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Editor: Patricia Eichenbaum Karetzky, Bard College, Annandale on Hudson, New York
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Note from the editor

ARTICLES

THE PHOENIX AND THE MOTHER: THE INTERACTION OF SPIRIT WRITING CULTS AND POPULAR SECTS IN TAIWAN1
Philip Clart, University of British Columbia

WATER, THE DIVINE ELEMENT OF CREATION AND EARLY IMAGES OF THE BUDDHA OF THE WEST IN EARLY CHINA33
Patricia Eichenbaum Karetzky, Bard College

THE HISTORICAL CONTOURS OF TAOISM IN CHINA: THOUGHTS ON ISSUES OF CLASSIFICATION AND TERMINOLOGY57
Russell Kirkland, University of Georgia

YIN XI: THE MASTER AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SCRIPTURE83
Livia Kohn, Boston University

THE GENESIS OF THE CONCEPT OF BLIND FATE IN ANCIENT CHINA141
Ning Chen, National University of Singapore

BOOK REVIEWS:

T. H. Barrett. *Taoism under the T'ang: Religion and Empire during the Golden Age of Chinese History.*169
Suzanne Cahill, University of California at San Diego

John Berthrong. *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue.*172
Alexander Lomanov, Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Far Eastern Studies

Timothy Brook. *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China.*175
David E. Kelley, Oberlin College

Glen Dudbridge. <i>Religious Experience and Lay Society in T'ang China: A Reading of Tai Fu's Kuang-I Chi.</i>	179
Charles E. Hammond, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale	
Stephan Feuchtwang. <i>The Imperial Metaphor: Popular Religion in China.</i>	183
Stephen F. Teiser, Princeton University	
Antonino Forte. <i>The Hostage An Shigao and His Offspring: An Iranian Family in China.</i>	188
Albert E. Dien, Stanford University	
Jacques Gernet. trans. by Franciscus Verellen. <i>Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to Tenth Centuries.</i>	190
Charles D. Orzech, University of North Carolina Greensboro	
Claude Larre, Isabelle Robinet, and Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallée, trans. <i>Les Grands Traités de Huainan zi.</i>	194
Mark Csikszentmihalyi, Davidson College	
Deborah Lynn Porter. <i>From Deluge to Discourse: Myth, History, and the Generation of Chinese Fiction.</i>	197
Robert Ford Company, Indiana University	
Peter H. Rushton. <i>The Jin Ping Mei and the Non-Linear Dimensions of the Traditional Chinese Novel.</i>	201
Frederick Brandauer, University of Washington	
Meir Shahar and Robert P. Weller. <i>Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China.</i>	204
Barend J. ter Haar, University of Heidelberg	
Burton Watson. <i>The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi.</i>	213
William Powell, University of California Santa Barbara	
Bell Yung, Evelyn S. Rawski, and Rubie S. Watson, eds. <i>Harmony and Counterpoint: Ritual Music in Chinese Context.</i>	217
Catherine Bell, Santa Clara University	

VIDEO REVIEW

Robert G. Henricks. <i>Great World Religions, Part IV: Confucius, the Tao, the Ancestors, and the Buddha: The Religions of China.</i>	223
Laurence G. Thompson, University of Southern California, emeritus	

BOOK NOTICE

- Michael Dillon. *China's Muslims*.227
Morris Rossabi, City University of New York

- Wang Jianchuan and Jiang Zhushan, editors. *Ming-Qing Yilai Minjian Zongjiao de Tansuo: Jinian Dai Xuanzhi Jiaoshou Lunwenji (The Investigation of Popular Religions since the Ming and Qing Dynasties: A Collection of Essays in Memory of Professor Dai Xuanzhi)*228
Philip Clart, University of British Columbia

BOOKS RECEIVED

THE PHOENIX AND THE MOTHER: THE INTERACTION OF SPIRIT WRITING CULTS AND POPULAR SECTS IN TAIWAN

PHILIP CLART

University of British Columbia

THE AUGUST MOTHER DESCENDS¹

On the fifteenth day of the fourth month of the *jiaxu* year, i.e. on 25 May 1994, at 6:20 p.m., after a communal vegetarian dinner, a group of roughly twenty men and women gather on the third floor of the “Temple of the Martial Sage, Hall of Enlightened Orthodoxy” (Wumiao Mingzheng Tang). This spirit-writing temple nestles in a narrow valley of the foothills of the Central Taiwanese mountain range, which at this place touches the outskirts of the bustling city of Taizhong. By their blue-colored, high-buttoned scholar’s gowns, these people are recognizable as “phoenix disciples” (*luan-sheng*), i.e. as members of a spirit-writing cult, or “phoenix hall” (*luantang*).

The third floor of the four-storied temple is devoted to the worship of the “Great Celestial Worthy, the August Mother of the Limitless” (Wuji Huangmu Da Tianzun), whose carved, painted, and gilded statue is placed behind glass in the center of an altar set against the back, eastern wall of the spacious room. She is depicted as a benign-looking, white-haired elderly lady, clad in gold, seated on a throne, holding in her right hand a long staff and in her left a peach, facing west out through the main entrance of her sanctuary, the “Palace of the Limitless” (Wuji Dian). Inside a square fenced-off area in front of the altars carrying her image and the offerings, a writing desk and a chair are placed, both covered with yellow brocade. In this “inner sanctuary” (*neidian*, literally “inner palace”) the actual spirit-writing will take place.

Having entered the outer sanctuary, men and women line up two in separate rows, facing each other, the men on the stage-left or *yang* side, the women on the stage-right or *yin* side of the room and start chanting a scripture which recounts the central themes upon which the worship of the August Mother is based. The scripture, titled *The August Mother of the Limitless’ Celestial Scripture for Awakening [the Original Spirits]* (*Wuji Huangmu huanxing tianjing*), was written through the planchette at the Hall of Enlightened Orthodoxy in 1982.²

The chanting of the scripture takes about thirty minutes. After its completion, more phoenix

disciples enter the room to attend the second part of tonight's worship: the spirit-writing. Some of them have arrived late, others have spent the time of the scripture recitation downstairs outside the temple, chatting and drinking tea. The numbers present now increase to about fifty worshipers; the gender ratio changes, too: while among the scripture reciters women dominated, now they are outnumbered by men roughly 2:1. Another change is linguistic in nature: while the *Celestial Scripture* was chanted in the Taiwanese dialect, almost all proceedings to do with spirit-writing are conducted in Mandarin.

At 7:00 p.m. sharp, one of the deputy temple chairmen, Mr. Chen Xuecai*, in secular life a fertilizer factory worker in a town in northern Taiwan, takes the microphone and announces the beginning of the spirit-writing seance over the temple's PA system: "All brothers and sisters, please enter the Palace and arrange yourselves in rows!" When the general shuffling has ceased and every disciple present has been handed a thin lighted stick of incense, Chen* calls out: "The bell-and-drum disciple shall proceed to his place!" The bell-and-drum disciple (zhonggusheng), Mr. Kong Xinhe*, an electrician with the state telephone company in his early fifties, steps in front of the offering table, where until just now the scripture recitation leaders had stood, performs the ritual of "three kneelings and nine kowtows" (*sangui jukou*) toward the image of the August Mother, kneels down again, and opens the seance by striking the bell 46 times and the wooden fish 92 times. While he is doing this, the medium, a middle-aged high-school teacher with the "pen-name" of "Enlightened Stylus" (Mingbi), carries out his "three kneelings and nine kowtows," then kneels down again and raises up three thick sticks of incense. After handing them to an attendant, who places them in the incense burner in the middle of the room, and performing one more kneeling and three more kowtows, Mingbi proceeds to the inner sanctuary, where the writing desk has been uncovered and a sheaf of large-size yellow paper as well as a red felt pen have been placed upon it. Mingbi stands in front of the writing desk, praying with the palms of his hands placed against each other in front of his chest. He then sits down on the chair, arranges his gown, and takes the pen into both hands which he rests on the paper in front of him.

Meanwhile three more functionaries have knelt three times and kowtowed nine times: Mr. Chen Xuecai*, Mr. Zhao Guangwu* (another deputy chairman), and Mr. Feng Jian'gao*, a man in his thirties, who is the Mingzheng Tang's most experienced decipherer of spirit-written characters. As the drumming and bell-striking draws to an end, they enter the inner sanctuary and take up positions to both sides of the seated medium, waiting with folded hands for him to fall into trance. Meanwhile all the phoenix disciples outside the sanctum kneel down, clasping their incense sticks with both hands, awaiting in this manner the arrival of the deity.

A sudden jerk goes through the body of the medium. His three attendants bow down, the other

disciples go into a kowtow position. The hand holding the felt pen quivers and rises upwards; then it comes down onto the paper with a thud, rapidly writing a sentence announcing the arrival of the Mingzheng Tang's presiding deity (zhuxi). This is called out by Mr. Feng*: "The presiding deity of this Hall, the Benevolent Teacher Guan descends," to which he quickly attaches a ritual formula calling upon the disciples "to reverently receive the chariot of the Benevolent Master!" Guan, however, descends only to announce the imminent arrival of a more important deity, namely, the August Mother and to command the Hall's earth god to meet her carriage at a distance of ten *li*, and its god of walls and moats to do the same at a distance of five *li*. The August Mother is preceded by her attendant and herald, the Mysterious Woman of the Nine Heavens (Jiutian Xuannü), who announces the topic of tonight's message by Huangmu and admonishes all deities and humans present to bow down and be respectful. Eventually the Mother herself arrives. She graciously allows everybody to rise; the disciples' incense sticks are collected, and stuck into the incense burner. Then everybody patiently remains standing while the August Mother, through Mingbi, rapidly writes out her message to her children. Silence reigns in the Hall, except for the buzzing of the fans, the sound of the pen moving over the paper, and the rustling of the filled sheets that Mr. Feng* places face-down on the altar.

Tonight's topic is the "Harmonization of Thoughts" as an essential step in the process of cultivation. We have to free our minds from preconceived notions and the restrictions placed upon the nature and scope of our thoughts and ideas by everyday existence, in order to make long-term progress in our gradual realization of the Way. The Mother illustrates this theme with examples drawn from the effects of correct and incorrect education of children. After the conclusion of the Mother's short essay, the Benevolent Master Guan gives a concise account of its gist, and then departs, as the Mother and her attendant had done before him. Their departures are each accompanied by bell-strikes, drum-beats, and kowtows on the part of the congregation. The medium comes out of his trance. First the bell-and-drum disciple, then the medium, and then his attendants take their leave from the Mother image on the altar with three kneelings and nine kowtows each. The seance concludes with the whole congregation performing three bows toward the image of the August Mother.

Now, Mingbi and Mr. Chen* proceed to the oblong offering table, where Mingbi reads out the divined text to the congregation, using a microphone. When he has finished reading, the whole congregation applauds. After a few remarks by Mr. Chen* on temple business and upcoming events, the congregation dissolves.

The text received on this evening was later transcribed on manuscript paper by Mr. Chen* from its original "grass-script" version into clearer characters. The original yellow sheets were then burnt. The Mother's message appeared about two months later in print in the Mingzheng Tang's monthly

magazine, *Phoenix Friend (Luanyou)*, available for everyone to read.³

What is significant about this seance is that it takes place in a spirit-writing cult, but is devoted to the August Mother, another name for the sectarian Unborn Venerable Mother (Wusheng Laomu). Spirit-writing cults and Mother-worshiping (“maternist”) sects represent separate religious traditions that have begun to intermix in Taiwan only in the post-war period. The purpose of the present article is to take a closer look at how these two traditions interacted, using the Hall of Enlightened Orthodoxy as a case example.

MATERNIST SECTS AND POPULAR CONFUCIAN PLANCHETTE CULTS

The two protagonists in this story are the Way of All-Pervading Unity (Yiguan Dao) and the Hall of Enlightened Orthodoxy. They are modern descendants of two originally separate religious traditions: popular maternist sectarianism in the case of the former and elite-patronized spirit-writing cults in the case of the latter.⁴ Both have their origins on the Chinese mainland and came to Taiwan at different points in time. Let us have a quick overview of the historical background and distinctive characteristics of each before discussing their interaction.

(A) PHOENIX HALLS

The Taiwanese phoenix hall tradition began in 1853 when a planchette cult was established in Magong, the capital of the Penghu Islands, located between the mainland province of Fujian and Taiwan proper. In that year a group of Magong literati sent a prospective medium to the city of Quanzhou in Fujian, there to be taught the use of the planchette by the Society for Public Goodness (Gongshan She). After the return of the medium, the “Society for Universal Exhortation” (Puquan She) was founded in Magong in the same year, with the purpose of carrying out spirit-writing, lecturing (*xuanjiang*) on the *Sacred Edict (Shengyu)*, and admonishing the people to moral conduct. However, the activities of the Society dwindled over the years, until it completely ceased operation when French forces occupied the Penghu islands during the Sino-French war of 1885. Two years later, in 1887, under the leadership of a group of six “government students” (*shengyuan*), funds were raised for the revival of the Society for Universal Exhortation, which was then renamed “Society for Complete Renewal” (Yixin She). It held regular public lecturing sessions, given by carefully chosen “lecturers” (*jiangsheng*), among whom we find such respectable persons as the eighth-rank button bearer Lin Sheng and the “Confucian apprentices” (*tongsheng*) Guo Ezhi, Xu Zhankui, Gao Sheng, and Chen Bingheng. The lectures expounded the *Sacred Edict* and such morality books as the *Amplified Instructions on the Sacred Edict (Shengyu guangxun)*, the *Tract on Action and Response (Ganying pian)*, and the *Essay on Secret Virtue (Yinzhi wen)* — stock texts for those

concerned with public morality. In 1891 the Yixin She set up as an organizational subunit the "Hall of Taking Joy in Goodness" (Leshan Tang), which was to devote itself exclusively to spirit-writing, producing new morality texts, presumably for use in the Society's public lecturing activities. The texts composed between 1891 and 1903 were collected and published as one of the earliest spirit-written morality books produced in Taiwan, entitled *Selected Novelties of Enlightenment* (*Juewu xuanxin*). At about the same time similar activities were pursued by local literati in Yilan County in the northern part of Taiwan proper. There the probably first spirit-written morality book ever to be produced in Taiwan was completed in 1890. The Yilan planchette cults, led by local degree-holders, were extremely active and spawned new cult groups all over northern and central Taiwan.⁵

These late nineteenth-century planchette cults were literati-led religious groups that tried to counter the perceived decline of traditional values by having the gods themselves reaffirm these values through the planchette. The divine admonitions and moral lessons thus obtained were relayed to the general public through public lecturing and the dissemination of morality books (*shanshu*). These outward-directed activities are the most easily noticed ones, but planchette cults then and now also had internal functions, i.e., functions pertaining to the spiritual needs of their own members. In particular, as religious institutions, they were and are concerned with their members' salvation.

Salvation, in the conception of Taiwanese phoenix halls, basically means deification. It is the cult member's, the "phoenix disciple's," aim to become a deity after his or her death. This aim is worked on in a long process of "cultivating the Way" (*xiudao*). What constitutes "Way cultivation" is taught by the gods in their planchette revelations, and the concrete contents differ slightly from hall to hall.

However, there are several common denominators; the most important being cultivation of everyday morality. It means realizing the basic Confucian virtues, such as benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), filial piety (*xiao*), and chastity (*jie*), in one's everyday life. Once one has succeeded in incorporating this ethical pattern into one's daily life, one has reached a state of continuous sincerity (*cheng*) and peace and purity of mind (*jing*) that will enable one to successfully progress in the cultivation of one's inner or "numinous" nature (*lingxing*).

Cultivating the Way is conceptualized as a path of learning. A phoenix hall is like a school, with the gods as teachers and the cult members as students. This understanding is reflected in cult terminology: phoenix disciples will address their cult's gods as "benevolent teachers" (*enshi*), while referring to themselves as "students" or "disciples" (*sheng, dizi*). Cult members are to devote diligent study to the messages received from the gods; these, often called "sagely instructions" (*shengxun*), are their textbooks.

Progress (or lack thereof) in one's cultivation is measured in units of merit and demerit. For this purpose, many phoenix halls use so-called "ledgers of merit and demerit," lists of good and bad deeds with amounts of merits and demerits attached to them.⁶ The balance of one's merit account, the "phoenix register" (*luanji*) established in Heaven once one becomes a cult member, determines one's postmortem fate: one may fall into purgatory, be reborn as a human being, or ascend to Heaven.

Ascension to Heaven requires a significant surplus of merit points. The amount of accumulated merit determines the rank of deity one attains: lower, middle, or upper.⁷ Even when one has attained divine status, however, one has to continue cultivating the Way in order to perfect oneself further. Spirit-writing journals are filled with accounts of virtuous people who after death became the earth god of some village. By diligently continuing to cultivate themselves and fulfilling their duties as earth god in an unexceptionable manner, they manage after several years to rise to the position of city god. From there further cultivation leads them to the position of, say, Mazu in an important Mazu temple. Finally, if the spirit in question does not stray from the correct path, it will eventually obtain a celestial office, and continue to further cultivate itself, rising gradually up through the various layers of the heavens.

Thus, cultivation introduces a dynamic element into the celestial hierarchy of the popular Chinese pantheon: almost all names of deities become simply names of divine offices, which may be held by a series of different meritorious spirits. Even though the Chinese pantheon is large and varied, there are still not enough "reward positions" (*guowei*) for the many virtuous souls coming out of spirit-writing halls who have "realized the Way" (*zhengdao*). Therefore spirit-writing halls tend to continually create new celestial offices to make space for them. Thus one is likely to find many deities in spirit-written texts which are not mentioned anywhere else.

The numbers of gods are further swollen by the practice of posthumously elevating one's ancestors to divine status. Both members and non-members can transfer merit to their ancestors who may still be caught in purgatory; this merit is credited to the ancestor's merit account and may help bring it up to a level qualifying him or her for rebirth or deification. As the easiest and most straightforward way of creating merit for this purpose is to donate money to the spirit-writing temple, soul-saving activities such as these are important sources of income for a phoenix hall.

In a wider historical perspective, Taiwanese phoenix halls are a local variant of a type of religious organization that developed on the Chinese mainland in response to the conditions of rapid social, political, and cultural change prevalent in the nineteenth century. This is largely uncharted territory in the history of Chinese religions and will be the object of a new research project I am about to conduct. My present hypothesis is that these planchette cults represent the fusion of two formerly

distinct forms of religious organization patronized by local elites: the Daoist spirit-writing cult and the charitable society.

Daoist spirit-writing cults usually focused upon one particular immortal with whom the members communed at regular intervals by means of the planchette. The most popular planchette deities were Patriarch Lü (Lü Zu), Zhang Sanfeng, and the Divine Lord Wenchang (Wenchang Dijun). The relationship between cult members and their patron deity followed the Daoist model of disciples and their perfected master, and the ultimate goal of cult membership was to obtain divine guidance in a project of religious cultivation that was to lead the disciples themselves to immortality. Collections such as Wenchang Dijun's *Book of Transformations (Huashu)*, the *Collected Works of Patriarch Lü (Lü Zu huiji)*, and the *Complete Collection of Zhang Sanfeng (Zhang Sanfeng quanji)* consist principally of planchette texts composed by such cult groups.⁸

Charitable societies, on the other hand, were the late Imperial equivalents of the Rotary or Lions' Club: associations of wealthy gentry and merchants engaged in all kinds of charitable activities, most commonly free dispensations of medicine, coffins and burials for the poor, collection of discarded scraps of paper with writing on them, as well as public lectures on and the printing of morality books.⁹

The new type of spirit-writing cult that appeared around the middle of the nineteenth century combined the internal structure of a Daoist cult with the conservative social reformism of the charitable society. It was driven by a millenarian sense of mission which was given pointed expression in a widely known myth. According to this story, the Jade Thearch was greatly enraged when he perceived the depths of moral depravity humans had fallen into, and decided to bring about a great cataclysm destroying all of humanity. A group of deities led by Guan Sheng Dijun interceded, pleading with the Jade Thearch not "to burn the jade with the stones," but to spare the good from his wrath. Furthermore, they requested that the apocalypse be postponed until the gods had a chance to exhort humans to moral reform. The Jade Thearch relented and allowed his subordinates to descend by means of the planchette into the world and by their teachings (*jiachua*) attempt to transform humans. The gods then used the planchette to establish many spirit-writing cults which were to record the divine teachings and spread them by means of morality books and public lectures.

This myth gave expression to serious disquiet among members of the literate local elites about the decline of the traditional order. It legitimized a planchette cult movement devoted to the moral reform of their age by making it their duty to assist the gods in changing the wicked ways of the world in the face of an impending apocalypse. To serve this purpose, they were not content to hold seances for their membership alone, but actively disseminated their revelations by means of public

lectures to the illiterate masses. They were less concerned with the esoterics of Daoist cultivation than with the reaffirmation and promotion of traditional standards of morality. This ethical aspect had also played an important role in the Daoist cults, but in the new cults it became their very purpose of being. This difference is apparent in the books of these groups. While Daoist cults tended to produce hagiographies of their patron immortals, including also the Perfected One's poetry, essays on aspects of Daoist doctrine, and moralistic treatises, the new cults' books tended to focus exclusively on the aspect of moral exhortation; both in name and in essence they were spirit-written morality books. The same applied to the conception of "cultivation" maintained by these cults which came to be understood as first and foremost moral in nature: immortality was to be achieved through the cultivation of virtues rather than through mystic methods. This shift found symbolic expression in the ritual focus of many of these cults (including the vast majority of Taiwanese phoenix halls) on the Confucian Martial Sage Guan Sheng Dijun, the leading figure in the cults' charter myth, rather than the immortals that had been the concern of their Daoist predecessors.¹⁰

The traditional moral norms propagated by these cults both internally and externally are commonly perceived to be part of the Confucian tradition; taken together with their worship of Guan Sheng Dijun this has led many such cults to define themselves and to be perceived by outsiders as "Confucian." Interestingly, however, according to my present knowledge of the sources, the term "Confucian" (Ru) appears as an explicit autonym only in the early years of the Republic, when "Confucianism" had ceased to be part of the public order and had become a teaching among others that one had to specifically affiliate with. David C. Graham reports that planchette cults in 1920s and 1930s Sichuan called themselves "Confucian shrines" (Rutan).¹¹ At the same time, an influential northern Taiwanese planchette medium, Yang Mingji (1899-1983), established the name "Divine Teachings of the Confucian Tradition" (Ruzong Shenjiao) for the religious system shared by Taiwanese phoenix halls. He proceeded to edit a liturgical manual for use in phoenix halls, the *Liturgical Regulations of the Confucian School* (*Rumen kefan*). This work drafted a set of basic rituals after the Confucian liturgical model, complemented by a number of Daoist-inspired rites; in addition it contained a list of "precious appellations" (*baogao*) of the principal deities worshiped in phoenix halls, and the *Esoteric Scripture of the Limitless* (*Wuji neijing*), a spirit-written commentary on the canonical *Doctrine of the Mean* recorded between 1907 and 1921 by a Sichuanese spirit-writing cult with close links to the sectarian Society of Goodness (Tongshan She).¹²

How Confucian are Taiwanese phoenix halls really? An intellectual historian may point out that the planchette cults' "Confucian morality" has long become a generalized Chinese civil morality, advocated by Daoists and Buddhists as much as by Confucians. After having for a long time utilized categories such as "Daoism" and "Confucianism" as hazy catch-all terms, scholars nowadays have become much more circumspect in using these big labels. Categories such as

"Confucianism" tend to get defined more and more narrowly and often to be avoided altogether. Such precision may represent an advance in our understanding of Chinese intellectual history, but I would argue that it cannot properly be applied to the evaluation of emic religious categorizations. The fact of the matter is that the now much-criticized fuzzy categories of "Daoism" and "Confucianism" were not just dreamed up by scholars, but reflect folk conceptualizations prevalent in Chinese society. For example, while from the viewpoint of the intellectual historian and the philosopher it may be questionable to interpret the "eight virtues" as specifically Confucian; in the folk view they are the quintessence of "Confucian ethics" (*Fujia lunli*), of the "Way of Confucius and Mencius" (*Kong-Meng zhi dao*). It is in this emic sense that I will henceforth use the term "popular Confucianism" to describe the basic orientation of phoenix halls.¹³

(B) THE YIGUAN DAO

The Yiguan Dao has its origin in the "Great Way of Former Heaven" (Xiantian Dadao) cluster of popular sects from which it branched out under the leadership of the fifteenth patriarch Wang Jueyi (c.1821-1884). It was given its present shape by the eighteenth patriarch Zhang Tianran (1887-1947). Unlike the phoenix halls, the Yiguan Dao has been studied extensively and I will thus confine myself to a brief sketch of its doctrines and practices, referring the reader to the authoritative studies for further information.¹⁴

Like many popular religious sects, the Yiguan Dao worships as its high deity the "Unborn Venerable Mother" (Wusheng Laomu), also called "Venerable Mother of the Limitless [Realm]" (Wuji Laomu) or "Enlightened and Illustrious Thearch-on-High" (Mingming Shangdi). She is the personification of the Dao, a cosmic mother who gave birth to everything in existence. Humanity sprang forth from her in the shape of 96 myriad "original numina" (*yuanling*). Having populated the world, in course these original numina became confused by desires and the world's material splendor. Their numinous purity clouded, they forgot their divine origins and became lost in the world of dust. Ever since, the Mother has been grieving over the loss of her children and has been trying to remind them of their true home and call them back to her side. For this purpose she sent down Buddhas to the world to preach to and save the original beings: in the first cosmic period Sakyamuni Buddha appeared and in the second his work was continued by Amithaba Buddha, but only two myriad were saved in each period. Now the world has entered the final and third period at whose end the world as we know it will perish in a cosmic cataclysm. So the need to save the remaining 92 myriad has now become urgent and the Mother has redoubled her efforts to direct humanity back to her paradise by sending religious teachers down into the human world. Reincarnations of Buddhas and high deities, these emissaries appear in the human world as leaders of sectarian religious groups who pursue the work of salvation by means of preaching, the dissemination of a form of doctrinal literature called

“precious scrolls” (*baojuan*), and by ritual. The Yiguan Dao shares many similar features with other “maternist” (i.e., Mother worshiping) popular sects. These include the assumed divinity of her patriarchs (Zhang Tianran, for example, was believed to be a reincarnation of Master Ji, the Living Buddha, Jigong Huofo), and the claim to possess the exclusive heavenly mandate to transmit the orthodox Dao and open the path back to the Mother’s paradise.

An important difference of the Yiguan Dao when compared to many other maternist sects is its heavy reliance on spirit-writing. This literate divination technique had not played a major role in maternist sects prior to the nineteenth century, since their membership base was located among the illiterate masses. This changed during the nineteenth century when the planchette cults’ millenarianism came into contact with that of the maternist sects, and we see the emergence of spirit-written works in the traditional morality book format that, however, focused thematically on the Mother myth. An early example is the *Golden Basin of Jade Dew* (*Yulu jinpan*), first published in 1880, a work that after the Second World War came to play an important role in the Taiwanese maternist planchette sect Compassion Society (Cihui Tang).¹⁵

We can only speculate what prompted this development. One possibility is that the social upheaval of the mid-nineteenth century caused the social decline of large numbers of relatively educated people. With no hope of ever rising to the scholar-official class, these individuals had no vested interest in that class’ ideology, but were free to pursue other venues of thought, including so-called “heterodox” ones. The fifteenth patriarch of the Yiguan Dao, Wang Jueyi, seems to have been such a person. Though not from a literati family background, he was a literate man who combined a livelihood as itinerant fortune-teller with sectarian proselytizing, mostly in the province of Sichuan. He practised spirit-writing and wrote a number of books on Xiantian Dao doctrine.¹⁶ These were modeled more after the type of scholarly treatise than after the sectarian “precious scroll” tradition. Joseph Edkins describes one of these works, the *Investigation into the Origins of the Three Books of Changes* (*Sanyi tanyuan*), and comes to the conclusion “that the author is a well read scholar.”¹⁷ There developed a subtradition in the Xiantian Dadao network that combined sectarian devotionism and millenarianism with scholarly modes of philosophical inquiry, popular Confucian moralism, and spirit-writing as a literate method of communicating with the transcendent realm. This subtradition shared a lot of common ground with the Guan Di centered planchette cults and therefore it should come as no surprise that sometimes these commonalities led to a fusion of the two types of religious organization. Planchette-wielding maternist sects such as the Yiguan Dao and the Tongshan She, a close cousin within the Xiantian Dadao lineage, were products of this fusion process, combining popular Confucian moralism with a maternist eschatology, while making heavy use of the planchette.

THE YIGUAN DAO AND PHOENIX HALLS IN POST-WAR TAIWAN

These processes of religious interpenetration barely affected Taiwan prior to the island's retrocession in 1945. While maternist sects had been present there since the eighteenth century, they inhabited a social universe quite separate from the elite-sponsored phoenix halls that sprang up in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and there seems to have been little or no contact between the two traditions. Conditions for such contact became more favorable when due to the decline of the traditional gentry phoenix hall leadership largely passed into the hands of local merchants and school teachers. At the same time, however, the "Vegetarian Religion" (Zhaijiao), as the three Taiwanese sects (Longhua Pai, Jintong Pai, and Xiantian Dao) were known collectively in the general population, was forced by Japanese policy to redefine itself as lay Buddhist and to join the government-sponsored Buddhist umbrella organizations.¹⁸ Thus the first traces of sectarian influence on Taiwanese phoenix halls originated not from the indigenous maternist sects, but from the published writings of mainland sects such as the Daoyuan, the Daode Xueshe, and the Tongshan She. These traces, however, were really just that; under the increasingly restrictive religious policies of the Japanese colonial regime, none of these mainland sects were able to enter Taiwan prior to 1945 and exert a more thorough influence.

This changed in 1945. After the island's retrocession, large numbers of sectarian activists came to Taiwan from the mainland and started to proselytize among the local population. A highly visible result was the founding of the Compassion Society (Cihui Tang), whose principal deity, the Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool (Yaochi Jinmu), first manifested herself in 1949 in Hualian through the mouth of a medium who had fled to the area from Zhejiang province on the Chinese mainland. Though this man claims never to have heard of Yaochi Jinmu in Zhejiang, the mainland fusion of spirit-writing cults with maternist sectarianism exerted a strong influence by way of the already mentioned nineteenth century *Golden Basin of the Jade Dew*, which became the main source of mythology for the new cult. It was extremely successful, establishing by 1979 a network of close on 200 branch temples all over Taiwan (and two in Japan). This is the first Taiwanese instance of a spirit-writing cult wholly devoted to the propagation of the maternist gospel. For the purposes of the present paper, I will refrain from a more detailed consideration of the Cihui Tang, and focus instead on the Yiguan Dao as the most successful among the mainland sects transplanted to Taiwan and as the single most important for the Taizhong halls that provide my case example.¹⁹

When Yiguan Dao missionaries first came to Taiwan after the second world war, they found a number of voluntary religious associations already in place which shared some common features with their sect. These included the three branches of the "Vegetarian Religion": the Dragon Flower Branch (Longhua Pai), Golden Pennant Branch (Jintong Pai), and the Way of Prior Heaven

(Xiantian Dao), with which it shared its maternist eschatology. In particular the Xiantian Dao was a close cousin, its list of patriarchs being largely identical with that of the Yiguan Dao except for the most recent generations. Then there were the phoenix halls: their popular Confucian moralistic outlook and their practice of spirit-writing provided a bond of kinship. The Yiguan Dao did not hesitate to capitalize in its proselytism upon such relations of religious kinship, quickly making inroads into the membership base of both traditions. Particularly their leaders were targeted by Yiguan Dao missionaries, as the conversion of its chairperson would often lead to the wholesale transformation of a "vegetarian hall" (*zhaitang*) or a phoenix hall into an Yiguan Dao "Buddha hall" (*fotang*). This policy was adopted, for example, vis-à-vis the above mentioned phoenix hall medium Yang Mingji, who in the 1930s had been instrumental in defining a common identity for phoenix halls. Ever eager to explore new venues of religious thought, he soon came into contact with the Yiguan Dao. It was probably in 1952 or 1953 that through the introduction of Lin Shuzhao, the converted chairman of the former phoenix hall Chongxiu Tang in Douliu (Yunlin County), he came to know Han Yulin, the leader of the Yiguan Dao's Fayi branch. These contacts allowed Yang to familiarize himself with Yiguan Dao doctrines and it is therefore no coincidence that in his 1956 book *Liuhe guiyuan* Yiguan Dao terminology is present in the form of references to the "universal salvation of the three categories of beings" (*sancao pudu*) and to the Venerable Mother of the Limitless (Wuji Laomu, with the "mother"-character written sideways, in Yiguan Dao fashion).²⁰

Another channel for the transmission of Yiguan Dao doctrines to phoenix halls was the circulation of spirit-written texts produced in Yiguan Dao "Buddha halls." A relatively early and widespread spirit-written book, which gives a quite complete exposition of Venerable Mother mythology and soteriology from an Yiguan Dao perspective is the *Daozhong jingming* (*The Bell of the Dao Exhorts to Enlightenment*). This book was spirit-written in 1960 in the Daoyi Gong Zhishi Tang in the Linbian District of Pingdong County, a temple belonging to the Andong branch of the Yiguan Dao.²¹ The book has since then been reprinted in many places and is nowadays a fairly common sight on morality book shelves in Taiwanese temples.

Relations between phoenix halls and the Yiguan Dao were not free of conflict, however, conflicts that arose from competition for members and different views on the status and legitimacy of phoenix halls. In particular phoenix halls were irritated by the Yiguan Dao's claim of representing the Way of Prior Heaven (*xiantian dao*), while at the same time relegating phoenix halls to the (inferior) Way of Posterior Heaven (*houtian dao*). Yiguan Dao doctrine conceives of the cosmos as tripartite, consisting of the phenomenal realm (*xiantian*, the world inhabited by human beings and ghosts), the ethereal realm (*qitian*, the heavens ruled over by the deities of the popular pantheon), and finally the principle realm (*litian*, the primordial paradise governed by the Venerable Mother). In its own view, the Yiguan Dao alone has received the celestial mandate to grant access to the principle realm by

means of transmitting the Dao of Prior Heaven to its initiates. Phoenix halls, through their spirit-writing, have access only to the deities of the ethereal realm; their method of cultivation, focusing on the accumulation of merit, is part of the Way of Posterior Heaven and allows the adept at best to attain divine status within the ethereal realm. This does not count as true salvation in the Yiguan Dao's view, however, as the ethereal realm will perish along with the phenomenal realm in the coming end of the age.

As can be imagined, many phoenix halls did not take kindly to the Yiguan Dao's belittling of their mission's validity. Yang Mingji himself, in spite of his close links to the Yiguan Dao, decried the slander heaped upon phoenix halls by some Yiguan Dao functionaries; he never quit the "Ruzong Shengjiao" he had helped found, but tried to get the Yiguan Dao and phoenix halls to cooperate.²² There were attempts to unify the island's phoenix halls under umbrella organizations. This may in part be seen as a continuation of Yang Mingji's and other phoenix disciples' efforts to institute a formalized system of practice and creed for all Taiwanese phoenix halls. However, though it is difficult to prove conclusively, I would hold that the attempts on the part of phoenix halls to better define their teachings and their specific characteristics were also motivated by the need to draw a line between themselves and planchette-using maternist sects. A clear corporate identity was important to phoenix halls both in order to compete with the Yiguan Dao on the religious market and also as a measure of protection against government intervention. In the public eye spirit-writing had acquired a heterodox aura by its association with the proscribed Yiguan Dao and even though phoenix hall and Yiguan Dao liturgies are structurally quite different, there were enough similarities (including the practice of spirit-writing as such and the ceremonial gowns worn by the participants) that a casual observer might confuse a phoenix hall for an Yiguan Dao *fo tang*. These similarities sometimes created trouble for phoenix halls. Jordan and Overmyer cite the example of the Hall of the Wondrous Dharma that disbanded after being subjected to a police investigation acting on a denunciation of the Hall as an Yiguan Dao cell.²³

One attempt to establish an umbrella organization was made in 1968, when an association of phoenix halls under the name "Taiwan Provincial Assembly of the Sagely Teachings" (Taiwan Sheng Shengjiao Hui) was founded. In its charter the Assembly deplored the inability of the Sagely Teachings to compete effectively with Buddhism, Daoism, and imported religions, of which Catholic and Protestant Christianity are specifically mentioned. The Assembly's objective was to restore traditional moral norms, bring about peace and harmony, and contribute to the task set by president Chiang Kai-shek of preserving the national essence and reviving Chinese culture. This was to be achieved through the guidance of the gods, under the unifying banner of the worship of Guan Sheng Dijun. The Shengjiao Hui was formally registered with the provincial government in 1969. After a short period of hectic activity, the Shengjiao Hui seems to have quickly scaled down and become

practically defunct. A second attempt in 1978, the establishment of a "Republic of China Assembly of the Divine Teachings of the Confucian School" (Zhonghua Minguo Ruzong Shenjiao Hui), was not much more successful in the long run. It was probably the autonomy of each phoenix hall and its legitimation through its own oracle that thwarted any attempts to establish an island-wide representative leadership for phoenix halls.

Though they were largely unsuccessful, these attempts to unify phoenix halls show that Taiwanese planchette cults retained a common religious identity separate from the planchette-using maternist sects, from which they consciously tried to distinguish themselves. The relations between phoenix halls and the Yiguan Dao, however, varied greatly from case to case. Some halls actually were "swallowed," including Yang Mingji's Zanxiu Gong in Ershui, which by the time of a field researcher's visit there in 1995 had become an Yiguan Dao *totang*.²⁴ Most, however, maintained themselves as independent entities integrating Yiguan Dao influences to varying extents. The following section will discuss how this relationship was negotiated in a central Taiwanese Hall of Enlightened Orthodoxy that was the object of a field study I conducted from November 1993 to June 1994.

THE HALL OF ENLIGHTENED ORTHODOXY

The present building of the Hall of Enlightened Orthodoxy of the Martial Sage's Temple, located in the foothills at the outskirts of Taizhong City, is like a sediment record of the cult's history. The oldest level is represented by the ground floor sanctuary devoted to the phoenix hall quintity of the Five Benevolent Lords (Wu Enzhu): Guan Sheng Dijun, Fuyou Dijun, Yue Wumu Wang, Xuantian Shangdi, and Siming Zhenjun. The second floor contains an altar to the Yellow Thearch (Huang Di), a remnant of the Mingzheng Tang's cooperation with the Yellow Thearch religion in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The third floor-shrine is named "Palace of the Limitless" (Wuji Dian) and houses an image of the August Mother of the Limitless Realm; this is where the seance described earlier took place. The fourth floor, the most recent layer of the building, holds the "Precious Palace of the Heaven-Penetrating Numinous Empyrean" (Tongtian Lingxiao Baodian), a representation of the Jade Thearch's celestial seat of government. The Jade Thearch worshiped here is none other than Guan Sheng Dijun who is believed to be the current incumbent of this official position. This section deals with changes and adjustments in the cult's mythology over time and is thus best dealt with in a chronological manner. It will be followed by a closer look at how this sediment record came into being by examining how the cult related to other religious traditions throughout its history and a consideration of the continuities of basic doctrinal orientations that have persisted through all these mythological transformations.

(A) RELIGIOUS COMPETITION AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE PANTHEON

The Mingzheng Tang maintains its own publishing house, the Phoenix Friend Magazine Society, for the publication of its spirit-written books and of a monthly magazine called *The Phoenix Friend* (*Luanyou*). Or perhaps one should say that the publishing house maintains the Mingzheng Tang, as it is considerably older than the cult group itself. Thus the history of the Mingzheng Tang really begins with the founding of the Phoenix Friend Magazine Society in 1969 as an adjunct to the "Palace of Kindness and Virtue" (Huide Gong), a spirit-writing cult in the rural town of Caotun in Nantou county. The idea of a fortnightly magazine for the publication of the Huide Gong's and other spirit-writing temples' planchette texts came from Mr. Zhang Yunchang*, a lawyer and former newspaper editor who had moved to Caotun from Taipei a few years earlier. After recovering from a serious illness he became a phoenix disciple of the Huide Gong in 1968. As a highly educated man, who not only possessed a Japanese university degree, but was also an accomplished classical scholar, Zhang* found ready acceptance among the leaders of the cult, mostly wealthy local business people, and was soon given a place on the temple's board of directors. Unfortunately, the Huide Gong was at that time plagued by fierce infighting over the use (or misuse) of its considerable financial assets. Zhang Yunchang* became embroiled in these conflicts and in the autumn of 1970 finally decided to leave the Huide Gong, taking his publishing concern with him. The Phoenix Friend Magazine and its director moved in with a Taizhong spirit-writing cult, the Hall of Sages and Worthies (Shengxian Tang), whose chairman Mr. Zheng Xuanxiang* was a close friend of Zhang* and had been for a long time the principal financier of *Luanyou*. Zhang Yunchang*'s 15 year-old-son Zhang Haoce* was apprenticed as a medium for the Shengxian Tang, taking the pen-name of Yongbi (Valiant Stylus); he turned out to be so gifted that he soon eclipsed the Hall's two earlier mediums, who gradually took backstage and eventually ceased their mediumship. The time from 1971 to 1976 were golden years for the Shengxian Tang whose reputation increased greatly through the inspired writings of Yongbi, publicized across the island by *Luanyou*. The Hall of Sages and Worthies was at the forefront of the phoenix hall movement and saw it as its mission to further develop and formalize a set of doctrines and practices that would strengthen phoenix halls' identity as a separate tradition vis-à-vis religious competitors, in particular the Yiguan Dao as the one most similar in character to the phoenix halls. Among the writings channeled by Yongbi the most significant in this respect were

- a collection of essays on matters of doctrine, published as a series called *True Principles of the Sages and Worthies* (*Shengxian zhenli*);
- a scripture honoring Guan Sheng Dijun's ascension to the throne as the eighteenth Jade Thearch (the *Jade Thearch's Sacred Scripture of Universal Salvation*, *Yuhuang pudu shengjing*);
- a scripture establishing the Primordial Heavenly Worthy as the true representation of the primordial Dao (the *Most High's True Scripture of the Limitless and Primordial Beginning*, *Taishang wuji hunyuan zhenjing*);²⁵

- a systematic description of the heavens (*True Description of the Heavenly Realm, Tianjie chuanzhen*).

All of these elaborated upon and systematized the traditional phoenix hall teachings, but they also expanded and added to these traditional teachings so as to make them more competitive. The first step in this direction was Guan Sheng Dijun's elevation to the throne of the Jade Thearch, which by one stroke promoted phoenix halls from Guan Di cults to Jade Thearch cults.²⁶ While this strengthened Guan's position vis-à-vis the Venerable Mother, an important problem remained: even in his elevated position as Jade Thearch, the Lord Guan remained inferior to any deity positioned in a transcendent realm beyond the heavens of the celestial bureaucracy. Therefore the Jade Thearch was still no match for the the Venerable Mother; in fact, Guan's new status was generally recognized within the Yiguan Dao, albeit with the understanding that this office had been conferred upon him by the Venerable Mother. Unless it was willing to deny the existence of an ultimate heaven altogether, the Shengxian Tang had to come up with a credible alternative to the Venerable Mother. This turned out to be the Celestial Worthy of Primordial Beginning (Yuanshi Tianzun). Only a few months after the completion of the *Sacred Scripture* a new scripture was written through the services of Yongbi, which served as a charter text for the Shengxian Tang's conception of the "limitless realm" (*wuji tian*), the ultimate realm beyond the governance of the Jade Thearch. The cosmology of the *True Scripture of the Most High Limitless Primordial Beginning (Taishang wuji hunyuan zhenjing)* is Daoist in inspiration, with the Celestial Worthy of Primordial Beginning as the personification of the primordial ether from which all differentiated things sprang forth. It effectively substitutes Yuanshi Tianzun for the Venerable Mother.

This project of defining a cosmic model that could compete with that of the Yiguan Dao culminated in 1975 in the planchette writing of the *True Description of the Heavenly Realms (Tianjie chuanzhen)*, a systematic description of the structure of the heavens. This book on the one hand reinforces Guan's position as the Ruler of Heaven by depicting him seated majestically in his Precious Palace of the Numinous Empyrean (Lingxiao Baodian) in Central Heaven (Zhongtian). On the other hand, it develops systematically the Limitless Realm (Wuji Tian) which is described as the residence of Yuanshi Tianzun, Li Laojun, Tongtian Jiaozhu, the Five Venerables, Confucius, and the retired seventeenth Jade Thearch, as well as a host of golden and celestial immortals (*jinxian, tianxian*) attached to these high deities' residences. The *Tianjie chuanzhen* also assigns a place in this scheme to the Venerable Mother: she is the Golden Mother (Jinmu), one of the Five Venerables; her residence is called the "Palace of Western Florescence" and is explicitly equated with the "Jasper Pool" (Yaochi). The *Tianjie chuanzhen's* description of the Wuji Tian thus seeks to relocate the Venerable Mother in a Daoist context, denying the primordial status accorded to her by the maternist sects. In the section on the Wulao we find inserted an explanatory paragraph,

which argues that the real primordial being was Yuanshi Tianzun, the Primordial Celestial Worthy. From him issued forth the Five Venerable Ones. From the subsequent union of two of the Wulao, the Golden Mother and the Wood Lord, eventually sprang forth the 96 myriad original spirits. In this way the Venerable Mother is reduced to her Daoist dimension as the Golden Mother, the Queen Mother of the West.

By the end of 1975, Yongbi's revelations thus had created a system of doctrine and cosmology for the Shengxian Tang that was designed to compete with the Yiguan Dao. However, its competitiveness was never really tested, as the cult's course of development changed drastically in the following year. In 1976 a long-simmering conflict between Zhang Yunchang* and the Shengxian Tang's chairman Zheng* came to a head and led to an irreversible split between the two men. It is probably no coincidence that this break occurred shortly after Yongbi had been drafted for military service in early 1976. In the preceding years it had been the gods' revelations through Yongbi that had kept an uneasy peace between Zhang* and Zheng*. With this mediating agency gone, conflict erupted and resulted in Zhang*'s departure from the Shengxian Tang. While the Shengxian Tang was given a new orientation by the revelations channeled through Yongbi's successor, an Yiguan Dao trained planchette medium, Zhang Yunchang*, with the help of a flock of faithful followers and the assets of the Phoenix Friend Magazine Society, quickly founded the Temple of the Martial Sage, Hall of Enlightened Orthodoxy in rented quarters not far from the Shengxian Tang's location. His position was precarious, however: Yongbi would be unavailable for the next three years, doing his stint of military service. Although the gods had given him permission to perform spirit-writing on his own in the barracks, the mailed-in revelations produced by Yongbi were not sufficient to keep a phoenix hall together. For one thing, as private revelations they lacked the mysterium of direct and observable communication with the gods which is an important attraction of phoenix halls. In addition, these revelations were confined in content to general expositions of doctrine or moral exhortation and lacked concrete guidance in cult affairs.

The second major function of the planchette, namely to provide healing and divinatory services to a faithful clientele, also could not be provided by an absentee medium. Zhang* tried to meet the demand for these services (in phoenix hall parlance summarized under the heading "relieving the world," *jishi*) by hiring a Daoist practitioner from Puli in Nantou county, who would offer various ritual services at the Mingzheng Tang on nine days in each lunar month.²⁷ This arrangement does not seem to have lasted very long, however, and Mr. Zhang* was soon exploring other venues for supporting his cult. Eventually he allied himself with the Yellow Thearch Religion (Xuanyuan Jiao), a sect founded by a Legislative Yuan member in Taipei in the early 1950s, and for several years to come the *Phoenix Friend* acted as one of the principal publishing organs for the Yellow Thearch Religion. While the Mingzheng Tang added an image of the Yellow Thearch to its roster of deities,

it did not cease spirit-writing in spite of the Xuanyuan Jiao's rejection of such "superstitious practices." Yongbi kept sending in his spirit-written texts and even wrote a slim collection of stories treating of Guanyin's miraculous interventions in the lives of believers (*Guanshiyin jiuku jiunan chuanzhen, True Description of Guanshiyin's Saving Actions in Suffering and Adversity*). The last installment of this book in the *Phoenix Friend* in March 1978 was followed by a long break of more than a year in Yongbi's revelations. I do not have any direct information on what happened at the time; there is however some indication that Yongbi had struck up some undesirable friendships in the army and tended to fill his free time with amusements other than spirit-writing.²⁸ With his son gone incommunicado, Zhang Yunchang* himself took up the planchette and under the pen-name Moxianzi (Master Ink-Immortal) started to act as the Mingzheng Tang's medium himself.²⁹ Moxianzi turned out a very prolific and successful medium and spirit-writing gradually became a higher-profile activity again in the Mingzheng Tang. The second book channeled through Moxianzi, *The Mind-Virtue of the Great Way (Dadao xinde)*, is this cult's first morality book revealed by the Venerable Mother, called here Most Honored Celestial Mother, Venerable Mother of the Limitless (Tianmu Zhizun Wujī Laomu). The Mother's preface contains in a nutshell the basic outlines of the maternist myth and the accompanying preface by the Jade Thearch implicitly recognizes the Mother's higher rank.

Quite suddenly, we thus come up against an about-face in the Mingzheng Tang's relations with maternism. While the Shengxian Tang had carefully constructed an alternative system designed to compete with the maternist soteriology offered by the Yiguan Dao, the Mingzheng Tang now, three years after its separation from the Shengxian Tang, suddenly embraced the Venerable Mother and her myth. Why this sudden change in policy? On this point I can only speculate. The Mingzheng Tang was not exactly a flourishing phoenix hall at the time. Much of its income came to it as a representative of the Yellow Thearch Religion; e.g., its new temple building, a comparatively modest affair completed in 1982, had been built as a Yellow Thearch Religion branch temple and financed by donations given for that specific purpose. Yet Zhang* was not willing to integrate completely with the Yellow Thearch Religion and give up spirit-writing. Thus he probably knew that his alliance with the Xuanyuan Jiao was not going to last and he kept his eyes open for alternative venues of development for the Mingzheng Tang. All through the 1970s, the Yiguan Dao had shown dramatic growth and thus its religious program was definitely something worth taking a second look at, in particular when many phoenix disciples had previously been initiated to this sect. I would thus propose that the appearance of the Venerable Mother marked the beginning of a new marketing strategy on the part of the Mingzheng Tang, trying to attract new members by tapping into the vast pool of Yiguan Dao initiates.³⁰

While the alliance with the Yellow Thearch Religion lasted, the maternist theme was developed only very slowly and gradually. In the early 1980s, however, relations between the Mingzheng Tang and the Xuanyuan Jiao cooled off markedly.³¹ While there was no open break and the Mingzheng Tang

maintained intermittent contacts with the Yellow Thearch Religion throughout the eighties, our phoenix hall now began to develop its maternist orientation forcefully and uninhibited by deference to the Xuanyuan Jiao. Around 1982 we notice a sudden burst of maternist revelations, producing a religio-philosophical treatise on cultivating the Way of Heaven (*The Mysterious Meaning of the Celestial Way, Tiandao aoyi*), a new scripture devoted to the Venerable Mother (*The August Mother of the Limitless' Celestial Scripture for Awakening [the Original Spirits], Wuji Huangmu huanxing tianjing*), and a shamanic travelogue describing the Mother's paradise of the Jasper Pool (*Sacred Gazetteer of the Jasper Pool, Yaochi shengzhi*). All of these works taken together thoroughly revised Yongbi's earlier efforts at developing a counter-model to the Venerable Mother.

While writing the *Tiandao aoyi*, the Venerable Mother had promised henceforth to visit the Mingzheng Tang twice every moon, on the first and fifteenth days. However, it was not until April 1983 that the Venerable Mother made good her promise and that these semi-monthly seances became a regular feature of the Wumiao Mingzheng Tang's liturgical calendar. They have remained so until the present day. The texts received on these occasions were first published in the *Phoenix Friend*; then, when a suitable number had come together, they were collected and published separately in a series of books with the overall title *Imperial Instructions of the Venerable Mother (Laomu yixun)*. Of these, six volumes have appeared to date.

A special method of spirit-writing, the "Marvelous Method of the Golden Indicator" (*jinzhi miaofa*), was introduced for seances of the Venerable Mother. Instead of the usual large, wooden planchette and the sand tray, the medium here wrote with a red felt pen directly on yellow paper. This was much faster, though less impressive, than the traditional method. Zhang Yunchang* was the first medium to use this divination technique, which requires much less bodily exertion, and thus seemed a more delicate, feminine technique, appropriate for the Venerable Mother. In the seance described at the beginning of this article this method of spirit-writing was employed.

In addition to her half-monthly appearances, the Venerable Mother also continued to write morality books. Moxianzi channeled two more books by the Venerable Mother before he retired as medium, both of them in the philosophical treatise style typical for his writings: the *Secrets of the Way and the Mind (Daoxin micang, completed 1984)* and the *August Mother's Book for Showing the Way to Confused Souls (Huangmu zhimi pian, completed 1986)*.

The special relationship of the Mingzheng Tang with the Venerable Mother was further strengthened by an important innovation: In 1984, the Venerable Mother introduced a new institution to the Wumiao Mingzheng Tang: the "Academy of the Limitless Realm for Realizing the Way" (Wuji Zhengdao Yuan). This is an elaboration of the old spirit-writing cult practice of saving one's

ancestors by transferring merit to them. I have mentioned that deification is the result of cultivation; this cultivation can be started during one's lifetime, but must be continued after death. In traditional phoenix writings concerning the underworld, we find that it includes a place called the "Institute for Gathering the Good" (Jushan Suo). This is where a meritorious soul is dispatched to on arrival in the world of the dead; in the Jushan Suo it will devote more time to studying the Way before being given a divine appointment. In traditional practice, remittances of merit to ancestors in purgatory usually did not immediately raise them to divine status, but first allowed them to enroll in the Jushan Suo for several years, to add their own efforts at cultivation to the merit given them by their descendants. Only then do they receive a divine appointment, usually a low level one such as earth god. From there the soul had to cultivate its way up the ranks—a long journey with an unsure outcome, since not few deities suffer lapses in their process of cultivation and are punished by being demoted or even thrown back into human existence. Having become a deity does not mean one has safely and forever withdrawn from the cycle of rebirths. It is not yet paradise.

The "Academy of the Limitless Realm for Realizing the Way" was established by the Venerable Mother to help particularly meritorious souls skip a few rungs of the ladder, easing their way to the Mother's paradise. By transferring merit to it, usually in the form of money donations and other meritorious acts, descendants can enroll an ancestor's soul in the Wuji Zhengdao Yuan. There it will stay for a stipulated amount of time (varying according to the soul's "roots of goodness," *shan'gen*, and store of merit from eight to twelve years), devoting itself to listening to lectures on the Way given by deities, reciting scriptures, meditating and generally continuing its cultivation process in a highly conducive environment. In fact, the Wuji Zhengdao Yuan fulfills the same functions for the dead that a phoenix hall fulfills for the living. At the end of the time period, the soul will have to pass an exam before being declared as having "realized the Way" (*zhengdao*). It will then be appointed directly to celestial office. The ranks of Wuji Zhengdao Yuan graduates vary according to the grades they receive in the final exam, but they never include the lowest or the highest ranks. The low ranks of deities active in the human world, such as earth and city gods, are exactly those the soul is supposed to be able to skip by attending the Academy. The highest rank, that of Golden Immortal (*jinxian*), the most perfected being, who resides in the Mother's paradise and is permanently free from the cycle of rebirths, is something that the graduate souls have to keep striving for while filling their celestial offices. Other academies are established in the heavens to further guide them in their cultivation. As a "textbook" and cultivation guide for use in the Academy, a new scripture was revealed in 1987, the *Mysterious and Marvelous Scripture of the Limitless on Realizing the Way* (*Wuji zhengdao xuanmiao jing*). This, together with the earlier *Celestial Scripture*, has become the main recitation scripture of the Hall.

The Wuji Zhengdao Yuan is headed by the Venerable Mother herself, with the day-to-day

administration given over to the Yellow Thearch, who has thus found a new employment. As an institution that exists in the world of the spirits, the Academy is not visible; its transactions become known to the secular world only through the planchette. However, it does have some physical accoutrements which are visible in the Hall of Enlightened Orthodoxy. There exists a soul tablet for every student of the academy (*xiush*); hundreds of these are arranged on shelves in side-wings of the temple. Once a soul has graduated from the academy a new, more ornate soul tablet with its divine title is placed on a shelf to either side of the Yellow Thearch, on the second floor of the temple.

The ancestor-saving part of the Wumiao Mingzheng Tang's activities has grown enormously over the last years, taking up more and more ritual time. Now, many of the deities who reveal at the Hall are graduates of the Academy, who come back to pass on some of what they have learned to the community to which they originally owe their opportunity for spiritual progress. The Academy has become such an important part of the cult that its name was inserted into the official name of the temple, which is now known as the Wuji Zhengdao Yuan Wumiao Mingzheng Tang.

Why was the Wuji Zhengdao Yuan instituted in the Mingzheng Tang? From an emic viewpoint, of course, it is an instrument established by the Venerable Mother to facilitate her children's return and a tangible sign of the Mother's respect for and trust in the Mingzheng Tang. In terms of inter-religious competition, however, it can be interpreted as a ritual product designed to compete with similar products in rival groups. And indeed, the Yiguan Dao offers its members a ritual mechanism for posthumously initiating their ancestors and thus transferring them to the Principle Heaven.³² The Wuji Zhengdao Yuan seems to be designed as a functional equivalent and competitor to this Yiguan Dao institution.

Competition and competitiveness seem to have been the key factors shaping the Shengxian Tang's and the Mingzheng Tang's mythological and institutional innovations: competition provided the incentive for innovation, while differing degrees of competitiveness determined the direction this innovation would take. As a strong and prosperous phoenix hall the Shengxian Tang up to 1976 could reaffirm its own heritage and develop it in a systematic manner that would allow it to compete with the sophisticated eschatology of the Yiguan Dao. The initially weak Mingzheng Tang did not have the Shengxian Tang's standing on the religious marketplace; its low competitiveness forced it to enter into alliances with its competitors and/or adopt some of their successful "brands." Thus it first allied itself with the Yellow Thearch Religion before changing course and adopting the Mother motif into its mythology. These changing policies have had obvious effects in the Hall's pantheon (e.g., the worship of Guan Di as Jade Thearch and the incorporation of the Yellow Thearch and the Venerable Mother) and in its institutional setup (e.g., the establishment of the Wuji Zhengdao Yuan and the concomitant rise in importance of ancestor related ritual activities). However, while adopting features from both the Yellow Thearch Religion and the Yiguan Dao, the Mingzheng Tang

has not been assimilated into either of these two competitors. It resisted all pressures from the Xuanyuan Jiao to cease its spirit-writing, and while it adopted central motifs of the Yiguan Dao's Mother myth, it did not import the attached sectarian soteriology. This latter issue will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

(B) PATHS TO SALVATION

The key bone of contention between phoenix halls and the Yiguan Dao is soteriological in nature, i.e., it concerns the question of how ultimate salvation is to be attained. Above, we saw that the Yiguan Dao claims to possess an exclusive mandate to mediate salvation in the Principle Realm of the Venerable Mother, by the same token denying phoenix halls this efficacy. While this alone would create friction between the two traditions, the issue actually runs deeper and concerns fundamental differences in their understanding of the requirements for salvation. For the phoenix disciple salvation is a question of individual moral cultivation. It is a lengthy process of merit accumulation, of self-improvement and purification, which leads the practitioner gradually upwards through the various echelons of the spiritual hierarchy until eventually he or she may attain final salvation as a golden immortal in the Limitless Realm. The role of the phoenix hall's benevolent masters in this arduous process of cultivation is that of teachers who guide their students on their path toward salvation, but ultimately the students still have to struggle along this path by their own strength. The benevolent masters grant no special graces that the disciples have not earned themselves through their accumulated merit.

By contrast, the Yiguan Dao carries with it the devotionalist heritage of a long tradition of popular sectarianism in which salvation by the Venerable Mother's grace plays a major role. Many of these sects claimed that initiation would effect immediate registration of the new member's name on the heavenly roster and effectively provide him or her with a passport to Heaven.³³ The Yiguan Dao continues this tradition of salvation by grace when it guarantees posthumous ascension to the Principle Realm to all its initiates. The miraculous efficacy of the three treasures (*sanbao*) conferred upon the new member during the initiation ritual³⁴ is a strong selling point and has played no small role in its enormous success on Taiwan and elsewhere. This subitist emphasis on salvation by grace, however, conflicts with the gradualist approach to salvation by cultivation that is championed not merely by the phoenix halls, but paradoxically plays a significant role within the Yiguan Dao as well. This is due to the sect's historical roots in both the maternism of the popular sects and the Confucian moralism of the planchette cults. The stock formula used to negotiate the tension between the two paths to salvation is that the sect first "transmits the Way" (*chuandao*) to the initiate; having received the Way (*dedao*), the initiate's faculties for moral cultivation are opened and he or she can then proceed to successfully "cultivate the Way" (*xiudao*). This formula, however, does

not resolve the basic contradiction between grace and cultivation as paths to salvation: If initiation alone guarantees entry into paradise, what further need is there for moral cultivation? Would not initiation confer salvation even upon the unworthy and immoral? A number of responses have been developed by the sect to defuse the tension existing in its soteriology. It is said for example that no unworthy person will ever obtain initiation as only those with the proper destiny are given this opportunity. At the same time the image of the Mother's Principle Realm has been refined by giving it a hierarchical structure; the highest level is only attainable to those who have successfully cultivated themselves and thus collected sufficient merit after initiation. The lowest level is a form of purgatory, a "hell in heaven," where sinful initiates suffer torments similar to those applied to uninitiated sinners in traditional purgatory. Still, the basic incompatibility of the paths to salvation cannot be resolved; there are compromises, but no real solutions. In the final analysis, when forced to assign primacy to one or the other of the two paths, the golden apple always goes to grace rather than to cultivation, to the "transmission" rather than the cultivation of the Dao. This is because the heavenly mandate to transmit the Mother's grace to the original numina is absolutely crucial to the Yiguan Dao's identity, marking it out as the sole legitimate and effective provider of salvation in the human world.

By the same token, the issue has persisted as the principal point of doctrinal disagreement between the Yiguan Dao and phoenix halls. Rejection of the Yiguan Dao's model of salvation by grace was a constant in all phases of the Mingzheng Tang's interaction with the sect, irrespective of its attitude toward the Mother mythology as such. The issue first appeared in the pages of the *Phoenix Friend* in 1973, when the magazine printed a revelation by the Immortal Old Man of the South Pole (Nanji Xianweng). The deity had descended on behalf of the Celestial Worthy of Primordial Beginning to answer the following three questions: 1. What are halls of prior heaven?; 2. What are halls of posterior heaven?; 3. What about the claim that one cannot ascend to the Limitless after death, if one's mysterious pass has not been indicated (i.e., unless one has undergone the Yiguan Dao initiation ritual)? The first two questions are easily resolved by claiming that phoenix halls are halls of prior heaven, and the temples of popular religion are halls of posterior heaven. Thus in one stroke, phoenix halls are elevated to propounders of the true Way of Prior Heaven and are at the same time differentiated from the inferior temples of popular religion, "which only allow people to worship sacred images, but cannot enlighten them on true principles." Having claimed for phoenix halls the same position that the Yiguan Dao was claiming for itself, the answer to the third question proceeds to dismantle the latter's claim to exclusive control over the Way of Prior Heaven:

The Way of Heaven has no selfishness. Whoever cultivates the Way, if they can diligently cultivate the Way of the Master [= Confucius] to the point of completing their rewards of the Way, can return to the Limitless. If somebody has received the indication, but does not diligently cultivate the Master's Way, they will still fall into purgatory. If someone has not received the indication, but is able to cultivate diligently, they can still ascend to the heavenly halls and return to the Limitless.

For example, the Shengxian Tang's phoenix disciple Li Yingqing had in his lifetime received the indication and transmission of the mysterious pass from an enlightened teacher, but after his death he still entered purgatory. If the disciple Li had not during his lifetime labored for the Hall and for society and [thus] created merit, and if his children had not created supplementary merit, how then could he have been released and entered the Institute for Gathering the Good (Jushan Suo)? Therefore if those in the world who cultivate the Way can diligently cultivate the correct Way, then there will definitely be a road to Heaven [open to them]. I hope they will not walk on devious paths. The sages, deities, immortals, and Buddhas are the enlightened teachers [who guide] in cultivating the Way. If one can obey the sacred instructions [i.e. the deities' messages conveyed through the planchette], diligently cultivates and respectfully carries them out, then the Way can be completed.³⁵

These explanations by Nanji Xianweng were prompted by confusion concerning the posthumous fate of the mentioned Li Yingqing. Li, a member of the Shengxian Tang's temple committee, had died in February of 1972. Less than six weeks before the revelation by Nanji Xianweng, Li Yingqing's soul had appeared in a Shengxian Tang seance describing his content existence in the Jushan Suo of the underworld. Now, this was not at all where he was supposed to have ended up; as an Yiguan Dao initiate he should have gone right up to the Principle Realm, bypassing purgatory altogether. Nanji Xianweng resolves the problem by effectively denying the efficacy of the Yiguan Dao initiation ritual. The only thing that counts toward one's salvation is the merit accumulated by an active cultivation of the Way, irrespective of any mystical initiation rites one may or may not have undergone. It is a reaffirmation of a moral cosmos uncompromised by ritualistic intervention. Whatever other changes were introduced later on, this position was to remain basic to the cult's self-definition vis-à-vis the Yiguan Dao. After the Mingzheng Tang's adoption of the Venerable Mother, the Mingzheng Tang's benevolent masters and the Venerable Mother herself had to address the issue of the validity of the Yiguan Dao's initiation ritual a number of times, and in each instance they refused to attribute to it any soteriological significance whatsoever, stressing instead the supreme importance of personal cultivation. The reception of the Three Treasures in this view is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the realization of the Way.

Just as for the Yiguan Dao the heavenly mandate to mediate salvation by the Mother's grace is crucial to its identity, so is the Mingzheng Tang's insistence upon cultivation as the only path to Heaven central to its own identity.

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, we can say that the Mingzheng Tang has adopted from the Yiguan Dao its maternist eschatology, but not its maternist soteriology. The conception of the ultimate realm as a paradise governed by a compassionate cosmic mother replaced the earlier conception of a Limitless Realm

ruled by the Celestial Worthy of Primordial Beginning, and its powerful imagery provided the legitimization for the Mingzheng Tang's most significant ritual innovation in the 1980s, the establishment of the Wuji Zhengdao Yuan.

In addition, the installation of the Mother as the cult's new high deity made an impact on the cult in at least two other domains. First and most obviously, the focus of worship has shifted away somewhat from Guan Sheng Dijun to the Venerable Mother as the highest deity. This, however, does not seem to have seriously affected Guan Sheng Dijun's authority. As the Jade Thearch, Guan holds all administrative authority in the heavens and conducts the affairs of the celestial government largely without intervention by the Venerable Mother. If we phrase it in terms of the "Imperial Metaphor," which is sometimes being used as an explanatory model for the Chinese popular religious pantheon, the Jade Thearch plays a role similar to the earthly emperor of traditional China, while the Venerable Mother may be compared to the empress dowager:³⁶ her authority is largely informal, but always deferred to. If we look at one instance of exercise of divine authority in the Hall of Enlightened Orthodoxy, namely, the authorization of the writing of morality books, we find that most books are formally authorized by the Jade Thearch. Even those written by the Venerable Mother's decree are usually also endorsed by a mandate of the Jade Thearch.

The near equality of the Jade Thearch and the Venerable Mother is also expressed in the Mingzheng Tang's written memorials, some of which are to be passed upwards from one level of the celestial bureaucracy to the next to be finally presented to the Jade Thearch and the Venerable Mother simultaneously. The fact that the Jade Thearch does not pass a memorial on to a higher ranking Venerable Mother, but receives it at the same time and at the same level as she is an expression of their factual, if not formal, equality.

A second and more significant area of maternist impact is the alternative model of relating to the sacred that the Mother offers. Worship of the Venerable Mother introduces an emotional element into phoenix halls that the Five Benevolent Masters are not as apt in providing. While Guan Sheng Dijun and his colleagues are virtuous and righteous deities, they are also stern and somewhat forbidding. The Venerable Mother, by contrast, is full of motherly feelings for her offspring, depicted as awaiting her children's return with tears in her eyes at the gates of the Jasper Pool. She thus gives a new, additional meaning to cultivation. As we saw, cultivation in a traditional phoenix hall setting is basically the spiritual version of the examination candidate's struggle for office in Imperial China, leading to salvation only in a gradual process of merit accumulation conducted under the supervision of stern, schoolmasterly male deities. Cultivation in a maternist context, by contrast, is clothed in the touching imagery of homecoming, of long-lost children returning to their home and to their compassionate and loving mother. The difference is also expressed in the terms of address

and self-denotation used by a phoenix disciple when talking to the Benevolent Masters on the one hand, and the Venerable Mother on the other hand. As described above, the Benevolent Masters are addressed as “benevolent teachers,” and the phoenix disciple refers to him or herself as “student” or “disciple.” When addressing the Mother, the phoenix disciple will use a non-colloquial term for “mother” (*muniang*), while referring to him or herself as “child” (*haizi*). This supplies a new and motivating angle on the otherwise rather daunting task of cultivating the Way.

This mother-child relationship contains the potential for creating an alternative route of accessing divine power. Sangren has suggested that the way deities in Chinese popular religion are approached parallels key social relationships. While the male deities of the popular pantheon are petitioned like bureaucrats who make their decisions “moved in part by the intrinsic justice of the request but influenced as well by bribery and promises of payment for wishes granted,” female deities “are moved less by concern for justice and the expectation of repayment than by a worshiper’s devotion and dependence.” They mitigate harsh paternal authority in the pantheon just as mothers and elder sisters do within the family.³⁷

This model is, however, not realized in the Mingzheng Tang. While the imagery connected with the Mother softens the hierarchical master-disciple relationship between the cult members and their male gods, it does not subvert it. Unlike her Yiguan Dao counterpart who secures for her children salvation through the Three Treasures she bestows on them, the phoenix hall version of the Venerable Mother does not confer any special grace; like all deities revealing there through the planchette, she simply acts as a teacher and guide for the “students of the phoenix.” As human beings, they are endowed by Heaven with the capacity for goodness which is all they need to return to the Venerable Mother’s paradise. They are therefore not in need of any further dispensation. The Venerable Mother and the other gods teach them how to realize their potential, but the disciples still have to go the whole way to paradise on the strength of their own efforts at cultivation. It is this unconditional rejection of the Yiguan Dao’s conception of grace and insistence upon merit-based cultivation as the sole path to salvation that have preserved the Mingzheng Tang’s identity as a phoenix hall in the face of all assimilative pressures. While the adoption of the Venerable Mother has added some new elements to the system of religious belief and practice of our phoenix hall, it has not significantly altered this system’s premises. The Venerable Mother has been incorporated on the phoenix hall’s terms and has become a phoenix hall deity, albeit one with certain special characteristics in comparison to the other gods. Song Guangyu has claimed that belief in the Venerable Mother has already diffused far outside of the circle of maternist sects, becoming an established part of Taiwanese popular religion.³⁸ Perhaps, but the present example demonstrates that this powerful religious image is subjected to redefinition and reinterpretation once it enters a previously non-maternist religious context. These shifts in meaning have to be borne in mind when one asserts the spread of a religious symbol beyond its context of origin.

END NOTES

1. This essay is partly based on field research, conducted at the Hall of Enlightened Orthodoxy between November 1993 and June 1994. I feel obliged to protect my informants by using pseudonyms for most personal names. All pseudonyms are marked with an asterisk “*”. I want to thank all the phoenix disciples of the Hall of Enlightened Orthodoxy for making me feel welcome, putting up with my bothersome questions, and in general making this research project possible in the first place.

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2. See Clart 1994/95 for my analysis of this revelation.

3. *Luanyou* 567, 1994: 7-8.

4. To clarify my terminology: The term “sect” shall refer to non-mainstream, mostly syncretic, religious bodies that possess a well-developed, voluntary membership structure and maintain a transregional presence and leadership. The term “cult” refers to any form of small-scale religious institution, usually centered upon one temple or shrine. There are a number of subcategories of cults, of which the “sectarian cult” is significant for our present purposes. This is a cult that possesses a developed system of doctrine and formalized, voluntary membership; it is in effect a sect in miniature. As most of the spirit-writing cults discussed here are such “sectarian cults”, the terms “sect” and “cult” in this article describe principally differences in size between the religious bodies discussed.

5. This brief outline of the historical development of phoenix halls on the Penghu Islands and Taiwan follows mainly the published research of Song Guangyu and Wang Jianchuan (Song 1995, Wang Jianchuan 1996a). For an English language overview of the early history of phoenix halls in Taiwan based on these articles and other relevant materials, see Clart 1996: 58-93.

6. On the history of these ledgers see Brokaw 1991. Seaman 1978: 58-62 discusses ledger use in a central Taiwanese phoenix hall in the 1970s.

7. The merit amounts and corresponding divine ranks are worked out in detail in a ledger composed in the Hall of Enlightened Orthodoxy, the *Sacred Thearch Wenheng's Statutes of Merit and Demerit (Wenheng Shengdi gongguo lü*, 1985/86). Cf. Clart 1994/95: 193-195, and Clart 1996: 289-296.

8. The secondary literature on these cults is still rather sparse. Relevant studies include: Seidel 1970, Huang 1988, Russell 1990, Kleeman 1994.

9. On Ming and Qing dynasty charitable societies see Smith 1987.

10. One among these, however, Patriarch Lü, also called the Divine Lord of Reliable Succor (Fuyou Dijun), retained a prominent position. In Taiwanese phoenix halls he is usually venerated as one of their benevolent masters, though clearly in a subordinate position to Guan Di. However, in areas of mainland China with a strong

Quanzhen Daoist tradition, such as in Guangdong, Patriarch Lū continues to play a more prominent role in planchette cults than Guan Di. See Tsui 1991.

The Qunying Tan, a Sichuanese planchette cult that published the morality book *Boat for Saving Lives (Jiusheng chuan)* in 1863, was devoted to Fuyou Dijun whose revelations, however, made it clear that it was his duty merely to assist in the current movement to save humanity which was in fact led by Guan Di. Cf. Clart 1996: 24-34. For a summary of the *Boat for Saving Lives* see Jordan and Overmyer 1986: 49-50.

11. Graham 1935: 487 and 1967: 103. These "Confucian shrines" have been experiencing a limited revival in recent years. See Yu 1996.

12. On Yang Mingji and the formation of the Ruzong Shenjiao see Wang Jianchuan 1996a, Wang Zhiyu 1996, and Clart 1996: 82-85.

13. I discuss the "Confucianess" of Taiwanese phoenix halls at greater length in part II, chapter seven of my dissertation (Clart 1996). Cf. also Wang Jianchuan 1996a: 187 for a description of the spirit-writing of early Taiwanese phoenix halls as a "popularization and 'religionization' of Confucianism" (*Rujia de tongsuhua, zongjiaohua*). In a similar vein, Song 1996: 307-313 characterizes phoenix halls as "religionized Confucianism" (*zongjiaohua Ruxue*).

14. See, for example, Jordan 1982; Song 1983 and 1996; Jordan and Overmyer 1986: chapters 9 and 10; Ma and Han 1992: chapter 18.

15. See Jordan and Overmyer 1986: 19-20 and 57-63 on the *Golden Basin* and the emergence in the nineteenth century of spirit-written texts as carriers of sectarian doctrine.

16. Ma and Han 1992: 1150-1164.

17. Edkins 1888: 305.

18. Wang Jianchuan 1994. Cf. also Jones 1996: 168-174.

19. I keep my references to the Cihui Tang fairly short as there already exists a detailed English language account of this movement by Jordan and Overmyer 1986: chapters six, seven, and eight.

20. There exists some disagreement as to whether Yang Mingji was actually initiated into the Yiguan Dao or not, with Wang Jianchuan affirming and Wang Zhiyu rejecting the suggestion. Wang Jianchuan 1996a: 192; Wang Zhiyu 1996: 10.

21. Song Guangyu 1983: 205.

22. Wang Jianchuan 1996a: 194.

23. Jordan and Overmyer 1986: 91-92. This confusion in the public's mind persists until the present day. Phoenix halls have not been very successful in building a corporate identity. Among the general population the term *luan-tang* is not widely known. For most persons uninvolved with phoenix halls, "Yiguan Dao" is the first association that comes to mind when they see blue-gowned men and women attending a spirit-writing seance. As I was able to witness at the Mingzheng Tang, this applies even to friends of phoenix disciples. When brought along for the first time to some festivity of the Mingzheng Tang, it has to be patiently explained to them that no, this is not an Yiguan Dao temple, but a phoenix hall. This usually has to be followed up by a lengthy exposition on what a phoenix hall is and does.

24. Wang Jianchuan 1996a: 192.

25. An English translation of this scripture has been produced and was kindly made available to me by Johnson 1994.
26. Interestingly, the myth of Guan's ascension to the Jade Thearch's throne originated in a maternist background. The probably earliest appearance of this motif can be found in chapter 37 of the *Precious Record of Penetrating the Netherworld* (*Dongming baoji*), a maternist spirit-written book produced between Winter 1920 and spring 1921 by a group of three planchette cults in Eryuan county (Yunnan province). In this version, it is the Venerable Mother who accepts the seventeenth Jade Thearch's resignation and appoints Guan the eighteenth incumbent on the recommendation of the Sages of the Three Religions (Sanjiao Shengren). The maternist dimensions of the story have been completely erased in the Shengxian Tang's version. See Wang Jianchuan 1996b for a detailed discussion of this myth's history.
27. This Daoist was none other than the "Tio sin-se*" studied in the early seventies by anthropologist McCreery 1973.
28. Yongbi's reprehensible life-style caused much conflict within the Mingzheng Tang after he started to act as its principal medium again in June of 1979. Ultimately it led to his being stripped of his medium's mandate in 1985.
29. Zhang* claims to have been taught the planchette in his youth by Hong Yueqiao, a friend of his father's. Hong was a well-known local scholar in the central Taiwanese town of Zhanghua in the late Qing and the Japanese period.
30. I must emphasize that this is informed speculation on my part. More mundane motives behind divine revelations are something that cannot be discussed with cult members to whom divine messages are exactly what they purport to be. Any linking of the gods' revelations to human ambitions is firmly rejected. My present attempt to link certain revelations to objective conditions of inter-group competition is very much an etic approach that would be unacceptable to the believer.
31. In his article on the Yellow Thearch Religion, Jochim 1990 describes the conflict from the viewpoint of this sect's leadership (Jochim 1990).
32. Cf. Wang Guangci 1991: 42.
33. Cf. Overmyer 1976: 188-189.
34. The three treasures include a mantra, a mudra, and the symbolic opening of the initiate's "mysterious pass" (*xuanguan*). Together they are said to effect the removal of the initiate's name from the books of purgatory and its registration in the rosters of Heaven.
35. *Luanyou* 92, 1973: 8.
36. This comparison was put forward by Zheng 1984: 107.
37. Sangren 1983: 19-20.
38. Song 1985: 206.

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CHINESE CHARACTERS

bade 八德

baojuan 寶卷

Chen Bingheng 陳秉衡

cheng 誠

Chongxiu Tang 崇修堂

chuandao 傳道

Cihui Tang 慈惠堂

Dadao xinde 《大道心德》

Daode Xueshe 道德學社

Daoxin micang 《道心秘藏》

Daoyi Gong Zhishi Tang

道一宮至釋堂

Daoyuan 道院

Daozhong jingming

《道鐘警明》

dedao 得道

dizi 弟子

Dongming baoji 《洞冥寶記》

enshi 恩師

Fayi 發一

fotang 佛堂

Fuyou Dijun 孚佑帝君

Ganying pian 《感應篇》

Gao Sheng 高昇

Gongshan She 公善社

Guan Di 關帝

Guan Sheng Dijun 關聖帝君

Guanshiyin jiuku jiuannan

chuanzhen

《觀世音教苦救難傳真》

- Guo Ezhi 郭鶚志
 guowei 果位
 haizi 孩子
 Han Yulin 韓雨霖
 Hong Yueqiao 洪月樵
 houtian dao 後天道
 Huangdi 黃帝
 Huangmu zhimi pian
 《皇母指迷篇》
 qitian 氣天
 Quanzhen 全真
 Qunying Tan 羣英壇
 ren 仁
 Ru 儒
 Rujia de tongshuhua, zongjiaohua
 儒家的通俗化、宗教化
 Rujia lunli 儒家倫理
 Rumen kefan 《儒門科範》
 Rutan 儒壇
 Ruzong Shenjiao 儒宗神教
 sanbao 三寶
 sancao pudu 三曹普度
 sangui jiukou 三跪九叩
 Sanjiao Shengren 三教聖人
 Sanyì tanyuan 《三易探源》
 shanshu 善書
 sheng 生
 Shengxian Tang 聖賢堂
 Shengxian zhenli 《聖賢真理》
 shengxun 聖訓
 Shengyu 《聖諭》
 Shengyu guangxun 《聖諭廣訓》
 shengyuan 生員
 Siming Zhenjun 司命真君
 Taishang Wuji hunyuan zhenjing
 《太上無極混元真經》
 Taiwan Sheng Shengjiao Hui
 台灣省聖教會
 Tiandao aoyi 《天道奧義》
 Tianjie chuanzhen 《天界傳真》
 Tianmu Zhizun Wuji Laomu
 天母至尊無極老母
 tianxian 天仙
 Tongshan She 同善社
 tongsheng 童生
 Tongtian Lingxiao Baodian
 通天靈霄寶殿
 Wang Jueyi 王覺一
 Wenchang Dijun 文昌帝君
 Yulu jinpan 《玉露金盤》
 Zanxiu Gong 贊修宮
 Zhaijiao 齋教
 zhaitang 齋堂
 Zhang Sanfeng quanji
 《張三丰全集》
 Zhang Sanfeng 張三丰
 Zhang Tianran 張天然
 zhengdao 證道
 zhonggusheng 鐘鼓生
 Zhonghua Minguo Ruzong
 Shenjiao Hui
 中華民國儒宗神教會
 Zhongtian 中天
 zhuxi 主席
 zongjiaohua Ruxue 宗教化儒學