

# Daoism in China Today, 1980–2002\*

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**ABSTRACT** Drawing on Daoist Association sources, fieldwork and interviews, this article analyses some major aspects of Daoism in China today. It first presents the revival of destroyed Daoist temples, the return of liturgical activities in Daoist temples and the establishment of training classes for young Daoists. It also discusses the restoration of ordinations of Daoists at the Quanzhen monastery Baiyun guan and the Halls of Zhengyi Tianshi at Longhu shan. Based upon the National Daoist Association's statistics from 1996, there were about 20,000 "Daoist priests who live at home," called *sanju daoshi*, who perform Daoist ritual outside monasteries in local communities across China. Despite the state's policy of controlling *sanju daoshi*, the revival of Daoist ritual tradition in village temples in China today reveals that Daoism is still very much alive in Chinese communities.

Daoism has remained a central part of the daily life of the Chinese people. Although the category of "Daoism" has different contents for different scholars, such as the aspects relating to philosophical mysticism, mythology, immortals, nourishing life, meditation and liturgies, Daoism can be seen as a religious and liturgical institution profoundly rooted in the "social body of the local communities."<sup>1</sup> From Ming times on, Daoism comprised two main schools: that of the Zhengyi Heavenly Masters, passed on hereditarily since the Han dynasty in the second century AD, and that of the school of Total Perfection (Quanzhen). The former fostered local communities and temple organizations and provided them with their liturgical framework and ritual specialists,<sup>2</sup> while the latter was based, on the Buddhist model, in monastic communities.

This article draws on three main sources of reference material that are helpful in understanding the recent situation and development of Daoism in China after years of suppression under the rule of the People's Republic.<sup>3</sup> The first is my own observation during the past three years while carrying out research into Daoism in China. I have visited Daoist

\* This article is based on a research project entitled "History of Heavenly Master Daoism in the Six Dynasties Period." The project was generously funded by the Research Grants Council of the Universities Grants Committee (ref. CUHK4019/99H). I would like to thank Franciscus Verellen, Daniel Overmyer, Timothy Barrett, Kenneth Dean and Paul Katz for their comments and suggestions.

1. Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, trans. by Karen C. Duval (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 4. On the discussion of the definitions of "Daoism" in the Chinese and Western studies of Daoism, see Russel Kirkland, Timothy Barrett and Livia Kohn, "Introduction," in Livia Kohn (ed.), *Daoism Handbook* (Brill: Leiden, 2000), pp. xi–xviii.

2. Kristofer Schipper, "Taoism: the story of the way," in Stephen Little (ed.), *Taoism and the Arts of China* (Chicago: The Art Institution of Chicago in association with University of California Press, 2000), p. 52.

3. On the suppression of Daoist priests during the period of Cultural Revolution, see Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai Zhongguo daojiao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1993), pp. 15–16, 231.

temples in Beijing, Chengdu, Xinjin (Sichuan), Heming shan (Dayi, Sichuan), Longhu shan, Maoshan, Suzhou, Nanjing, Shanghai, Luofu shan (Huizhou) and Guangzhou. Because I am now engaged in a research project on Daoist ritual traditions on the southern coast of Guangdong province, I have also had the opportunity to observe Daoist rituals in that region's villages and talk to the "Daoists living at home" (*huoju daoshi*) who perform these rituals.

My second source of reference material is the two most representative journals of Daoism in China, *Zhongguo daojiao* and *Shanghai daojiao*. Since 1987, the *Zhongguo daojiao* has been a nation-wide, bimonthly publication of the National Daoist Association of China.<sup>4</sup> The *Shanghai daojiao* is a regional publication of the Shanghai Daoist Association.<sup>5</sup> These journals provide valuable information on three main topics: news of Daoist Associations, especially their religious activities, meetings and policy documents, at both national and provincial levels; repairs to and openings of Daoist temples; and the religious life and conditions of the Daoist priests who reside in temples.

The third source of reference material is academic reports on Daoism in China today; for example, recent publications by Li Yangzheng, Jan Yün-hua, Thomas H. Hahn, Kenneth Dean, Hachiya Kunio, John Lagerwey, Liu Jingfeng and Daniel Overmyer.<sup>6</sup>

This article covers the period from 1980 to the present day and focuses on three main aspects: the religious activities of Daoist temples and the conditions of administration of these temples under the Daoist Associations, at the national or provincial level; the restoration of ordination

4. Before the publication of *Zhongguo daojiao*, the National Daoist Association published a journal, *Daoxie huikan*, but this publication was only for inside information and could not be subscribed to by others.

5. There are three other regional journals of Daoism published in China today: *Sanqin Daojiao*, *Fujian daojiao* and *Maoshao daojiao*.

6. See Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai Zhongguo daojiao*; Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai daojiao* (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 2000); Jan Yün-hua, "The religious situation and the studies of Buddhism and Taoism in China: an incomplete and imbalanced picture," *Journal of Chinese Religions*, Vol. 12 (1985), pp. 37–64; Thomas H. Hahn, "New developments concerning Buddhist and Taoist monasteries," in Julian F. Pas (ed.), *The Turning of the Tide: Religion in China Today* (Hong Kong: Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch, in association with Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 79–101 and "On doing fieldwork in Daoist studies in the People's Republic – conditions and results," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, Vol. 2 (1986), pp. 211–17; Kenneth Dean, "Field notes on two Taoist *jiao* observed in Zhangzhou in December 1985," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, Vol. 2 (1986), pp. 191–209, "Funerals in Fujian," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, Vol. 4 (1988), pp. 19–78, "Revival of religious practices in Fujian: a case study," in Pas, *The Turning of the Tide*, pp. 51–77, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of South-east China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), "Taoism in contemporary China," ch. 24, in D. Lopez (ed.), *Chinese Religion in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 306–326, and *Lord of the Three in One: The Spread of a Cult in Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Hachiya Kunio, *Chugoku no Dokyo: sono katsudo to dokan no genjo* (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku toyo bunka kenkyujo, 1995); John Lagerwey, "Fujian sheng Jianyan diqu de daojiao," *Misú quyi*, No. 84 (1993), pp. 43–82; Liu Jingfeng, *Gannan zongjiao shehui yu daojiao wenhua yanjiu* (Hong Kong: International Hakka Studies Association, Ecole Française D'Extrême Orient, Overseas Chinese Archives, 2000); Daniel L. Overmyer (ed.), *Ethnography in China Today: A Critical Assessment of Methods and Results* (Taipei: Yuan-Liou Publishing Co. Ltd., 2002).

ceremonies for Quanzhen *daoshi* and Zhengyi *daoshi*; and popular Daoism and professional ritual specialists, commonly known as *huoju daoshi*, especially their ritual services and ceremonies outside Daoist temples. Because of the lack of a common definition of “Daoist believers” (*daojiao xintu*) and accurate data on the Daoist population of the laity in China, I do not deal with lay believers of Daoism, but focus on the institutional and clerical aspects of Daoism in China since the 1980s.

### *Daoist Associations, Daoist Temples and Daoists*

Like most other national religious organizations in China following the Cultural Revolution, the National Daoist Association, originally founded in 1957, was re-established and held its third National Congress in 1980.<sup>7</sup> Following its re-establishment, the first task of the National Daoist Association was to restore the Daoist temples that had been destroyed by the Red Guards or occupied by non-religious organizations during the Ten Years’ Chaos.<sup>8</sup>

Thomas Hahn’s fieldwork report on Daoism in China between 1980 and 1986 has already pointed out that this initial phase of “Daoist recovery” was characterized by the revival of destroyed Daoist temples and the return of old Daoist priests nation-wide. Despite a suspicious “wait-and-see attitude” maintained by certain Western observers and scholars towards the changing religious policy in China after the years of destructive annihilation, Daoist temples, like other religious centres, have been rebuilt one by one and opened to the public since 1980.<sup>9</sup> In 1982, 21 of the best-known Daoist temples in 17 provinces or on famous mountains were the first temples to be re-opened, and received government approval when they were classified as nationally protected religious centres. Although some restored Daoist temples, such as Longhu shan in Jiangxi and Maoshan in Jiangsu, are of the Zhengyi order, most belong to the public monasteries (*shifang conglin*) of Quanzhen Daoism.<sup>10</sup> Since then, the speed of restoration and reconstruction of Daoist temples has

7. On the founding history of the National Daoist Association before 1980, see Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai daojiao*, pp. 38–70. In 1998, the National Daoist Association held its sixth national Congress. The Congress then elected the present members of executive committee of the National Daoist Association. Ming Zhiting is presently the chairman, and there are nine vice-chairmen, who are Zhang Jiyu, Ren Farong, Liu Huaiyuan, Wang Guangde, Huang Xinyang, Huang Zhi’an, Ding Changyun, Tang Chengqing, Lai Baorong and Yuan Bingdong.

8. *Daoxie huikan*, No. 13 (1984), pp. 1–8.

9. Julian F. Pas, “Introduction: Chinese religion in transition,” in Pas, *The Turning of the Tide*, p. 1.

10. The 21 restored Daoist temples are Bixiaci in Taishan, Taiqing gong in Laoshan (Liaoning), Mao shan daoyuan in Jiangsu, Baopu daoyuan in Hangzhou, Longhu shan tianshifu in Jiangxi, Wudangshan zixiaogong in Hubei, Wudangshan taiyue taihe gong, Changchun guan in Wuhan, Chongxu guan in Huizhou, Tianshidong in Qingcheng shan (Sichuan), Zushidian in Qingcheng shan, Qingyang gong in Chengdu, Louguan tai in Zongnan shan (Sha’anxi), Baxian gong in Xi’an, Yuquan daoyuan in Huashan, Jiutian gong in Huashan, Zhenyue gong in Huashan, Wuliang guan in Qianshan (Liaoning), Taiqing gong in Shenyang, Zhongyue miao in Songshan (Henan), and Baiyun guan in Beijing.

accelerated. During the 1990s, restoration of Daoist temples expanded from those located in metropolitan cities to those in more rural, county areas. According to the “official” numbers and statistics disclosed by the National Daoist Association, about 400 Daoist temples were opened in 1992, 1,200 in 1995 and 1,600 in 1998.<sup>11</sup> Li Yangzhen, the associate director of the National Daoist College, claims a total of 1,722 Daoist temples established up until 1996.<sup>12</sup> In the case of Jiangsu province, it is reported that in 1993 there were only five Daoist temples, but this had increased to 42 in 1999.<sup>13</sup> It is not known whether there are instances in which main temples have established branch temples, or whether there are economic ties or dependence between temples.

Because of the lack of comparable data, it is not possible to obtain an accurate estimate for the number of Daoist priests that belong to the Quanzhen or Zhengyi orders. However, Li Yangzhen’s account suggests that the number of resident Daoist priests rose to 7,135 in 1996, of whom 4,139 were Quanzhen monks, 2,311 Quanzhen nuns and 685 Zhengyi priests.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, based on the geographical distribution of the Quanzhen and Zhengyi priests who were ordained in Qingcheng shan and Longhu shan in 1995, it is known that those who were ordained as Quanzhen monks and nuns came mainly from the Baixian gong (Xi’an), Louguan tai (Sha’anxi), Changchun guan (Wuhan), Wudangshan (Hubei), Qingcheng shan and Taiqing gong (Liaoning). In comparison, the Zhengyi ordained priests were from Daoist temples or Daoist Association in 12 provinces and one city, such as Jiangsu, Shanghai, Hunan, Hubei, Anhui, Zhejiang, Guangdong, Jiangxi, Yunnan, Fujian and Henan.<sup>15</sup>

Because of the state’s administrative need for effective management and control of Daoist temples and their members, the establishment of local organizational authorities, such as Daoist Associations, continues. It is known that, by 1999, 133 regional Daoist Associations had already been established at a nation-wide level.<sup>16</sup> All Daoist Associations are under the administration of the Religious Affairs Bureau (*zongjiao shiwuju*) at the district level.<sup>17</sup> Regional Daoist Associations are responsible for the management of temples, providing liturgical and scriptural training for their resident members, negotiating with the government over the repair of temples, and recruiting young members into Daoist temples.

It is evident that the tasks and concerns of Daoist Associations, at both the national and district level, have gradually changed during the years since the revival of Daoism in the 1980s. As mentioned above, the first phase of Daoist revival in the early 1980s was characterized by the restoration and repair of destroyed temples, as well as the recruitment of

11. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 3 (1992), p.10; No.5 (1999), p. 4.

12. Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai daojiao*, p.185.

13. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 1 (2001), p.9.

14. Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai daojiao*, p.185.

15. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 4 (1994), p.15; No. 1 (1996), pp.11–12.

16. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 5 (1999), p.4.

17. Li Yangzheng, *Daojiao shi luejiang* (Beijing: Zhongguo daojiao xueyuan, 1997), p. 537.

young members into temples. The National Daoist Association, which was established with the aim of training young members, started a half-yearly programme called the “Higher educational class for Daoists” (*daojiao zhishi zhuanxiuban*) in 1982, which continued in 1984, 1986, 1987 and 1988.<sup>18</sup> The 1988 class was arranged especially for Daoist nuns, and 62 recommended students were admitted. It is reported that many graduates, especially from the first and second classes, have already achieved high positions in Daoist temples or Associations.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, many provincial and local Daoist Associations, for instance in Shanghai, Wuhan, Chengdu, Maoshan, Suzhou, Sha’anxi and Zhejiang, all started their own training classes for young Daoist priests in the late 1980s.<sup>20</sup>

In comparison with the condition of Daoism in China in the early 1980s, it seems that the problems regarding the legitimacy of Daoist temples, or of accusations being made against religious ceremonies being performed in temples, have not been heard since the 1990s. Instead of a problem of survival, the Daoist Associations (at all levels) have shifted their attention to focus more on the rules and orders relating to the internal affairs of Daoist temples and their staff members. They are now more concerned with ensuring effective means of managing and administering the so-called “corrected” temple activities, the religious life of resident members, and, most importantly, the “Daoists living at home,” who perform ritual services and ceremonies outside temples.

In the past ten years, the National Daoist Association has sought to enforce four influential policy documents in connection with issues concerning temple management, rules for the ordination of Quanzhen and Zhengyi priests, and a definition of the “corrected” religious activities of “Daoists living at home.” The four paper documents are: “Methods for administering Daoist temples” (*Guanyu daojiao gongguan guanli banfa*) in 1992; “Tentative methods related to the administration of the Zhengyi priests who live at home” (*Guanyu daojiao sanju zhengyipai daoshi guanli shixing banfa*) in 1992; “Rules about the transmission of precepts for the Quanzhen order” (*Guanyu quanzhenpai chuanjie de guiding*) in 1994; and “Rules related to conferring registers of ordination for the Zhengyi priests” (*Guanyu zhengyi pai daoshi shoulu guiding*) in 1994.<sup>21</sup>

As it is no longer a question of prophecy, we shall try to explain the phenomenon of the rapid growth of restored Daoist temples in present-day China. The spiritual and religious needs of many Daoist believers are of course important, but the following three aspects play an equally important role. First, because of the lack of comparable evidence, it may

18. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 1 (1987), pp. 53–54, No. 3 (1987), pp. 63–64; Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai Zhongguo daojiao*, pp. 100–102. In 1990, a National Daoist College was established in the Baiyun guan at Beijing. There were two different classes, the “higher” and “advanced” programmes of Daoist education. See *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 3 (1990), p. 3.

19. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 1 (1987). For example, the present abbot of Baiyun guan, Huang Xinyang and the vice-president of National Daoist Association, Zhang Jiyu were graduates in the 1985 class.

20. Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai Zhongguo daojiao*, pp. 107–112.

21. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 4 (1992), pp. 6–7; No. 4 (1994), p. 14; No. 5 (1999), p. 4; Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai Zhongguo daojiao*, pp. 316–322.

be difficult to imagine that anti-religious attitudes towards Daoism have been completely withdrawn in China. Because Daoist Associations at all levels are constitutionally governed by the Religious Affairs Offices, it is hard not to imagine the government authority's consistent influence on these religious establishments.<sup>22</sup> Whatever the relationship between the government authority and religious bodies in China, it is a fact that basic religious activities in Daoist temples have been considerably revived and continuously expanded. Without doubt, the number of temples and priests has grown rapidly in the last decade.

Secondly, it is clear that, since the 1980s, money for repairing and reconstructing Daoist temples in China has been continuously raised by, and has always depended upon, Chinese Daoist institutions based in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. Guangdong and Fujian are two particular cases where money from foreign sources has been invested in Daoist temples.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, cadres and officials from the provinces or cities realize that such financial sources, used for rebuilding Daoist temples, can be one of the most effective means of attracting further money to invest in public works and establishments at the district level, such as schools, universities, hospitals, tourism, improvement of village education and so on.

Thirdly, the revival of Daoist temples has undoubtedly benefited from the boom in economic growth in China during the past two decades, which has resulted in the growth of personal income and the rapid development of private companies. It is not surprising to discover a close link between the recovery of Daoist temples and the nation-wide expansion of the tourist industry. In the summer of 1999, when I visited the Yuanfu Wanninggong temple at Maoshan, Nanjing, which was restored and opened to the public in 1988,<sup>24</sup> I was told that, "in 1997, a total of 650,000 pilgrims and tourists visited the Maoshan, and as a result, the total income from tourism amounted to 10 million [RMB]. Since the 1990s, the Maoshan Daoist temple's yearly income has increased by 500 thousand [RMB] every year, and it had made a profit of 6.5 million [RMB] up until 1999."<sup>25</sup> In 1996, supported by such a large income from tourism, the Yuanfu Wanninggong decided to build the largest bronze statue of Laozi in the world at Maoshan. In co-operation with a city-based company, the Yuanfu Wanninggong invested a total of 30 million RMB in its construction. There was an official public celebration in November 1998, when the giant Laozi bronze statue, 33 metres high, was opened to the public.<sup>26</sup>

22. Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai Zhongguo daojiao*, p.77.

23. Thomas H. Hahn, "New developments concerning Buddhist and Taoist monasteries," pp.81-83.

24. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No.3 (1989), p. 23.

25. Maoshan daojiao wenhua yanjiushi (ed.), *Maoshan daoyuan*, p.20. According the newsletter published by the Daoist Temple of Maoshan, *Maoshan daoyuan*, No. 9 (2000), the Maoshan temple has earned 6.6 million RMB in the first eight months of 2000.

26. *Maoshan daoyuan*, No. 1 (2001), p.3.

*Ordinations of Quanzhen and Zhengyi Daoists*

The revival of Daoism in present-day China advanced to a new phase with the renewal of its ordination practice, held by the Quanzhen order at the Baiyun guan, in 1989. This was the first Daoist ordination ceremony since the takeover of the communist government in China. In 1995, the Quanzhen and Zhengyi orders of Daoism held ordination ceremonies in the Qingcheng shan and Longhu shan respectively. The key to Daoism's survival crisis in China is clearly the succession of a new generation of young priests, which led the National Daoist Association to consider seriously the renewal of ordination, which had not taken place since the 1940s.<sup>27</sup>

With regard to the history of Quanzhen ordination ceremonies, Yoshioka Yoshitoyo found that 31 ordinations were held at the Baiyun guan between 1808 and 1927.<sup>28</sup> Until the period of the Republic of China, the Quanzhen sect had no bureaucratic institution for ordination, although it had to take place in a public *shifang* monastery.<sup>29</sup> From the Ming dynasty onwards, the Daoist priests of the Zhengyi order received their ordination within a loose Heavenly Master's family system, whose head was the Tianshi himself.<sup>30</sup> Until the early Qing, the Heavenly Master was entrusted to hold a nation-wide ordination at the Longhu shan, or to visit the various provinces to hold ordination platforms.<sup>31</sup> In the fifth month of Qianlong 4 (1739), the Heavenly Master's role as the nominal head of a nation-wide ordination system was banned.<sup>32</sup> Whereas the state tended to keep abreast of the Heavenly Master's nominal authority within the administration of Zhengyi Daoism, it is known that the Heavenly Master was still confirmed as guardian of orthodoxy within Daoism. He continued to issue registers to individuals who went to the Longhu shan for ordination, or selected other Daoists of the Heavenly Master's office (*Zhenren fu*) in his name and gave local Daoists licences (*zhizhao*)

27. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 4 (1994), pp.14–15. According to Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai daojiao*, p.123, the last ordination of Quanzhen order held before the takeover of communist government was in the Erxian An, Chengdu, in 1947.

28. Yoshioka Yoshitoyo, "Taoist monastic life," in Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel (eds.), *Facets of Taoism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p.236.

29. Vincent Goossaert, "The Quanzhen clergy, 1700–1950," in John Lagerwey (ed.), *Religion and Chinese Society: The Transformation of a Field* (Hong Kong: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient and Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2003), pp.10,18. Goossaert's study shows that Beijing's Baiyun guan and Shenyang's Taiqing gong were the two major Quanzhen ordination centres of North-eastern China. There were 1,740 Daoists ordained at the Taiqing gong between 1823 and 1929 in 8 ordinations and 5,460 at the Baiyun guan between 1807 and 1927 in 31 ordinations.

30. On the ordination in the Zhengyi tradition, see Kristofer Schipper, "Taoist ordination ranks in the Tunhuang manuscripts," in Gert Naudorf, Karl-Heinz Pohl and Hans-Herrman Schmidt (eds.), *Religion und Philosophie in Ostasien (Festschrift für Hans Steininger)* (Königshausen: Neumann, 1985), pp.127–148.

31. Vincent Goossaert, "Counting the monks: the 1736–1739 census of the Chinese clergy," *Late Imperial China*, Vol. 21 (2000), pp. 53–55.

32. Hosoya Yoshio, "Kenryū chō no Seikyō" ("The Zhengyi order under the Qianlong reign"), in Akizuki Kan'ei (ed.), *Dōkyō to shūkyō bunka (Daoism and Religious Culture)* (Tokyo: Hirakawa, 1987), pp.577–78. Goossaert, "Counting the monks," p.54.

bearing his seal.<sup>33</sup> According to Li Yangzhen, the last ordination ceremony for the Zhengyi *daoshi* at the Longhu shan was held in 1946.<sup>34</sup>

With the takeover of the communist government, the Daoists were prohibited from performing any ordinations. With the renewal of the ceremony at the Baiyun guan in 1989, the period of the Quanzhen ordination procedure (*chuanjie*) was shortened to 20 days from the traditional 100 days.<sup>35</sup> There were 75 ordinands, 30 (40 per cent) of whom were women, and all of whom had already lived within a proper monastery for more than three years.<sup>36</sup> The oldest was aged 75 and the youngest was 21. At the end of the ceremony, the ordinands received the so-called Great Precepts of the Threefold Altar (*santan dajie*): the Initial Precepts of Perfection (*chuzhen jie*), the Intermediate Precepts (*zhongji jie*), and the Great Precepts of the Celestial Immortals (*tianxian dajie*).<sup>37</sup> In November 1995, a second Quanzhen ordination was held at the Changdao guan, also named the Tianshi dong, at the Qingcheng shan. Master Fu Yuantian was the abbot (*fanzhang*) of the Qingcheng shan, and thus took the presiding position of the Ordination Master (*chuanjie lishi*).<sup>38</sup> Some 400 Quanzhen monks and nuns underwent the 1995 ordination.

The re-establishment of the Zhengyi ordination ceremony seems to have been more complicated. Restoration of the Zhengyi transferral of Register (*shoulu*) was first discussed in 1989, and a final agreement was reached in 1994, following the introduction of the “Tentative methods for administering the Zhengyi priests who live at home” for two years.<sup>39</sup>

Although the Quanzhen order of Daoism, which was established during the 12th century, attempted to follow the Buddhist ideal of a celibate and monastic life, the majority of the Zhengyi *daoshi* lived a married *daoshi* life at home, wearing ritual vestments for the performing of ritual, a practice which continues today.<sup>40</sup> These married *daoshi* were called the

33. *Ibid.* p.54. One copy of such a licence issued in 1704 has recently been found in the possession of a Daoist family from Hunan. It quotes that the early Qing imperial administration still entrusted the Heavenly Master with maintaining orthodoxy within Daoism by conferring on local Daoists the quality of a practitioner of pure Daoist liturgy. See Liu Jingfeng, *Gannan zongjiao shehui yu daojiang wenhua yanjiu*, p.263.

34. *Zhongguo daojiang*, No. 2 (1990), p.4. See also Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai daojiang*, p.124.

35. During the early 19th century, the duration of Quanzhen ordination had been shortened to 52 days at the Baiyun guan. See Goossaert, “The Quanzhen Clergy, 1700–1950,” p. 21, n.63.

36. *Zhongguo daojiang*, No. 3 (1989), p.5.

37. Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai daojiang*, pp. 121–23. Cf. Yoshioka Yoshitoyo, “Taoist monastic life,” pp. 235–36; Goossaert, “The Quanzhen Clergy, 1700–1950,” p.21; Monica Esposito, “Longmen Taoism in Qing China: doctrinal ideal and local reality,” *Journal of Chinese Religions*, Vol. 29 (2001), pp. 193–95.

38. *Zhongguo daojiang*, No. 1 (1996), pp. 7–11; Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai daojiang*, p.123. There were ten senior monks to be selected with different titles of ordination offices for the function of assisting the presiding master. They are Xie Zongxin, Wu Lichong, Cao Xiangzhen, Jiang Zhilin, Han Renquan, Tian Chengqi, Zhou Zhiqing, Huang Zhi'an, Wu Yuanzhen and Huang Xinyang.

39. *Shanghai daojiang*, No. 2 (1994), pp. 54–55.

40. Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, p.54 claims that: “On the basis of historical and contemporary observations, we can state that Taoism never was a monastic religion, for celibacy, is, in fact, inconsistent with its fundamental conception of the body. From the early



*huoju daoshi*, nowadays known in China as the *sanju daoshi*. However, under the Ming, Qing and the Republican periods, “*Daoshi* living at home” were always questioned and given a choice between a normal religious life, in which they would reside in a temple, or a return to lay status.<sup>41</sup> The state has always wanted the Daoists to conform to the Buddhist ideal of celibacy and a monastic life. Theoretically, it was illegal to perform ritual services and ceremonies outside Daoist temples. After the takeover by the communist government, all *huoju daoshi* were banned. Almost all of the ritual manuscripts that these Daoists possessed were taken from them and burnt or lost during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, since the beginning of the 1980s, traditional Zhengyi rituals, including the *Jiao* offering rituals and *Zhai* funeral rituals, have been extensively revived in China, especially in the villages of southern China.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the enormous resurgence of Zhengyi rituals in local society, the question of the married *sanju daoshi*’s “official” status, and how to manage them effectively, has perplexed the National Daoist Association since the 1990s. Above all, since these Daoist ritual specialists have always performed services and ceremonies in the context of the cults of various gods in local temples, they may not be so easily distinguished from temple shamans, whose religious activities are still criticized as superstitious. Therefore, it should be understood that the National Daoist Association’s restoration of the ordination of the Zhengyi order in 1995 was not an easy accomplishment in the light of Daoism’s modern history in China. However, the Zhengyi ordination actually took place under the guidance of the 1992 “Tentative methods for administrating the Zhengyi priests who live at home.”<sup>44</sup> The rule is aimed at determining and classifying who are the “correct” and “recognized” *sanju daoshi* of the Zhengyi order.<sup>45</sup> Basically, a Zhengyi *sanju daoshi* is qualified and recognized only if he has successfully obtained a “Daoist certificate belonging to the Zhengyi sect” (*Zhengyipai daoshizheng*), which is uniformly issued by the National Daoist Association.<sup>46</sup> Theoretically, it is illegal for the *sanju daoshi* to perform liturgical services and ceremonies

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*footnote continued*

times of the independent local communities of the Heavenly Masters’ government, the *tao-shih*, men and women, were married people.”

41. Goossaert, “Counting the monks,” p.46.

42. Dean, “Field notes on two Taoist *jiao* observed in Zhangzhou in December 1985,” p.195.

43. Cf. Kenneth Dean, “Revival of religious practices in Fujian: a case study,” in Pas, *The Turning of the Tide*, pp.51–77; “Taoism in Southern Fujian: field notes, fall, 1985,” in Tsao Pen-yeh and Daniel Law (eds.), *Studies of Taoist Rituals and Music of Today* (Hong Kong: The Society for Ethnomusicological research in Hong Kong, 1989), pp. 74–87; and *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of South-east China*.

44. On 24 August 1998, the National Daoist Association reviewed the 1992 rule and renamed it as the “Provisional methods for administering the Zhengyi Priests who live at home.” Cf. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 3 (2002), p.6.

45. About the details of the “Tentative methods related to the administration of the Zhengyi priests who live at home” (*Guanyu daojiao sanju daoshi guanli shixing banfa*), see Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai Zhongguo daojiao*, pp.321–22.

46. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 4 (1992), pp.6–7.

outside a Daoist temple or officially endorsed religious centre, without advance approval from the regional Daoist Association.<sup>47</sup>

The first modern Zhengyi ordination ceremony took place at the highest doctrinal altar (*zongtan*) of the Halls of Tianshi fu, at Longhu shan on 5 December 1995, and lasted for three days.<sup>48</sup> Instead of conceiving it as a revival of the Heavenly Master family system, this ordination of “conferring registers” (*shoulu*) was not organized by the Halls of Tianshi fu, but by the National Daoist Association. With no ecclesiastical connection with the hereditary Heavenly Master, the ordination was presided over by three primary masters of the Zhengyi order, He Canran as the “Master who initiates and transmits” (*chuandu shi*), Chen Liansheng as the “Master who examines” (*jiandu shi*) and Zhou Niankao as the “Master who guarantees” (*baoju shi*). In fact, after the 63rd Heavenly Master, Zhang Enpu (1904–69), fled to Taiwan in 1949, the hereditary office of Heavenly Master Zhang was no longer recognized and has not been restored in China.

Around 200 ordinands, traditionally called the “students of registers” (*lusheng*) took part in this ordination ceremony.<sup>49</sup> Their ages ranged from 20 to over 80. At the end of the ordination, the ordained Zhengyi *daoshi* received a “registration certificate” (*zhidie*) (not “register of scriptures” *jinglu*) and a volume of “collected essays on the scriptures and instructions [given] for the ordination of Zhengyi sect of Daoism” (*daojiao zhengyipai shoulu chuandu jingjiaoji*).<sup>50</sup> Despite the lack of data on their religious background, it is certain that some of them must have belonged to the kind of *sanju daoshi* who must obtain the official “Daoist certificate, stating that they belong to the Zhengyi order.” The officials of the National Daoist Association hoped that the apparently disordered situation of *sanju daoshi* could be further improved and structured by restoring ordination, and could thus achieve a more effective system of managing them.<sup>51</sup>

Regarding the purpose of this article, the restoration of the ordination system in the mid-1990s is evidence of Daoism’s improved situation in China. The problem of succession in Daoism has been properly addressed. Whether Daoist ordinations will continue and to what extent they

47. *Ibid.* p.7.

48. Before the 1995 Zhengyi ordination ceremony held at Longhu shan, the Halls of Tianshi, on 3–9 October 1991, had held an ordination ceremony for 36 Zhengyi *daoshi* who came from Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia. Cf. *Shanghai daojiao*, No. 4 (1991), p.28; *Zhongguo daojiao*, No.1 (1992), pp.5–6.

49. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 1 (1996), pp.11–12; *Shanghai daojiao*, No. 1 (1996), pp.7–11; Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai daojiao*, pp. 125–26.

50. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 4 (2001), p.12; Li Yangzheng, *Dangdai daojiao*, p.126. In the past, after ordination, the Zhengyi Daoist priest would receive the so-called “register of scriptures” (*jinglu*), disciplinary rules (*jie*), and scriptures from the Heavenly Master. The register was a list of names of the spirit generals contained in the sacred scriptures and thus gave the Daoist masters command over the specific graded number of spirit generals. Cf. Schipper, *The Daoist Body*, p.60 and “Taoist ordination ranks in the Tunhuang manuscripts,” pp.128, 140; Franciscus Verellen, “The twenty-four dioceses and Zhang Daoling: spatio-liturgical organization in early Heavenly Master Taoism,” in Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara (eds.), *Pilgrims and Place: Localizing Sanctity in Asian Religions* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003), pp. 15–67.

51. *Shanghai daojiao*, No. 2 (1994), pp.54–55.

will become normalized in the future is not known at this moment. Nevertheless, as a leading Zhengyi master, Chen Liansheng, pointed out in his speech on the issue of “the significance of the conferral of registers to Zhengyi Daoists” (*Guanyu zhengyipai daoshi shoulu de yiyi*), the Zhengyi ritual tradition may not yet have been properly legitimized because of some “inappropriate” policies that are maintained by local government officials.<sup>52</sup> According to Chen Liansheng, the restoration of the Zhengyi ordination tradition plays an important role in ensuring the healthy, protected and ordered development of this long established Daoist tradition.<sup>53</sup>

### *Sanju daoshi, Local Cults and Temple Festivals*

Unknown to most outside observers of Chinese religions, traditional Daoist rituals, local cults and popular culture have revived and increased their activities in China today, especially in rural villages.<sup>54</sup> Although we have access to a number of reports on the resurgence of Daoism in local society, we still know surprisingly little about the present situation of popular Daoism and, in particular, the figures and religious activities of *sanju daoshi* who live among the common people.<sup>55</sup> Despite their responsibility for governing Daoist activities, the Daoist Association has described the *sanju daoshi*'s ritual activities as being in a serious state of disorder and sometimes criticize them as being superstitious.<sup>56</sup>

Until the 1990s, district Daoist Associations did not have statistics for the number of *sanju daoshi*.<sup>57</sup> In the early 1990s, in order to control and handle them more easily and effectively, they started to investigate the real situation regarding *sanju daoshi*. The Daoist Association in the city of Wenzhou reported that there were 1,605 *sanju daoshi* of the Zhengyi sect in 1992.<sup>58</sup> The Daoist Association in Fujian province quoted a total of 4,000 Zhengyi *daoshi* in the cities of Quanzhou, Putian and Jinjiang.<sup>59</sup> The Daoist Association in Gansu province verified that, until 1993, there were about 1,200 Zhengyi *daoshi* registered with the association.<sup>60</sup> It was reported that there were 1,000 Zhengyi *daoshi* in Shanghai in 1990. In

52. *Shanghai daojiao*, No. 3 (1995), p.34.

53. *Shanghai daojiao*, No. 2 (1994), pp.4–5. On Chen's other essays related to the aim of the restoration of Zhengyi ordination, see Chen Liansheng, *Daofeng ji (Collected Essays of the Wind of the Dao)* (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1996).

54. Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of South-East China*, p.3.

55. The 80 volumes of the monograph series of “Studies in Chinese ritual, theatre and folklore” (*Minsu quyi congshu*, Taipei: Shih Hocheng Foundation, 1993-) edited by Wang Qiugui have contributed to a better understanding of popular Daoism in county level in the past decade. Other ethnographic reports covering the Hakka regions of South-east China (*Traditional Hakka Society Series*, Hong Kong: EFEO, 1997-) directed by John Lagerwey also cover local Daoist ritual in that region. See Daniel Overmyer, “Introduction,” in Overmyer, *Ethnography in China Today*, pp.3–4.

56. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 3 (1992), p.25.

57. Hann, “New developments concerning Buddhist and Taoist monasteries,” p.15.

58. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 3 (1992), p.25–26.

59. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 1 (1989), p.10.

60. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 3 (1994), p.7.

Jiangsu province, the number of registered *sanju daoshi* exceeded 4,000 in 2000.<sup>61</sup> I have also had access to all the materials published by the Daoist Associations and have found only one report that presents the total number of Zhengyi *daoshi* in China today. Li Yangzheng reports that, based on the National Daoist Association's statistics from 1996, there were about 20,000 *sanju daoshi* in local society.<sup>62</sup>

It is not difficult to find evidence of the Daoist Associations' enthusiasm for setting up district bureaucratic control of *sanju daoshi*, especially since the late 1990s. For example, in the city of Suzhou a special monitoring committee and administration office for *sanju daoshi* were set up in 1997. Under the committee's governance, similar management task forces were set up in districts, counties and villages. By law, the "corrected" *sanju daoshi* have to register with their local Daoist Association, and thus receive a "Daoist certificate belonging to the Zhengyi sect" which legally permits them to perform ritual services and ceremonies outside Daoist temples. Standardized ritual vestments, manuscripts and instruments are also provided, which the *sanju daoshi* are requested to use when they perform rituals.<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, the renewal of their Daoist certificate is based on an annual examination of their religious activities.<sup>64</sup>

Bureaucratic control of the "Daoists living at home" (*huoju daoshi*) has existed since the Ming period and probably continues to the present day.<sup>65</sup> In the Hongwu reign, the Ming state took steps towards setting up a clerical bureaucracy to supervise all Daoist priests at a national level, the *daolu si* in the Board of Rites and the *daohui si* in the counties.<sup>66</sup> According to Vincent Goossaert's study of *huoju daoshi* in the Qing period, the state's policy for controlling "Daoists living at home" was evident in its religious policy that granted a ministry's licence (*buzhao*) to a select number of non-Quanzhen Daoists through the secular authorities of the *daolu si* or the *daohui si*.<sup>67</sup> Apart from this official method of gaining recognition, it is known that some Daoists went to Longhu shan for the Heavenly Master's ordination and returned home afterwards. Whereas there are two different ways, secular and religious, of identifying Zhengyi *daoshi*, it is still not clear how far they can help to identify the so-called *huoju* type of Zhengyi *daoshi* in the Qing period.

In addition to the *huoju daoshi* of the Zhengyi tradition, there must

61. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 1 (2000), p.9.

62. Li Yangzheng, *Dongdai daojiao*, p.185.

63. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 3 (2002), pp.6–8.

64. *Zhongguo daojiao*, No. 5 (1999), pp.17–19.

65. On the traditional Chinese state's control of religious activities of the people, see Daniel L. Overmyer, "Attitudes toward popular religion in ritual texts of the Chinese state: the collected statutes of the Great Ming," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, No. 5 (1989–90), pp.191–221 and Anthony C. Yu, "On state and religion in China: a brief historical reflection," unpublished paper, 2002.

66. *Ming huidian*, Vol. 226, pp.4435–37. See also Ishida Kenji, "Mindai Dōkyō shijo no Zenshin to Seii" ("The Quanzhen and Zhengyi orders in Daoist history during the Ming dynasty"), in Sakai Tadao (ed.), *Taiwan no shūkyō to Chugoku bunka (Religion in Taiwan and Chinese Culture)* (Tokyo: Fukyosha, 1992), pp. 145–195.

67. Goossaert, "Counting the monks," pp.42–47.

have been a large number of “Daoists living at home” independent of either official registration or religious ordination by the Heavenly Master. More attention has been recently given to the widespread distribution of the mixture of Daoist ritual tradition and shamanistic cults across Chongqing, Guizhou, Fujian and southern China.<sup>68</sup> As representative variants of Zhengyi ritual specialists in local regions, vernacular Daoists of Lüshan traditions (*shigong*) in northern Fujian and of the Duangong rites around the Guo related altar in Guizhou are professional ritual specialists, who live among the common people and are often invited to perform rites on the birthdays of local gods, consecrations of village temples, healing, exorcism and so on.<sup>69</sup> These vernacular Daoist priests do not receive their ordination from the Heavenly Master, but are ordained locally by their masters, who pass them religious names (*fahao*) belonging to their own Daoist altars (*daotan*).<sup>70</sup>

Although Daoism is not defined in this article, its liturgical function and unification seem to be the key that causes all *huoju daoshi* to call themselves Daoists. Kristofer Schipper points out: “Rather than his way of life, then it is his liturgical function, his role as ritual specialist, that defines the position of the *tao-shih*,” and that, “it is in towns and urban areas that one most frequently finds the families of *tao-shih*.”<sup>71</sup> This is the Daoism of China’s common people.<sup>72</sup> Although the state has always tried to control them, the “Daoists living at home” continued their liturgical life unhindered before the destruction of Daoist sanctuaries between the late Qing period and the Cultural Revolution.<sup>73</sup> Looking at Daoism in this way leads to a better understanding of the great significance of the enormous revival of Daoist ritual services and ceremonies in local society and temples in China today.

Without doubt, scholars’ recent fieldwork and researches on Daoism in Fujian have demonstrated the huge revival of Daoist ritual tradition in local society.<sup>74</sup> In his meticulous account of Daoism in contemporary Fujian, Kenneth Dean arrives at the same conclusion as Schipper did in

68. See Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of South-east China*, pp.28, 42; John Lagerwey, “The altar of celebration ritual in Lushan county, Sichuan,” and “Duangong ritual and ritual theatre in the Chongqing area: a survey of the work of Hu Tiancheng,” in Daniel L. Overmyer (ed.), *Ethnography in China Today: A Critical Assessment of Methods and Results*, pp.75–108.

69. On the study of Nuo related *duandong* ritual tradition, see Hu Tiancheng, “Vernacular priest plays of Jielong in Sichuan,” Vols. 1, 2, and 3 (*Minsu qui congshu*, Nos. 18, 34, and 35) published in 1993 and 1995. On the study of Lüshan ritual tradition, see Ye Mingsheng, “Fujiansheng Longyanshi Dongxiaozen Lüshanjiao guangjitan keyiben” (“The ritual texts of the Guangji altar of the Lushan sect in Dongxiao town, Longyan municipality, Fujian”), in Wang Qiugui (ed.), *Zhongguo chuantong keyiben huibian (Collection of Traditional Chinese Ritual Texts)* (Taipei: Xinwenfeng Publishing Co., 1999).

70. Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of South-east China*, pp.53–58; Liu Jingfeng, *Gannan zongjiao shehui yu daojiang wenhua yanjiu*, pp.217–231.

71. Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, pp.56–57.

72. There are other kinds of “Daoism,” which are called monastic, mystical and philosophical Daoism.

73. Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, pp.16–19.

74. On books and reports on the revival of Daoist ritual in local levels, see n.3.

his study of Daoism in the city of Tainan, Taiwan in the late 1960s.<sup>75</sup> The liturgical tradition of the “Masters of the Gods” has an indispensable relationship with the local cults of temple deities. Given the important role of Daoism in popular cults, Dean presents many examples which show that “Taoists must consecrate the temples. The festival of the gods must be blessed by Taoists. Purification ceremonies are conducted by Taoists. Processions are initiated and led by Taoists. Great Offerings are consecrated by Taoists.”<sup>76</sup>

In my fieldwork in a village in Bao'an, close to the Futian airport of the city of Shenzhen (Guangdong), I travelled with a Daoist family named Chen, whose Daoist altar is called Guangsheng tang. Without receiving any ordination certificate by the Heavenly Master, there have been at least four generations of Daoist priests in the Chen family since the late Qing. At present, four brothers of the present generation have resumed their performance of Daoist rituals. They still remember the story of their father who, like other contemporary *huoju daohsi*, had been banned from performing Daoist rituals since the 1950s. In the Chen family's village, several other Daoist altars are openly active at the present time. In the course of my fieldwork, I observed the Chen Daoists performing rituals for the consecration (*kaiguang*) of a rebuilt ancestral hall, the birthday festival of Tianhou in a temple, and the *Zhai* ritual for the dead. The interaction between Daoist rituals and the local community's daily religious life has been a constant manifestation of popular Daoism in local society throughout its history until the present day. Daoists perform rituals that are a part of the local religion of common people.<sup>77</sup>

### Conclusion

This presentation of the major aspects of Daoism in China today does not invite overly optimistic speculation that the age-old Daoism has already returned to modern China. Without doubt, Daoism is present today, as it was in former times. Nevertheless, the progressive destruction of Daoist sanctuaries, priests and ritual traditions over the past century has not yet been forgotten.<sup>78</sup> Modernization, anti-religious policies and government officials' misunderstanding of Daoism still present a great challenge to the survival of this indigenous religious tradition in China. As Schipper has pointed out, Daoism was never a purely monastic religion, nor did it depend on any definite form of temple existence, but is supported by a variety of religious rituals and festivals in the lives of local society. As some scholars of Chinese religion have shown, various

75. Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of South-east China*, pp. 15–17.

76. *Ibid.* p.13.

77. For recent fieldwork reports on the interaction of popular Daoism with local temple festivals during 1990s, see Liu Jingfeng, *Gannan zongjiao shehui yu daojiao wenhua yanjiu*, especially pp.177–347 and Overmyer, *Ethnography in China Today*.

78. On the destruction of Daoism in the past century, see Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, pp. 16–19, and Lai Chi-tim, “Minguo shiqi guangzhoushi nahm-mouh daoyuan delishih kuojiu” (“History of ‘nahm-mouh Daoist halls’ in early Republican Canton”), *Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History of Academia Sinica*, Vol. 37 (2002), pp. 1–40.

socio-economic policies, or the state's political exploitation of the local community in early modern China, had a destructive effect on temple cults and cult organization in local society.<sup>79</sup> In a similar way, the future of Daoism, with particular regard to the important role of Daoism in Chinese local culture, is equally dependent on the extent of openness and the balance of the controlling policies that the state adopts towards local Daoism and its related professional ritual specialists, "Daoists living at home."

79. Cf. Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900–1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988) and Barend J. ter Haar, "Local society and the organization of cults in early modern China: a preliminary study," *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions*, Vol. 8 (1995), pp. 1–43.