daoism prominent in Yao ritual traditions, but Yao share many elements with pre-modern official and mainstream Chinese culture: their cosmology, their festive calendar, their pantheon of deities with its heavenly hierarchy, their system of ritual practices, and their script.<sup>4</sup> All Yao scriptures are written in a variant of Chinese, marked by a combination of literary, vernacular, and even southern Chinese and Yao dialectal elements. This unique combination

has formed the primary textual medium of politico-religious life in Yao society.

I am interested in the position of Chinese texts and other ritual objects in Yao politico-religious traditions, and ask the question: *How do Chinese script and “Daoist” imagery—both evidence of imperial authority—function in the creation and maintenance of Yao identities?* I argue that their function is similar to that of texts and other patterns (*wen* 文) in Chinese official religion, going back at least to the Han Dynasty. Just as revealed scriptures, or treasures (*bao* 寶), served to legitimate the authority of the emperor and the dynastic line through their symbolic expression of the Mandate of Heaven, so too do Yao Chinese texts serve to legitimate the authority of village leaders and clan lines, as well as to create and maintain local and extra-local Yao identities. In this way center and periphery resemble each other.

To elaborate, the larger research theme yields such specific questions as: How did mountain-dwelling, swiddening agriculturalists moonlighting as ritual specialists, obtain these heavenly treasures, originally granted solely to the emperor? When and by what means did Yao become Daoists, and how did the reception of this imperial (and textual) religion serve to mediate relations between Yao and non-Yao communities, between Yao and local Chinese officials, and finally, between Yao and the state—both the Chinese and other states into whose domains Yao entered? How did literacy in the Chinese script, a requisite to participating in Daoist ritual culture, help to cement a Yao sense of identity in contradistinction to non-literate societies in their midst?

### THE DAO AMONG THE YAO REVISITED

Contemporary discourse concerning the practice of Daoism in Yao societies often credits Michel Strickmann as being the first scholar to apprehend Daoist elements in Yao ritual culture. In his brief article “The Tao Among the Yao: Taoism and the Sinification of South China,” published in 1979, Strickmann detected what Shiratori Yoshiro—the compiler of the *Yao Documents*,<sup>5</sup> “600 pages of manuscripts in Chinese characters” collected by Shiratori and his colleagues—had not.

Although Shiratori raised the possibility of Daoist or Buddhist influence in the materials, he remained silent to the fact that the vast bulk of the *Yao Documents* were Daoist texts used by Yao priests in their religious rites. In his article, Strickmann attempted to explain how and when Yao came to adopt Daoism as their religion, and argued that it was part of a larger sinifying process, one that began by the thirteenth century. While paving the way for future research, and defining a new field of academic endeavor, his discussion was impressionistic, and left many questions unanswered. I will reassess Strickmann's initial intuitions about the appearance of Daoism among the Yao people, expanding on his argument in some places, and in others, diverting from it.

Prior to Strickmann's writing about Daoism in Yao society, most research on Yao by Western and Japanese scholars was conducted in Southeast Asia, primarily in Thailand, by anthropologists who were for the most part unfamiliar with Chinese cultural and religious traditions, let alone with the Chinese script.<sup>6</sup> Complaining about the lack of communication between different fields of learning, which resulted in the failure to recognize Daoist elements in Yao ritual manuals, Strickmann remarked:

The fashionable isolation of different scholarly disciplines from one another can sometimes have rather unfortunate results. Taoist studies have traditionally been much cultivated in Japan, and it is regrettable that in this instance anthropology should have been so far removed from Sinology. It is odd that the anthropologists should suppose these texts, written in excellent Chinese, to be simply indigenous Yao productions.<sup>7</sup>

Many Chinese scholars writing about Yao during the same period—presumably capable of reading Chinese and familiar with Daoist themes—were equally ignorant of the Daoist composition of Yao ritual culture. Influenced by Hegelian notions of progress,<sup>8</sup> they were wont—as it is still common in much Chinese scholarship—to associate “ethnic minorities” with “primitive religion,” an ideological persuasion which resulted in their overlooking the obvious: the

basic commonality between Yao and local (i.e., Southern) Han ritual practices, as well as among other peoples living in South China and Southeast Asia.<sup>9</sup>

In 1982, Jacques Lemoine published his *Yao Ceremonial Paintings*, which while reiterating many of Strickmann's points, attempted a more detailed study of Yao paintings and their significance in Yao ritual culture. Unlike Strickmann, Lemoine was not a Daoist specialist, but rather an ethnographer of Yao (Iu Mien) and Hmong religion, as well as a collector of Yao paintings; therefore, most of his arguments about the history of Daoism and how it spread to South China were heavily influenced by Strickmann. Following in Strickmann's footsteps, Lemoine recognized that the paintings were primarily representations of Daoist deities. In a similar fashion, he criticized previous scholarship for not recognizing this:

For some reason or other, many observers in past decades have failed to see for what it is this whole body of rituals, and the books and paintings on which it relies. One or two of the dozen or so Chinese researchers who have been to the Yao hills during this time have noted in passing that some of the rituals they watched were 'taoist-like,' but most other anthropologists have sought to explain Yao religion in terms of archaic and indigenous tribal beliefs. This is surprising, because one needs only a minimum knowledge of Chinese religious practices to understand that Yao religion and rituals can only be a borrowing from a more powerful tradition. And this tradition is Chinese Taoism.... The paintings which are displayed on such occasions [the last two months of the Chinese calendar year] are also all the more striking and it is difficult to ascribe them to a primitive tradition. Unfortunately, the common prejudice that mountain people are 'backward' has somehow blinded some of their most enthusiastic supporters. Ignorance of the Chinese script has also been a serious obstacle for most Western anthropologists working with the Yao.<sup>10</sup>

Ignoring the majority of previous scholarship that countered their assertions (see the following section), Lemoine and others endorsed Strickmann as the one scholar who *discovered* Yao Daoism.

## YAO DAOISM BEFORE LIBERATION

Despite his being credited with this *discovery*, Strickmann clearly was not the first scholar to speak of it. Already in the Qing Dynasty, some gazetteers and other locally based documents from South China discussed Yao practices, using terminology that most contemporary scholars would associate with Daoism, unfortunately only in brief mention. Li Laizhang's 李來章 *Bapai Fengtu ji* 八排風土記 (1654–1721), for instance, explains that Yao mourners, after burning spirit money and covering the deceased in a white cloth, must conduct a purification 修齋 for one night—a practice which could either be Daoist or Buddhist in nature.<sup>11</sup> The same text more explicitly states that “...they make offerings to the deities and invite Daoist priests to intone Daoist scriptures...”<sup>12</sup> 奉神延道士口誦道經 *The Gazetteer of Lianshan County* 連山縣志 (1693) claims that Yao do not take medicine when sick, but rather “...invite Daoist priests to pray for them...,”<sup>13</sup> 請道士禱之 *The Gazetteer of Lechang County* 樂昌縣志 (1719) adds that they “[administer] talismanic water to heal them,”<sup>14</sup> thus recalling the standard use of talismans and talismanic water in mainstream Daoist healing rituals since the 2nd century C.E.<sup>15</sup> The *Lianshan Suiyao Ting zhi* 連山綏猺庭志 (c.f. 1830) describes the presence of Daoist priests at Yao funerals. In front of the pit where the body of the deceased will be buried: “...Yao Daoist priests face the corpse and intone memorials and charms, and only then place it in the coffin.”<sup>16</sup> 猺道面尸誦章咒乃殮 Further on the same page the text maintains that “Yao Daoist priests are their teachers. They also have *keyi* (Daoist liturgy). Their texts cannot be understood. For those who are outstanding in their studies they invite Daoist priests so that they can receive the registers (*shoulu*).<sup>17</sup> Those who receive the registers wear a scarlet robe.”<sup>18</sup> 猺道自為教亦有科儀其文不可曉學優者則延諸道為受錄受錄者服朱衣 Finally, the *Gazetteer of Lianshan County* remarks: “Those male children

who are intelligent do not read Confucian (*ru*) books, but only follow Yao Daoist priests in their studies.”<sup>19</sup> 兒之聰穎者不與讀儒書唯從猺道士學 Mention of Yao Daoist priests (simply *yaodao*), liturgies (*keyi*), receiving the registers (*shoulu*), and talismanic water (*fushui*) all indicate the recognition of Daoist rituals in Yao society during the Qing Dynasty, at least by the local officials who wrote these gazetteers.

Evidence also suggests that Chinese scholars during the decades leading up to “liberation” (i.e., before 1949) were aware of the presence of Daoist practices in Yao societies. As Barend ter Haar describes in his excellent annotated bibliography of Yao religion,<sup>20</sup> some very detailed studies by Chinese anthropologists on Yao religion and culture appeared during the Republican period, which recognized the presence of Daoist texts written in Chinese, Daoist deities and practices, as well as various ritual implements also used by Han or orthodox Daoist priests.

There appears to have been an ongoing discussion during the Republican period about whether or not Yao Daoism was the same as *real* Daoism as practiced in Han communities. Writing in 1943, Liang Zhaotao 梁鈞韜 pointed out that most people who had previously investigated Yao religion were aware of conspicuous Daoist influence. Not only did many Yao deities and rituals appear to be Daoist, but Yao also followed the Yin/Yang Five Phase system.<sup>21</sup>

According to Liang, prior to his going into the mountains to investigate Yao religion he was prepared to witness the Daoized (*daojiaohua* 道教化) religion that earlier scholars had described; once in the mountains, however, he soon came to the conclusion that Yao religion was only superficially Daoist. Perhaps Yao worshipped the most important deities in the Daoist pantheon, but these deities lorded over others that were clearly indigenous to Yao society.<sup>22</sup> Liang further distinguished Yao religion from its Han counterpart by asserting that Yao merely worship and fear their deities, and perform rituals to them as a means of dispelling evil spirits.<sup>23</sup> He also argued that Yao interpret yin / yang and the five phases more simplistically. For instance, he claimed that in the Han and Yao conceptions, the five phases correspond to yin and yang differently.<sup>24</sup> For these

undeveloped reasons Liang believed that Yao religion only had the appearance of Daoism, but in its substance was really comprised of a mixture of more primitive elements: Spirit worship (*jingling chongbai* 精靈崇拜), Animism (*youling chongbai* 有靈崇拜), and Fetishism (*yaowu chongbai* 妖物崇拜).<sup>25</sup>

Six years earlier, writing in the same journal, Jiang Yingliang 江應樑, provided what ter Haar has considered: “probably the first serious study of Yao religious life, including its Daoist aspects.”<sup>26</sup> Although Jiang began his investigation of Yao in Northern Guangdong with the expectation that he would discover the religion of a primitive people (*chumin* 初民) without writing or an advanced sociopolitical structure, and who worshipped a dog king, Jiang Yingliang soon discovered that Yao religion had been influenced by Han religion and culture:

徯<sup>27</sup>人固然是多神教的崇拜者，但是這種崇拜卻並非全部含有原始宗教的意義而是多量的有著漢化的色彩，而在漢化之中，卻又不完全是漢人宗教的典型。

While it is true that Yao people are worshippers of a polytheistic religion, their worship, contrary to expectations, does not completely consist of primitive religious significance. Rather, it has multiple characteristics of Hanification; yet, in the midst of such Hanification, it is not completely the religion of the Han people.<sup>28</sup>

Jiang went on to explore the multiple layers of Hanification (*Hanhua*) in Yao religion, and insisted that in every instance where Yao religion showed similarities with Han practices, it was due to Han influence on Yao society; thus, for Jiang, the aspects of Hanification that he recognized in the Yao religious context were not the *real* Yao religion.

Like Strickmann over forty years later, he discovered that Yao priests—who he referred to as shamans (*wu* 巫)—used Chinese script; i.e., they used Han writing. However, he also saw that interspersed among the standard Han graphs were others that were clearly Yao inventions.<sup>29</sup> These *strange* invented characters combined with

an equally *peculiar* syntax and grammar made it difficult for Jiang and his colleagues to comprehend.

Jiang sinocentricly viewed this divergence from Han convention as a failing on the part of Yao ritual specialists. Somehow they had learned to use Chinese writing but had failed to grasp how the language worked. In so doing, Jiang assumed that there was an intrinsic connection between the Chinese script—in his understanding, a Han Chinese phenomenon / invention—and Chinese language. What he did not take into account was the possibility that Yao employed Chinese script to represent their own semantic and syntactic necessities.<sup>30</sup> It is also the case that many Yao documents are copies—or at least related versions—of sources that also appear in official compendia, such as the *Daoist Canon* (*Daozang* 道藏).

After seeing a Chinese couplet (*duilian* 對聯) hanging over a temple in a Yao village and said to have been written by the village headman (*cunzhang* 村長), Jiang questioned whether Yao could even read, or grasp the meaning of, the words that they wrote.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, he failed to explain in detail why he came to this conclusion. The couplet follows a standard format of parallel verse, with two corresponding seven character lines: “The three stars together shine, bringing peace to our residence. The five fortunes approach, blessing with goodness our home 三星拱照平安宅，五福來臨慈善家。”<sup>32</sup> What about this couplet convinced Jiang that, even though Yao people could write, they were unable to understand the meaning of the characters?<sup>33</sup> Is it because of where they hung it and that their choice of location did not follow Han conventions?<sup>34</sup> From a Han perspective, such a couplet belongs more on a family home than on a temple, since it is more a prayer for family blessing. Perhaps, but following a convention is not the same as understanding the meaning of what is written.<sup>35</sup>

As Jiang noted, every Yao village he visited had a similar, simply constructed religious structure—the only white building in a village—which his Yao informants called “shrines” (*ci* 祠) rather than “temples” (*si* 寺).<sup>36</sup> A shrine is generally a place for the worship of ancestors or important deceased heroes; thus, it is not so unusual that there would be a couplet ushering in blessings for the families living in the village.

Such a couplet would be stranger indeed at an urban temple or at a mountain monastery.

Jiang looked to Yao religious architecture as further evidence of Han influence. The important point for him is that the temples and everything inside them were made by Han craftsmen.<sup>37</sup> Lemoine makes a similar point about the scriptures and paintings used by Yao in Laos and Thailand: “The Yao were probably taught the art of painting at the same time as they learned calligraphy.... But, as in the reproduction of liturgical books, the Yao must often have been obliged to rely on Chinese painters.”<sup>38</sup> Lemoine then relates the following anecdote about an amateur Chinese painter that he met while in Laos:

When the artist was Chinese, he might well have been also a kind of ‘weekend amateur’ painter. When I was in Luang Prabang in Laos, some ten years ago, I knew a petty Chinese peddler who used to settle himself, for months at a time when business was slow, in a Yao village near Vang Vieng. In this area, predominantly populated by lowland Laotians and others, stood a group of three Yao villages which had been there for about forty years, and formed, as it were, a kind of demographic and cultural island. In spite of the villagers’ attachment to their traditions and culture, their isolation increased the difficulty of securing proper training in the Chinese script for their children, and proper rituals by qualified High Masters for themselves. The nearest qualified High Master for a *tou sai* ceremony had to be fetched from a neighboring province, at five days distance on foot and by boat. It was thus a great advantage for them to have an itinerant Chinese copyist and teacher on the spot. When this man announced that he could also reproduce their sacred paintings and books, a family commissioned him to copy a number of rituals and a series of paintings. A son of the family became his apprentice; and this young man learned so well that, when his teacher left, he could paint unaided from the originals already in the house.<sup>39</sup>

Lemoine used this anecdote primarily as evidence for how Yao might have originally learned to paint and write, and "... how an isolated village, with neither artists and calligraphists and with its tradition threatened by the decay of its religious paraphernalia, can nevertheless reconstitute its cultural capital by making best use of opportunities as they arise."<sup>40</sup> Jiang, on the other hand, looked to such examples as evidence that the deities painted in Yao temples were not representations of an authentically Yao awareness of divinity.

Jiang recognized that many Yao deities, such as the Heavenly Worthies of the Three Pure Realms (*Sanqing* 三清), the Jade Emperor, and the Heavenly Master, Zhang (*Zhang Tianshi* 張天師)—dressed in their official garb—were in fact the most important deities of religious Daoism. However, like the Yao documents with their invented Yao graphs mixed in with the more typical Han ones, the Yao Daoist pantheon was comprised of a mixture of typically Han deities with ones that were indigenous to the Yao religious setting. Unlike Strickmann and Lemoine, Jiang had little interest in the Daoist elements in Yao religion—even though he documented them quite efficiently—or in the fact that Yao religion might indeed be Daoism; he was more interested in its pre-Daoist (i.e., pre-Han) attributes. In one place in his article he even expressed his disappointment in response to certain prayers in Yao ritual manuals: "Unfortunately, they are all too Daoized, and actually do not represent the primeval, mysterious flavor of the Yao people." 可惜都太道教化了，實不能代表徯人原始的神秘意味。<sup>41</sup>

Although Jiang noticed Daoist imagery in Yao ritual culture, he could not accept that Daoist deities and temples were authentic Yao religion; in his view, the original and authentic Yao religion did not use paintings or statues, or even temple structures. Instead, the only truly Yao religious structures in the mountains where Yao dwelled, were large stones in front of which they worshipped.<sup>42</sup> According to Jiang, when it came time for Yao living in mountainous areas to worship their deities,<sup>43</sup> they congregated in front of such a stone, lit a fire with wood, and everyone sat to the side of the fire. They hung paper money on top of the rock and placed six bowls of food in front of it.<sup>44</sup> To Jiang, the worship of a large stone was evidence of Yao religion in

its pre-Hanified state. This may be true, but Yao worshipped Daoist deities; Jiang made little attempt to demonstrate when this later layer of practice altered traditional Yao ways. Moreover, the sanctification of rocks and mountains, rivers and lakes, trees, and other objects of nature has been a standard feature of Chinese religious history since very early times.

Jiang also pointed out that even though Yao worshipped Daoist deities, these deities were personified quite differently in the Yao context than in the Han one. For one, many Yao deities, he explained, were associated with specific professions, such as those administering ritual, wealth and property, fate, hunting, and farming. This in and of itself is not indicative of a distinction between Han and Yao views of divinity.

Jiang then argued that Yao embraced a negative characterization of several esteemed Han deities. For proof, he looked to the songs of deities in Yao ritual manuals, where the Earth God (*Tudigong* 土地公) and the Kitchen God (*Zaojun* 灶軍) are portrayed as demons (*mogui* 魔鬼). In the Han context these deities also have their fearful sides; they judge human actions and report them to higher authorities, who then administer punishments, such as a decrease in lifespan.<sup>45</sup> One might also ask if there really is indeed standardization of Han views of the same deities.

Why did Jiang react with such disappointment to the notion that Yao religion was indeed Daoism, or had been Daoized? As mentioned earlier, Jiang came to the Yao Mountains of northern Guangdong hoping to witness primitive religion, similar to a birdwatcher catching a glimpse of a rare species. As part of a larger international anthropological project, he was attempting to grasp the evolution of human society at an earlier stage of development—where did he as a civilized human being come from.<sup>46</sup> Jiang and other anthropologists of the time viewed Yao people living in the mountainous regions of Guangdong and Guangxi as being permanently held in a changeless state, outside time, and beyond the laws of evolution. The signs of Hanification and Daoification they discovered, upon closer investigation, were in their understanding part and parcel of the influence of civilization on lower cultural forms—the forms they were ultimately attempting to grasp.

### THE CONTEXT OF STRICKMANN'S ARGUMENT

Clearly, Strickmann was not the first scholar to discuss Yao Daoism. More accurately, he brought it to the attention of fellow Western sinologists, especially those studying Daoism and other aspects of Chinese religion. To understand the significance of Strickmann's findings, it is necessary to view them in the context of Western scholarship on Chinese religion from the 1960s through the 1980s. Taiwan was the primary laboratory and Han religious traditions—Daoism, Buddhism, and popular religion—were the key samples under investigation. At that time, there was a great deal of discussion between anthropologists based in Taiwan and sinologists (those who were working primarily with classical Chinese texts), many of whom had studied Chinese in Taiwan, and were thus exposed beyond the text to the living religious culture that to this day can be witnessed on Taiwan's streets and in its temples.<sup>47</sup>

Some scholars of Chinese religion in Taiwan, such as Kristofer Schipper, combined study of actual ritual traditions with equal attention directed at reading the texts used by practitioners, and made comparisons with practices that were known to have existed on the mainland. During the 1960s, Schipper, a sinologist by training, left his post at the *Academia Sinica* to immerse himself in Daoist life in South Taiwan.<sup>48</sup> Schipper's work in Taiwan shed light on the connections between religious life—particularly Daoist—in Taiwan and in the regions of China from where Taiwan's inhabitants had come. In his own words:

It is a widely verifiable fact that the traditional culture of this area is similar, if not identical, to that of the places of origin of its inhabitants—the regions of Ch'üan-chou [Quanzhou] and Chang-chou [Zhangzhou] on the Chinese mainland. This fact enables us to gain a certain amount of historical perspective on the field observations of J.J.M. de Groot, who worked in Amoy 100 years ago. Beyond his first-hand account, I have relied on Chinese scriptural sources. This information provides indications that support my contention

that the distinction between these two kinds of liturgy, one written in classical Chinese and the other in vernacular—the so-called vulgar rites (*su-fa*)—has a long history in China.<sup>49</sup>

As de Groot had argued for southern Fujian, Schipper distinguished two separate ritual traditions. On the one hand, the Daoist priests (*daoshi* 道士) of the Orthodox Unity (*Zhengyi* 正一) line—the Celestial Masters who claimed descent from Zhang Daoling, the progenitor of their ritual lineage—use the Chinese texts of the Daoist Canon (*daozang* 道藏). On the other hand, another class of ritual specialist used texts of a “vernacular” tradition.

As Schipper points out, in order to perform orthodox Daoist ritual, it is necessary to be able to read classical Chinese:

The classical ritual performed in Hokkien is in pure *wen-yen* [literary Chinese] in a variety of styles, usually alternating prose with rhymed parts....The classical rituals have to be read, that is, the text (always manuscript) has to be present on the altar and the officiant—or one of his acolytes—turns the pages as the reading progresses, even if the text is known by heart. This reading (and chanting) is done in the classical Hokkien pronunciation (*thak-im*; Mandarin: *tu-yin*), which is entirely different from the spoken language.... The use of this classical pronunciation requires much training on the part of the performers. The masters of classical ritual are specialists. And so, in a different way, are the performers of vernacular ritual.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, for Schipper, one of the defining features of the Daoist priest is his literacy in Chinese, and his ritual use of Chinese texts, which he explains are always in manuscript form, and are not only meant to be read but also have a place in the ritual as objects of great symbolic power.

In contrast to the orthodox traditions of the Daoist priests, Schipper—following de Groot—distinguished a separate class of specialist known

as a “ritual master” (*fashi* 法師) who used his own set of “vernacular” texts for his rituals.<sup>51</sup> Like other texts found in print form in southern Fujian since the 18th century, the texts of the Taiwanese ritual master are in Hokkien syntax. “However, when used ritually, the vernacular texts that are transmitted in writing are never read; they are always recited by heart.”

Following Schipper’s work—as well as that of the many anthropologists who produced ethnographic accounts on Chinese religion in Taiwan—a next step was to trace the origin of specific practices and pantheons to the mainland. It is for this reason that much of the serious ethnographic work on Chinese religion during the 1980s and 1990s was conducted in Fujian, in precisely those areas from where Taiwanese hailed.

Meanwhile, another trend that gained momentum during the 1990s—and continues today—was the detailed investigation and documentation of local ritual practices throughout China, work that in some ways harkened back to the work of Chinese anthropologists during the 1930s and 1940s. The *Minsu Quyí* 民俗曲藝 series, administered by the Taiwanese scholar, Wang Qiugui 王秋桂, is most representative of this trend, in that the majority of research in the series of now over one hundred volumes was conducted by scholars who hailed from the areas under investigation.<sup>52</sup> Rather than making generalized claims about a single Chinese religion that was the same at all places and all times, the *Minsu Quyí* scholars limited their focus to the county and district levels. Despite its highly descriptive nature, the *Minsu Quyí* series has made it possible for scholars to explore the regional variations of Chinese religious phenomena, as well as specific patterns that seem to unite different regions, classes, and ethnicities. This project was begun after Strickmann’s article.<sup>53</sup>

## DAOISM AND SINIFICATION

To Strickmann, and those who followed him, the existence of Yao Daoism was nothing short of remarkable, because it was an indication

that Daoism had spread beyond a single ethnic group, and even beyond Chinese borders. As Strickmann remarked:

Yet there is another, basic question that we may well ask: how have these Taoist texts come into the hands of impoverished Yao villagers in the mountains of northern Thailand? And what is the significance of this extensive corpus of Taoist ritual material, assimilated to their own traditions and preserved by a distinctly non-Chinese ethnic group?<sup>54</sup>

Embedded in Strickmann's questions was a more fundamental issue than simply the fact that Yao were Daoist practitioners—what did this fact say about the diffusion of Daoism throughout China and beyond Chinese borders, and what other Chinese political, religious, and cultural traits were simultaneously propagated in this process?

Strickmann's initial question—how have these Daoist texts come into the hands of impoverished Yao villagers in the mountains of northern Thailand—connotes a sense of surprise at the fact that Daoism could have transcended Chinese and other national borders (as if there was a wall), and reached the hands of impoverished villagers living in the mountains. His use of the words, “come into the hands,” implies that the texts somehow mysteriously traveled south to Thailand and reached the mountainous terrain where Yao dwell, where he would expect to find primitive, illiterate villagers. There is no agency in Strickmann's question, other than the question word: “how.” His emphasis is the texts that he holds in his hands, not the exchange between actors. Because of this, he does not consider that those very impoverished villagers came to Thailand from Central and South China with their texts and ritual paraphernalia already in hand.

The surprise that Strickmann expressed upon discovering that Yao religion was fundamentally Daoist is understandable, given that he saw Daoism as intricately bound to Chinese language and ethnicity—a factor which marks a major difference between how Daoism and Buddhism have been viewed in contemporary discourse. Daoism is

viewed as a Han Chinese phenomenon, what Anna Seidel has called China's "unofficial higher religion,"<sup>55</sup> even though Daoist communities were open to various groups from the earliest days of their inception as an organized tradition.

Although Buddhist texts first appeared in South Asia and were written in Pali and Sanskrit, the religion quickly spread beyond its region of origin. As it spread, the texts associated with it were translated into multiple languages, including Chinese and Tibetan, and new texts were written in diverse areas. As such, Buddhism has not been restricted to a single language or people, even though Pali and Sanskrit still survive as authoritative languages. Few are shocked at the presence of peoples in East and Southeast Asia who practice Buddhism.

What is referred to as Daoism, on the other hand, is comprised of emblems of the Chinese state. Its script is Chinese. Its deities are Chinese officials; even the clothing they wear is the garb of officialdom. Daoist ritual is modeled on official Chinese rituals and administrative practices. For Strickmann, it was through the propagation of Daoist ritual practices, with their emphasis on Chinese script and imperial icons, that Chinese literacy, cultural norms, and a distinct sociopolitical structure spread to certain non-Chinese groups (such as the Yao) in South China:

Taoist liturgical patterns were adapted to native mythology and sacred typography; Taoist social organization was integrated within native communal structure. Written memorials and talismans have always been a prominent feature of Taoist ritual. In Taoist priests, the Yao would have had competent guides to Chinese literacy, well able to introduce them to the involved paperwork that effective communication with the heavens required.<sup>56</sup>

To Strickmann, at least as he expressed the issue of Yao Daoism in his 1979 article, all agency is in the hands of the Chinese official and his main accomplice—the Daoist priest.<sup>57</sup>

## THE SIGNIFICANCE AND PLAN OF THE PRESENT WORK

The point of departure for the current project was Strickmann's questions about how and when Yao became Daoists, and how Daoism functioned in Yao society, as opposed to its function in other mainstream Chinese traditions. What I discovered is that official sources prior to the Qing Dynasty are silent about the question of Yao Daoism. Moreover, no written Yao sources remain from the pre-Qing period, though most extant materials are copies of older documents, and there is frequent allusion in them to earlier times. In the case of Yao ritual manuals, many can be found in the Daoist Canon, and are known to have been extant during the Song period. However, the early provenance of a text is not necessarily an indication of the use of that text by a given community. Conversely, lack of concrete evidence from earlier periods does not prove that Yao Daoism is a Qing phenomenon—merely that it is difficult (if not impossible) to say when Daoist traditions were revealed to Yao societies.

Although pre-Qing sources do not shed much light on the question of Yao Daoism, or on any other aspects of Yao religion, they do contain a great deal of information about contacts between Yao and the Chinese state, as well as with other sociopolitical entities in what is now South China. By “Chinese state” I mean the administrative network that linked diverse regions with the capital, as well as the official bureaucrats and military commanders who, as representatives of the emperor, controlled individual administrative units and pacified autochthonous populations that threatened them. One of the central concerns of authors who we might now call geographers and ethnographers was the detailed documentation of this administrative network. What was important to them was determining exactly what counted as state/government territory—that is, what were the limits of the Emperor's realm. Throughout this book I am interested in how the state was constructed, both as a physical, territorial entity, but also as a virtual one represented in various textual and visual media, and delineated by such terms as: the Central State (*Zhongguo* 中國) and the Nine Continents (*Jiuzhou* 九州)—terms which pre-figure

a dichotomy between center and periphery, inside and outside, civilized and wild.

The results of my research in Part I show that contacts between Yao and Chinese officialdom did not begin in the Song Dynasty, as some studies argue. Instead, by the 11th century, new labels were used to refer to border peoples and their changing relation to the central government. In Chapter One, I examine the specific definitional parameters of the Song labels—*Yaoren*, *Yaoman*, and *Manyao*—and the Tang label—*Moyao*. All of these terms point to phenomena associated with taxation, corvée, and registration, as much as they do to specific peoples. These were perennial concerns for the official elite, but became evermore apparent with the increasing trend toward unification during the late Six Dynasties period.

Previous scholarship has either denied links between these Tang and Song labels and earlier ways of referring to peoples in the same region, or has accepted them without question. In Chapters Two and Three, I explore specific narratives that were told about and by the autochthonous peoples—known as Man 蠻—in Hunan and outlying areas, and demonstrate that they reflect many of the same concerns that are evident in Song and later sources about Yao. Yao sources, known as the *Yao Charters* (*quandie* 券牒) and as the *Passport for Crossing the Mountains* (*guoshanbang* 過山榜), express the very same concerns. The claims made in these documents—official and Yao alike—stem from actual bonds and covenants made between Man leaders and the leaders of various kingdoms (Qin, Chu, etc.) during the Warring States and early imperial periods.

In Part II, I investigate the emergence of Daoist movements—most notably, the Celestial Masters and the Yellow Turbans—at the end of the Han Dynasty, during the same period that Man rebellions became most prevalent. The founding leaders of the Celestial Masters movement, like the Man chieftains, were regional leaders in the area directly to the west of the Man heartland. At least one Man subgroup—the Banshun—were, as Terry Kleeman has brought to our attention, among the first proponents of the Celestial Masters. The very name of the budding movement—the Newly Emerged Correct and Unitary Dao and the

Covenant with the Powers 新出正一盟威之道—also alludes to the earlier tradition of making covenants, albeit with heavenly, as well as earthly, powers.

The system of ritual practice, generally known as Daoism, could very well be referred to as *imperial*. That the early Celestial Masters Daoist community in second century Sichuan province, and through extension, all subsequent movements tracing their origin back to it, derived their ritual practices from the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.) politico–religious landscape, has been convincingly argued by Anna Seidel. Beginning in the latter part of the Western Han (ended in 9 A.D.) apocryphal manuscripts, divine charts, textual descriptions of the appearance of extraordinary beings and bizarre anomalies, talismanic script and seals, and following the collapse of the Han Dynasty, revealed “Daoist” scriptures and the priests who presented them, were all symbols of the emperor’s mandate bestowed on him by heaven above. The Yao documents collected by Shiratori, and discussed by Strickmann and Lemoine, are part of this very same tradition.

I conclude this book with a detailed analysis of the *Passport*, a document possessed only by Yao leaders, which Yao view as evidence of imperial and heavenly recognition.