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Introduction

From early on, the Chinese have called those in charge of formal rituals, social regulation, and self-perfection "masters of Dao" (*daoshi* 道士). Among them, some are described as "having left the family" (*chujiaren* 出家人). Celibate ascetics, they are today notably members of the Daoist school of Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Perfection). Founded in the late 12th century by Wang Chongyang 王重阳, the school centers around the Longmen branch 龙门派 (Dragon Gate), which goes back to the patriarch Qiu Chuji 邱处机, Wang's best-known disciple. The Daoists of this school live communally in temples in a world of their own, and dedicate their lives to liturgy and asceticism. There are both male and female adepts—literally called "Heaven/Male-Dao" (Qiandao 乾道) and "Earth/Female-Dao" (Kundao 坤道) using the appellation of key trigrams from the *Yijing*易經 (Book of Changes). I thus refer to them as monks and nuns or, more generally, as monastics. The latter I use as a generic term in this volume to deal with the officiants of both sexes forming the Daoist community, and then explore how best to understand their role and vision in the Chinese context.

One enters the Quanzhen community through a rite of ordination and investiture, accompanied by the transmission of canonical texts as well as of formal robes, the "cap and gown." Sealing the relation between master and disciple, this passage may also mean to replace, to a certain extent, traditional kinship ties with new ritual bonds. Adepts commit themselves to observe various sets of precepts and monastic rules that are both ethical and ascetic in nature. They thereby enter an alternative way of life: among adults and in celibacy, the latter despite the fact that on occasion, notably in small institutions, monks and nuns share the same temple grounds.

Daoist monasteries and hermitages are located preferably in the mountains, offering a degree of tranquility and seclusion. Yet even in the most remote area, these temples still receive numerous visitors. The monastics are thus in frequent contact with the surrounding population as well as with individuals or groups who travel to meet them. They also tend to go on personal trips, for ascetic or initiatory purposes, or engage in more or less lengthy retreats in mountain grottos. However, Daoist temples are never left by all the monastics at the same time: they always remain guarded at least by few monastics who make sure that the holy place opens everyday and welcome the worshipers. In addition, there is no village or urban county without its local temple. Thus, many monastics live in the cities, where they play an important part in community life.

The role of the temple goes beyond strictly speaking religious practices, since it extends into social organization and occupies a key position in social space. The monastics are intimately connected not only to their fellow brethren of other temples but also to local lay followers, who in turn maintain links with those of other temples, placing the monastics in a strong, tightly woven network. The connection, moreover, is clearly visible in various sets of ritual and material exchange so that, for the most part, Chinese monastics are at the center of various levels of community and not strictly speaking "recluses" at all.

The Wengongci

The Wengongci daoguan 文公祠道观 in Hanzhong, the subject of this study, is home to about fifteen permanent monastics plus various temporary fellows. It is a Daoist monastery (*daoguan* 道观) and thus part of an institution first established in China in the 5th century C.E., and of much prominence since the Tang (see Kohn 2003a) that yet has a different dimension of meaning today. In addition to serving as a monastery, the Wengongci is also a sanctuary to a little known deity called Wengong 文公, the literary appellation of the poet Han Yu 韩愈 (768-824). Daoists venerate him as the god in charge of the South Gate of Heaven (Nantian men 南天门), where the earthly and heavenly realms intersect. His cult is particularly widespread in southern Shaanxi but is also known on a national level, where he is connected with Han Xiangzi 韩湘子, a prominent member of the ubiquitous Eight Immortals (*baxian* 八仙).[1]

Since I first visited the Wengongci in 1993, it has undergone major reconstruction. At the time, the only parts rebuilt were the main worship hall as well as a small courtyard facing it. The compound as a whole looked less like a temple than like an accumulation of houses without proper wall or context, singularly lacking in splendor. However, the three monks then in residence made it into a holy place through their vision: they accurately described what had been there in the past and fervently outlined what they had planned for the future. They easily enchanted the visitor with colorful depictions of

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1 These immortals (Zhongli Quan 钟离权, Lü Dongbin 吕洞宾, Zhang Guolao 张果老, Li Tieguai 李铁拐, He Xiangu 何仙姑, Lan Caihe 蓝采和, Cao Guojiu 曹国舅, and Han Xiangzi 韩湘子) came together as a group in the late Song dynasty (12th-13th c.). Each of them also kept his personal history. The most famous is indisputably Lü Dongbin, closely followed by Han Xiangzi (Clart 2007, xvi)

multiple adjacent venues, describing numerous halls for worship and religious activities that had been there in the past and would rise again as worship grew. Some buildings at the time were still occupied by lay people who had come to reside there during the Cultural Revolution and who would take a few more years before leaving and returning the property to the temple. Others were already vacant, gradually destroyed for rebuilding in new splendor. Meanwhile, makeshift altars arose here and there from the rubble; people, most often elderly, came to perform prostrations. The sight was disconcerting.

When the monastics refer to the Cultural Revolution, they do not mean quite what we learn in history textbooks today, i.e., the period from 1966 to 1976 when Mao Zedong unleashed the Red Guards on the people and their artifacts. Rather, they use the term to indicate the entire time under communism when the practice of Daoism as well as of all other religions in China was prohibited. This means about twenty years from the 1960s to the 1980s, beginning with early campaigns against revisionist intellectuals and thus also monastics and ending with the Four Modernizations and general liberalization under Deng Xiaoping. I will use the term Cultural Revolution in this sense and would like to emphasize how, from my very first contact with the monastics, I have been much impressed with the renewal of the Daoist religion and its vibrancy despite this long hiatus. From the beginning, older monastics who clearly remembered how it was before the prohibition kept on showing the way, eagerly supported by others, often younger ones who joined in the reconstruction effort, not least by becoming monastics themselves.

The Wengongci soon took on a completely new level of importance. It was chosen as the office of the local Daoist Association (Daojiao xiehui 道教协会,), created by the authorities to both integrate and control the various Daoist communities in the country. The temple thus came to be right in the center of the interface of ancient and post-revolutionary China.

To strengthen this new position, the temple is sometimes credited with a longer history than it has: indeed, the Wengongci has a rather thin historical record, at least in written sources and in comparison to the higher centers of Daoism in Hanzhong. A small place erected in 1743 under the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), it had grown nicely during the 1920s. Then, at the end of the 1950s, it was submerged in the waves of history only to emerge, in the early 1990s, as one of the mainstays in the Daoist network of Shaanxi province. Despite these facts, certain monastics and lay followers still associate it with the first of all Daoist communities, ancient Zhang Lu Town 张鲁城 of the Eastern Han (25-220 C.E.). This claims to be the place where the third Celestial Master established a theocratic state as part of the Way of the Five Pecks of Rice (Wudoumi dao 五斗米道). It is the pride of the region.

The temple also owes a great deal of its fame to nearby centers, notably Mount Tiantai 天台山, located about 30 kilometers north of Hanzhong town and not to be confused with the larger and more famous Buddho-Daoist center in Zhejiang. This mountain, covered with temples that go back as far as the Tang dynasty (618-907), is a great monastic center well respected in the national Daoist community. As many Daoist mountains today, it is classified as a "nature park" (*senlin gongyuan* 森林公园) and serves as a major tourist attraction. Many monastics there live in six temples that also mark the stages of ascent to the summit. Today presented as "one of the eight most beautiful sites of the area" (*Hanzhong shizhi* 1994: 740-41), this holy Daoist place—which also holds a number of Buddhist temples—is one of the mainstays of the cult of Yaowang 药王, the Medicine King and divinized form of the renowned Daoist, physician, and alchemist Sun Simiao 孙思邈 (681-782). More importantly for Daoists today, it is the place where the celebrated centenarian He Mingshan 何明善 lived until 2005: this makes it one of the key local centers of religious renewal. The connections between the holy mountain and the urban Wengongci are very close, especially because the abbot of the latter was among the first disciples of He Mingshan.

As I went around the nearby countryside, invited by lay people or monastics to visit the temples of various orders, I soon confronted a multiplicity of Chinese terms for "temple," terms that reveal the diversity not only of vocabulary but also of institution. Thus, "grottoes" (*dong* 洞), "belvederes" or "observatories" (i.e., "monasteries") (*guan* 观), and "hermitages" (*an* 庵) clearly designate Daoist temples, while "monasteries" (*si* 寺) or "pagodas" (*da*塔) are Buddhist and "shrines" (*ci* 祠) mostly Confucian but sometimes also Daoist. In addition, "temples" (*miao* 庙)—the most commonly used term among them—may designate institutions of any religion. Other places might be called "terraces" (*tai* 台), "palaces" (*gong* 宫), "courts" (*yuan* 院), or "altars" (*tan* 坛)—the latter not necessarily indicating the location of a cult. Beyond all this, certain "mountains" (*shan* 山) are closely associated with temples housing monastics who speak of them as famous Daoist centers. Plus, certain Buddhist temples have become Daoist without a change of name or, vice versa, Daoist sanctuaries transformed into Buddhist temples. In addition to the nomenclature and architecture often being interchange-able, Chinese religions tend to have porous boundaries and share certain popular deities as well as communal practices.

The specific terms for "temple" apparently convey different meanings. They may be informative with regard to the site's actual location: e.g., "grottos" tend to be at the bottom of a mountain, while "terraces" often indicate an elevated space, "hermitages" are found in remote locations, and "mountains" tend to be at higher altitudes. They may also indicate the nature of their inhabitants so that "belvederes," the classic Daoist monasteries, often house a community of Daoist

masters. Alternatively, they may show the character of the building, such as "temple," "shrine," and "altar" in ritual terms and "palace" in an imperial or metaphorical dimension.

Yet, far more commonly, they are not what their name suggests. Mountains may very well be simple hills as, for example, the famous Mount Fengdu 酆都山 northeast of Chongqing, whose peak measures all of 288 meters! This means that temples conserve their appellation within the context that led to their name originally, whether or not this may still be appropriate. For this reason, one may find "monasteries" today that have no monastics or "hermitages" that house large religious communities, ancient country temples that have been massively urbanized, and so on.

Fieldwork Settings

The present volume focuses on a group of monastics and lay followers of an ordinary Daoist temple located in the southern part of Shaanxi, a region that has played an important role in the history of Daoism. Here Laozi allegedly transmitted the *Daode jing* 道德经 (Book of the Dao and Its Virtue) during his emigration to the west at Louguantai 楼观台(Terrace of the Lookout Tower). Here the oldest Daoist school of the Celestial Masters (Tianshi 天师) had early centers (Verellen 2003): its founder Zhang Daoling 张道陵 is still a major patriarch in the area. In addition, Shaanxi is also considered the cradle of monastic Daoism, honored to house the tomb and temple of Wang Chongyang as well as the grotto where Qiu Chuji achieved enlightenment. Four major monastic centers (*conglin miao* 丛林庙) of massive influence are located here: Chongyanggong 重阳宫 (Wang Chongyang's Palace), Louguantai楼观台, Baxiangong 八仙宫 (Eight Immortals' Palace, formerly named *an* or Hermitage), and Zhangliangmiao 張良庙 (Zhang Liang's Temple). Numerous Daoist temples in southern Shaanxi, moreover, see themselves as centers of learned transmission and propagation of ancient cults.

The Wengongci is of a more modest stature and belongs to what monastics call a "small monastery" (*zisun miao* 子孙庙)—a Daoist institution formed by a local religious group and mainly composed of a master and his disciples. Unlike in the major monastic centers mentioned above, the master here accepts novices before ordination. The temple thus affords insights into the entire personal and ritual path typically followed by Daoist monastics.

My introduction to the community came from Wu Shizhen,[2] a Daoist monk of the Baxiangong in Xi'an, the provincial capital. This connection allowed me to establish a close, confidential relationship with the socio-religious community in Hanzhong. He had never gone there before I went with him in 1993, yet Wu was warmly received by his fellow monastics and offered a place to stay in the temple, as the monastic hospitality rule demands. The abbot and two of his disciples took me to a nearby hotel where I settled during this stay (and many others).[3] When Wu spoke with the local monastics, they found various mutual acquaintances in the "great family" of Daoist monastics. That, as well as the fact that the Baxiangong is a much bigger (and famous) monastery than the Wengongci, helped the local abbot to accept my presence. In addition, Wu was well connected in Daoist networks related to Hanzhong. Quite young at the time, he was yet well known for his intellectual and ritual competence as well as his training at the Baiyunguan白云观 (White Cloud Monastery) headquarters in Beijing. His intervention on my behalf was invaluable. As a result, I spent about thirteen months in Hanzhong between 1993 and 2000. During this time, I absorbed the local dialect as well as the Daoists' internal language while establishing good relations with monks and followers. I also had the chance to follow them on a variety of transfers and to visit, as an actual community member, many temples in the region and some beyond it. I thus became intimately familiar with both the time and space of the temple's story.

I focused my study on the monastics connected to the temple: despite their various social origins and cultural levels, they can be considered erudite. Not all of them, to be sure, are literati and some are not even literate. Still, even today they receive extensive teachings oral transmission: ancient texts, myths, calendar calculation, and cosmology. They are quite familiar with the traditional symbolic correspondence systems as well as in ritual and divination practices. They apply them in life and continuously refer to the great principles of Daoism—if sometimes in contradictory ways. Generally, the monastics not only value a good education but also peddle histories and legends from a highly knowledgeable perspective. Holders of somewhat secret knowledge handed down orally over numerous generations, they constantly refer to the

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2 I have changed all proper names to preserve the anonymity of my informants, except when they have published relevant materials in their own name.

3 At the time, strangers were not allowed to live among monastics, at least beyond the big cities, nor to stay with local people in their own homes. The monks thus ran a nearby hotel authorized to admit "foreign guests," not far from the Dongguan quarter where the Wengongci is located. They offered me a room there, which I accepted and have used many times over the following years. Living in such a "neutral" environment made it easier to me to meet people who were not or no longer Wengongci community members as well as monks or lay followers who enjoyed visiting with me to talk (or even sometimes to gossip) on a different level than possible in the institution itself.

works of their "philosophical founders" Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Liezi as well as to the Daoist Canon, which modern scholars are working hard to explore. Learning their conceptions of the monastic community, local deities, and life and death in general, one gains an understanding of Daoism as it is actually lived and accepted today. By the same token, among the inhabitants and followers of the Wengongci and its surrounding institutions, I have found frequent and vivid allusions to the great books of the religion—a connection between ancient wisdom and modern life I attempt to present in this work.

As fits the genre of the monograph, I try to report the ideas and practices of the community members as literally as possible, including their various contradictions and their full complexity. Monastics and followers often deliver highly elaborate reflections about themselves and the community, discussing them in terms of social organization, politics, symbolism, theology, cosmology, and more. They often speak in citations yet without mentioning the source or author or even the original context, not even giving a hint that those words are not their own. The most difficult task, then, has been to unravel their explications and citations as much as working through (and maintaining distance from) their evaluation and analysis.

One should also recall that access to Daoist thought is quite difficult for the monastics themselves, partly due to the complexity of the concepts in the various works but more importantly because of the philosophical labyrinth they subscribe to. The religion tends to cultivate a veritable cult of mysteries and paradoxes. Not only is it not particularly interested in proselytizing, but it also sees itself as an obscure organization that vacillates between the ostensible and the hidden. Daoist texts are intentionally secretive, and understanding them is intimately dependent on the acquisition of fundamental merit. Without being necessarily formulated in a complicated fashion—the most fundamental ideas are usually cached in very simple terms—they are obscured by textual organization (indexes being all but unknown) and codified in an internal Daoist language, into which one must be initiated to understand it properly. The fact that the texts are in classical Chinese makes them even more difficult to access, notably to members of the younger generation whose entire education is in the modern language. Most recently, even the most erudite of monks have trouble understanding them. Since the introduction of simplified characters, the monastics have worked with a double strategy: continuing the usage of classical Chinese and increasing translations into modern, especially of key scriptures.

The monastics of the Wengongci have guided me into the complex representation of humanity, universe, and Dao, which is first highly abstruse to the Western student, then comes to reveal great richness. This ethnographic and personal experience forms the core of this work.

Research Sources

To understand the Daoist monastic universe, I have made use of a variety of sources. Principally, I have based my research on the numerous oral materials I collected during my fieldwork, from formal accounts to practical words of advice and information. I have also used ancient Daoist texts that locals refer to frequently. Beyond that, I have worked with texts written by the monks themselves about the history of their monasteries as well as about the foundations of their creed and their major practices. Finding themselves in a time of transition and given the large number of works destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, Daoist masters today have to recreate lost documents from memory and edit them to integrate recent historical developments while also taking into account the work of local historians.

There are especially two documents, compiled in 1994 under the auspices of the Hanzhong Daoist Association for internal circulation, which deal with the Wengongci: *Hanzhong daojiao de chujing* (The State of Daoism in Hanzhong) and *Hanzhong shi wengong ci daoguan fuxing jian jieji* (A Brief Presentation of the Reconstruction of the Wengongci in Hanzhong) (Hanzhong daojiao xiehui 1994a; 1994b). Approved by the Association, these works are officially listed under its general (and exclusive) authorship, but they were actually written by the local monk Fu Zhian (even his name does not appear anywhere) with the help of various lay followers. They neither are for sale in the temple shop nor distributed communally. I was equally interested in other documents created by the Association: letters, short texts exchanged by members, the *Daojiao dacidian* (Great Dictionary of the Daoist Religion; Min and Li 1994), and various issues of the journal published by the Chinese Daoist Association in Beijing—*Zhongguo daojiao*中国道教 (Chinese Daoism)—and that of its Shaanxi branch—*Sanqin daojiao* 三秦道教 (Daoism of the Three Qin [Kingdoms]).

Beijing headquarters also published several books, specifically for young monks, distributed widely through the temple network; it also put out works addressed to Daoist country priests and some for sale at larger institutions. Among them, I benefited particularly from the *Daojiao yifan* (Observances of the Daoist Religion) by Min Zhiting (1986), a copy of which I received from a monk before the book came into general circulation. It has been of great value in my studies, especially also since it summarizes a number of ancient texts and conforms closely to the actual practice supported by the Daoist Association in its effort at standardizing and unifying widely growing local cults, temples, and rituals. As regards the

vast corpus of Daoist texts, I have concerned myself mainly with those cited most frequently today as well as with recent materials that help with the description and analysis of the role of Daoist monks today.

Beyond works written or edited by the Daoists themselves, I have also consulted documents about Daoist history and temples: local gazetteers and dynastic histories, as well as modern studies by Chinese scholars, historians of religion, theologians, or editors of innumerable works on the region's "famous local sites and ancient traces" (*mingsheng guji* 名胜古迹). They inevitably discuss temples, since they are among the most important remnants of ancient times, along with museums, traditional edifices, and imperial tombs. Their purpose is to mark the main tourist circuits and provide information on locations essential to national prestige and economy. I also referred to the various glosses in ancient Daoist texts often mentioned by monks and sinological authors alike.

Most relevant to my work were studies dedicated particularly to Daoist monasticism, notably Yoshioka Yoshitoyo's fieldwork during his life at the Baiyunguan in Beijing where he stayed from 1940 to 1946 as an initiate. He was thus able to provide an in-depth account and analysis of its practices (1970; 1979). Another early pioneer was the German missionary Heinrich Hackmann who spent eleven months near the Taiqinggong 太清宫 (Great Clarity Palace) on Mount Lao 崂山 near Qingdao in the 1910s (1920; 1931). His work was studied in some detail by Livia Kohn who also illuminates certain ancient normative texts edited by the Qing master Wang Changyue 王常月, today regrouped by Min Zhiting (Kohn 2003b).[4]

A World of Their Own

From an ethnological perspective, the liturgical and ascetic activities at the Wengongci are at the root of the need to bring some individuals together. Daoists live solely among themselves and thus form a unique monastics' "community" that yet connects to a larger community, i.e., the temple as a center for both monastics and lay followers, which is thus a "socio-religious" unit. In its narrow form, the monastic community consists of people who are not related by kin yet adopt family structures in their organization. Not only do its members use terminology based on kinship but they also create a lineage of transmission that echoes family genealogies. These elements make it possible to understand the group in terms of *pseudo-kinship*, a form of "social relations which are expressed in terms of kinship (of reference or address) without however resulting from effectively recognized kinship ties (created by consanguinity or marriage)," relations that themselves resemble descent, affinal or brotherhood bonds (Bonte 1991: 550). The study of pseudo-kinship is still new in anthropology[5]—except for the concept of adoption, which has been amply studied. It includes a variety of heterogeneous situations: god-parenthood, *compadrazgo*, sworn brotherhoods, and the like. It is also used in highly dissimilar contexts—affective, judicial, ritual—and in multiple forms of relationship—horizontal and vertical. It is particularly relevant for understanding Daoist communities and, more generally, Chinese society today.

The community of monks functions like a domestic group and can be considered a household. The question then is to find out whether networks of multiple monasteries still preserve this character or whether they shift to a different cultural, doctrinal, and political order.

Two well-known systems create connections between the temples and their communities. One is the old network of cults, the so-called division of incense (*fenxiang* 分香): it creates an affiliation of temples through the deities they venerate and to whom their sanctuaries are dedicated. Another is the newly built network of the Daoist Association, put in place by the communist government: it records the numbers of monks and lay followers in a given region and affords hierarchical state control. By obliging its members to bow to a superior authority, the Daoist Association creates a chain of solidarity among practitioners and followers. My ethnographic study of the Hanzhong region shows the great complexity and interconnection of networks in worship, politics, and monastic organization.

Examining the notions of asceticism and immortality as found in the Daoist context, especially in comparison to Christian visions, one must also reflect on the connections between the monastery and the world in the religious sense of the word. Using the definition of "asceticism" by Max Weber, one sees that the self-cultivation practices at the Wengongci do not exactly match his concept of "inner-worldly asceticism" (*innerweltliche Askese*), but are often quite close to what he calls "world-rejecting asceticism" (*weltablehnende Askese*) and thus mystical contemplation (Weber 1978: 541-44; 1990: 105-85).

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4 Further documentation includes the works by Oyanagi Shigeta (1934) on the Baiyunguan and by Igarashi Kenryu (1938) on the Taiqinggong in Shenyang.

5 See Mintz and Wolf 1950; Pitt-Rivers 1972; 1973; d'Onofrio 1991; Bonte 1991; Fine 1992; Lauwaert 1991; Héritier-Augé and Copet-Rougier 1995.

Does the position "beyond kinship" which monastics occupy necessarily create a situation where they intensify the "care of their self" (*le souci de soi*)? This expression by Michel Foucault qualifies the way of dealing with oneself by "taking oneself as an object of knowledge and a field of action, so as to transform, correct, and purify oneself and to find salvation" (1986: 42). More than that, does this "world of their own" (*la vie entre soi*), to use Claude Lévi-Strauss's term,[6] allow them to believe that "the law of exchange can be evaded"? Does it make it possible for them to join a separate group that consists of ritual kin, which in a way receives (its members) without "exchanging" and thus function in an

6 Lévi-Strauss concludes *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* as follows, "To this very day, mankind has always dreamed of seizing and fixing that fleeting moment when it was permissible to believe that the law of exchange could be evaded, that one could gain without losing, enjoy without sharing. At either end of the earth and at both extremes of time, the Sumerian myth of the golden age and the Andaman myth of the future life correspond, the former placing the end of primitive happiness at a time when the confusion of languages made words into common property, the latter describing the bliss of the year after as the heaven where women will no longer be exchanged, i.e., removing to an equally unattainable past of future the joys, eternally denied to social man, of a world in which one might keep to oneself [*vivre 'entre soi'*]" (1969: 497). One might wonder whether the ritual kinship that links all monks together could embody this dream of a life in a restricted circle, impossible in the usual kinship organization because it is opposed to life in society.