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Abbreviations used in the notes

TC: Schipper, Kristofer and Franciscus Verellen, ed. 2004. *The Taoist Canon: a historical companion to the Daozang*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 3 vols.

YG: Guo Hai 郭海, ed. 1993. *Yanggao xianzhi* 陽高縣志. Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe.

Preface

This book, along with my film *Li Manshan: Portrait of a Folk Daoist*, tells the tale of a hereditary family of household Daoist priests based in a poor village in north China—a story that is at once remarkable and commonplace. We trace the vicissitudes of their lives over the past century, and their enduring ritual practice, through the experiences of two main characters: Li Manshan (b.1946) and his late great father Li Qing (1926–99), eighth and seventh generations of Daoists in the family.

Li Manshan

At first Li Manshan seems just like any other dour chain-smoking north Chinese peasant—and in a way, he is. But like J.S. Bach, he is also a hereditary ritual specialist who embodies all the arcane ritual knowledge accumulated in his family over many generations. Performing Daoist ritual, notionally a supplementary income to tilling the fields, has long been a virtually full-time freelance job. Few folk Daoists have much if any concern for the abstruse aspects of classical Daoism; their expertise is based mainly on practicing ritual skills, and in other respects they are indistinguishable from ordinary peasants.¹ Li Manshan has great charisma, but don't imagine one of those Daoist sages with

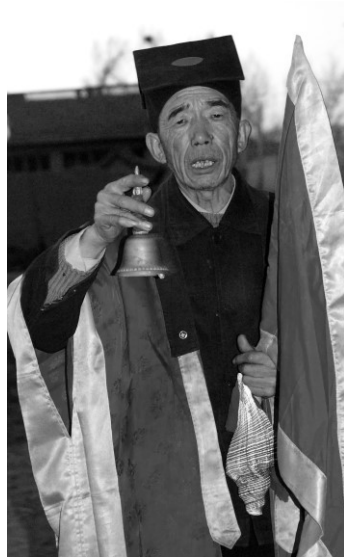


Fig. 1: Li Manshan, 2009.

long white beard and topknot, bowing graciously. Very thin, with gaunt craggy features and bushy eyebrows, he has several personalities. He is patient and careful in all he does, from domestic chores to the whole gamut of ritual tasks. Modest, unassuming, and serious, he is honest in his dealings with people when they seek his help; among friends, he may play the fool, a bit of a clown. I sometimes wonder if his childlike aspect, like his hunched gait and shambling

¹ Contrast the temple priest in south Shaanxi studied by Herrou (2010), largely devoted to more abstruse reflections on the meaning of *dao*.

walk, may be a legacy of the Maoist decades when he was under a political cloud—it is as if in his every move he has internalized the need to deflect criticism. Only when he dons his Daoist robes and takes up the drum to sing the scriptures does he undergo a miraculous transformation—solemn, upright, and majestic.

He smokes with abandon, but is not a drinker, nor does he gamble. In a gregarious society, he is something of an introvert. He says little at table during rowdy funeral meals, and is shy and uncomfortable on the mercifully rare occasions when we have to endure banquets with bigwigs. This endears him to me, as I too find it hard to adapt to the constantly communal society. Given that he has to be quite hard-headed as leader of his ritual group, in his dealings with people he is natural, personal, and sincere. After all the privations of his youth he now lives comfortably, but he sets little store by material goods. At home he drinks hot water (rarely flavored with even a few tea-leaves) from an old chipped enamel mug—hard to find in the shops now anyway.

Li Qing



Fig. 2: Li Qing on *sheng*, 1991.

My relationship with Li Manshan is indivisible from our mutual reverence for his father Li Qing. I was honored to meet him on a couple of visits in 1991 and 1992, long before I got to know Li Manshan. When I met Li Qing he was sixty-six *sui*, just the same age as Li Manshan when I began studying more seriously with him in 2011. Li Qing was more portly than his sons, his gentle face lightly adorned by whiskers. By contrast with Li Manshan's diffident demeanor, he exuded a natural benign authority.

Both our feelings for Li Qing are tinged with regret that neither of us managed to learn as much with him as we would have wished—of course in very different ways. For Li Manshan,

he wishes he could have gone on absorbing his father's knowledge in his teens while going round on rituals with him, as he would have done more but for various interruptions under Maoism; even after the revival of the 1980s he feels he should have been more diligent. For me, having realized what a remarkable group of Daoists I had chanced upon in 1991, I then got busy with projects elsewhere in China; and by the time I returned to Yanggao in 2001, Li Qing was no more. True, I was doing some interesting research over that period, but imagine if I had apprenticed myself to him in those years. So now, bearing in mind how much has been lost even since the 1990s, we would both love to hear the father's answers to all the questions about ritual that I can now only ask the son.

Among all the Daoists practicing in Yanggao county over the last century, Li Qing had an impressive mastery of performing rituals, of the manuals on which they are based, and of the vocal liturgy that animates them. He was an awesome musician on the *sheng* mouth-organ that accompanies the liturgy along with the *guanxi* oboe. One doesn't necessarily get to hear Daoists playing for their own satisfaction outside the context of performing ritual, but sitting in his house while he accompanied Liu Zhong's *guanxi* on his *sheng*, I was in the company of true *amateurs*, master musicians. And there was another reason why everyone revered him—his gentle benevolent nature. Not all folk artists live up to their obligatory Communist image of selflessly “serving the people,” but Li Qing did. His local reputation was immense; Li Manshan still encounters people who are moved to recall his kindly heart.

Approaches

So as not to try the patience of the lay reader, I refer the more academically inclined to Appendix 1 for some theoretical issues. In the widely-diffused south Asian expression, we are all “blind people groping at the elephant”—only able to describe that tiny part of the total picture that we happen to grasp, never managing to see the whole.

While I seek to connect modern and early China, my main aim is to integrate the changing practice of Daoist ritual within the life stories of ordinary people in rural China under successive regimes since the 1930s. The maintenance of ritual through the pre-Communist period, the decades of Maoism, and the revival since the 1980s all turn out to be fluid and nuanced, with Daoists constantly negotiating new challenges, as they always have done. Writing biography and local history with a focus on religious practice can make a fine prism through which to view Chinese society; and it enables us to detail changing ritual practice, which may seem timeless. Mesmerized by exotic ancient ritual treatises, we neglect social, human, history at our peril.

Even for scholars equipped with the skills to study modern or imperial China, Daoist ritual is a daunting topic. We now know it's alive throughout China today, but it may still seem like a subject for historians. Indeed it is—but the topic shouldn't belong only to them, or only to academic discourse; it certainly doesn't for Chinese people, where it is an indispensable part of community life throughout the countryside. Since Daoist ritual is about communication, I set myself the challenge of trying to write accessibly, seeking to give an impression of the whole vibrancy of such local traditions.

So this book is about ordinary Daoists, not the great sage mystics of yore. It is largely about their ritual practices in modern times—because that is the only era for which we can glean much detail. And it is about the actual performance of ritual, not the ancient meaning of written texts. For some scholars, current observation is often an embarrassed footnote to textual research, a quick foray to see if we can still detect any traces of antiquity, hastily wiping our feet afterwards. But fieldwork in the present is the very basis of what we can learn. Without experiencing Daoist ritual in performance now, and all its details and variables, it is hard to imagine how it might have been once upon a time.

I interlace several types of material. In Parts One to Three I describe the lives and practices of Li Manshan and his group in an ethnography based mainly on my stays with them since 2011, and recreating modern history within living memory back to the 1930s and further. These chapters alternate with sections on the performance of individual rituals. Parts Four and Five are more technical, a kind of “Eat up your vegetables or you won't get any pudding,” addressing first ritual texts and then performance and sound. In Part Six I return to an account of the ever-changing current scene. And all the while, as I seek to evoke the continuing energy and relevance of the Daoists' performance, I reflect on the inspirational challenges of engaging in fieldwork. As you read, do consult the film—select scenes are indicated in the text by ☉.

Dramatis Personae

Li Qing (1926–99): Master Daoist.

Li Peisen (1910–85): Li Qing's uncle, also a crucial figure in the transmission.

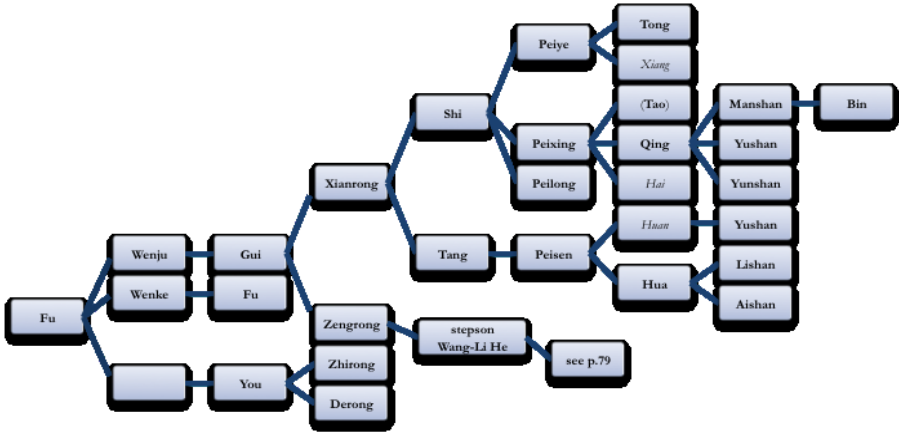
Li Manshan (b.1946): Li Qing's son, current leader of the ritual band.

Li Bin (b.1977): Li Manshan's son, another fine Daoist.

Golden Noble (b.1968) and **Wu Mei** (b.1970): disciples of Li Qing and core members of the current band.

Genealogy: Daoists in the Li lineage

From Li Fu, 16th generation in the lineage



The genealogy features only the Daoist ritual specialists in the lineage, except for Li Tao; *Li Xiang*, *Li Hai*, and *Li Huan* only “determined the date.”

Li Fu 福

Li Wenju, Li Wenke

Li Gui, Li Fu 富, Li You

Li Xianrong (1851–1920s), Li Zengrong (1854–ca. 1912), Li Derong, Li Zhirong

Li Shi (ca. 1872–1928/1935?); Li Tang (1879–1931?)

Wang-Li He (1893–1951) (stepson of Li Zengrong)

Li Peiye (1891–1980), Li Peixing (1899–1947), Li Peilong (1904–57)

Li Peisen (1910–85)

Li Tong (1909–92), (Li Xiang 1931–89)

(Li Tao 1918–93), Li Qing (1926–99), (Li Hai 1931–2010)

(Li Huan 1935–2014), Li Hua (b.1951)

Li Manshan (b.1946), Li Yushan (b.1954), Li Yunshan (b.1969)

Li Yushan (b.1953); Li Lishan (b.1974), Li Aishan (b.1976)

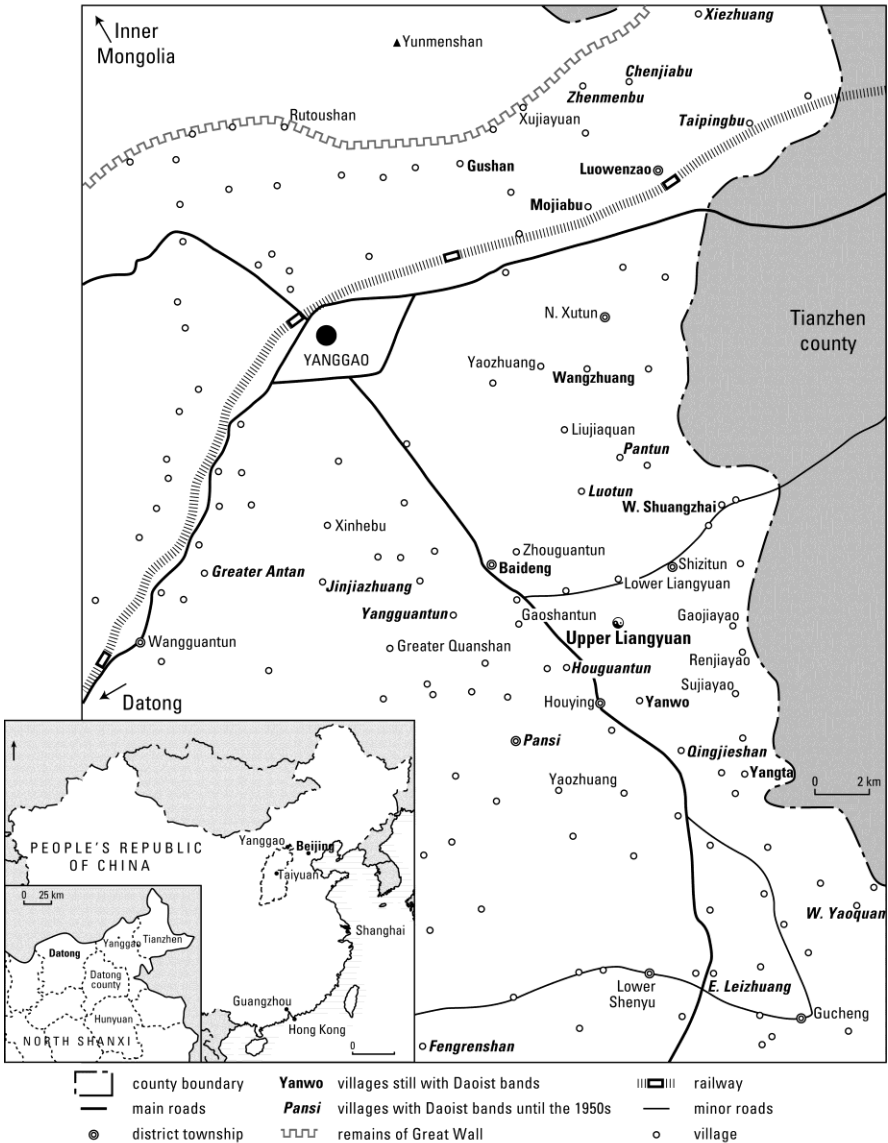
Li Bin (b.1977)

Chronology

italics denote wider national events

early 15th century	Li lineage migrates north from Xiaoyi county to Yanggao
late 18 th century	Li Fu becomes disciple of Jinjiazhuang Daoists
1900	<i>Boxer uprisings</i>
early 20 th century	Li Xianrong copies ritual manuals
1911	<i>Fall of Qing dynasty and end of imperial system</i>
1919	<i>May Fourth Movement</i>
1926	Li Qing born
1937	<i>Japanese invade; War of Resistance begins</i>
1942	Temples refurbished
1945	<i>Japanese defeated</i>
1946	Li Manshan born
1946–47	<i>Civil war between Communists and Nationalists</i>
1947	<i>Land reform.</i> Li Peisen moves to Yang Pagoda village
1948	Yanggao liberated
1949	<i>National Liberation</i>
1950–53	<i>Korean war, campaigns</i>
1953–58	<i>Co-ops, collectives, communes.</i> Mass migrations from Yanggao
1958	Li Qing recruited to North Shanxi Arts-Work Troupe
	<i>Great Leap Forward.</i> Food shortages worsen; exodus continues.
1962	Li Qing returns
1964	<i>Four Cleanups</i>
1966	<i>Cultural Revolution.</i> Li Qing burns ritual manuals and paintings
1976 September	<i>Mao dies; Gang of Four overthrown</i>
1977	Li Peisen returns, bringing back ritual manuals. Li Bin born
1979	<i>Commune system dismantled.</i> Li Qing rehabilitated
1980	Li Peisen and Li Qing begin recopying ritual manuals
1980–84	Funeral ritual gradually revives. Bicycles become common
1985	Li Peisen dies
1987	Temple fairs revive in Yanggao
1988	New generation of Daoists begins learning with Li Qing
1989	<i>student demonstrations crushed.</i> Li Qing copies genealogy
1990	Li band performs in Beijing
1991–92	My first visits
1993	Pop music first used for Yanggao funerals
1997	<i>Deng Xiaoping dies</i>
1999	Li Qing dies
2001, 2003	I visit again
2004	Ritual quorum reduced from seven to six. Mobile phones common
2005	Li band performs for Amsterdam China Festival
2007	Li Bin opens funeral shop in county-town
2008	Li band ratified for Intangible Cultural Heritage status
2009	Li band performs in Carnegie Hall
2011	I begin regular visits again. With Li Manshan to Hong Kong conference
2012–13	Tours of Italy, Germany, and Geneva, and events in Beijing
2015, 2016	I visit again

Yanggao county, northeast-central area



Upper Liangyuan Village (Li Manshan, 2012)



- ▲ Former temples: 1 Palace of the Three Pure Ones; 2 Temple of the God Palace;
3 Temple of the Perfect Warrior; 4 Guanyin temple; 5 Dizang temple; 6 Temple of
the Three Officers; 7 Temple to the Five Ways; 8 Temple of the God of Wealth.
- Houses of Daoists: 1 Li Peiye; 2 Li Peixing, Li Qing; 3 Li Peisen (later Li Yushan);
4 Kang Ren; 5, 6 Li Zengguang; 7 Li Manshan; 8 Huang Chanxi; 9 Li Xianrong, Li Shi.

Introduction: Setting the Scene

The poor and seemingly unremarkable county of Yanggao lies just below the border with Inner Mongolia, in the far north of Shanxi province. Like many areas of north China, it is said to suffer “nine droughts every ten years.” It is some three hundred kilometers west of Beijing and north of the provincial capital Taiyuan—both remote until road transport improved in the 21st century. Here there are none of the coal mines that dominate some areas of north Shanxi, notably the regional capital Datong just west. The whole Datong region may now be conveniently considered the northern border of Han Chinese culture, but even in late imperial times Shanxi province extended further north into what later became Inner Mongolia, which is still effectively part of the macro-region.

You can take the train that chugs westwards from Beijing to Datong, passing through the rugged mountains dividing Hebei and Shanxi provinces, and hop off after less than six hours at the little station of Yanggao. Only since the 1990s has the bustling county-town been modernized. Just north, remnants of the Great Wall still stand. In some villages crumbling ramparts (*bi*) give evidence of the Ming-dynasty garrisons guarding the wall, and many other village names reveal military ancestry. From the county-town the main road southeast, going nowhere in particular, crosses the Baideng river bridge and passes through the sleepy township of Baideng. Taking a left at Gaoshantun village, we turn up the little road leading east to Shizitun (“Lion Camp”) township, passing the villages of Sibaihu and Lower Liangyuan and then turning south again to reach Upper Liangyuan. The village is only twenty kilometers south of the county-town, but until the 1980s that meant a walk of several hours.

The Village of Upper Liangyuan

Like many villages, Upper Liangyuan has gone into further decline since the economic reforms of the 1980s. Between 1948 and 1990—a period when the overall population of China doubled—its registered population increased only modestly from 740 to 986. In times of adversity many Yanggao people traditionally fled north and east “outside the passes” (*kouwai*) to Inner Mongolia or the Zhangjiakou region, and in the 1950s this turned into a mass exodus.

Since the 1990s the village population has declined, not so much as a result of the birth-control policy, but due to another wave of migration—now prompted by ambition rather than starvation. Most able-bodied younger people have moved to the towns and cities to seek work in construction or factories,

though (unlike many villagers from poor areas of south China) they tend not to migrate very far. By 2011 the village had a nominal population of 1,300 with official residency there, but only six or seven hundred were still resident—still fewer than in 1948.

Those “left behind”—in more ways than one—engage in mostly unprofitable agriculture in the surrounding fields. The village is not a market center, and has never had a restaurant. At the west end of Li Manshan’s alleyway his neighbor has a fine orchard. In the general store on the corner at the eastern entrance of the alleyway is a large communal room where many villagers (both male and female) like to pass the time gambling.

From the 1980s, Yanggao men too poor to afford a local bride began to buy wives from even poorer southern provinces. Upper Liangyuan alone has over thirty wives bought from Sichuan. I meet several such women on my trips to nearby villages, finding them generally articulate and pleasant—and to my relief, they tend to be more bilingual in standard Chinese than most villagers.

My explorations of the village have been facilitated by the map that Li Manshan carefully drew for me in 2012 (p.8). It is hard for a European to imagine how exciting this map is. We can take for granted all the maps of English villages stretching way back, and photos over many decades, even paintings dating back centuries; by contrast, I suspect Li Manshan’s map is the only ever depiction of his home village. His careful indications of the former temples, and the houses of the Daoists, show how alive they remain in his heart.

At Home with Li Manshan

In 2004 Li Manshan and his wife moved to a new house (Fig. 27) in the northwestern area of Upper Liangyuan, where most new houses have been built—as if the village is slowly inching its way towards the county-town. Like all rural dwellings in north China, the house is single-storied; but it is much more bright and spacious than the old-style dwellings where villagers like Li Manshan grew up.

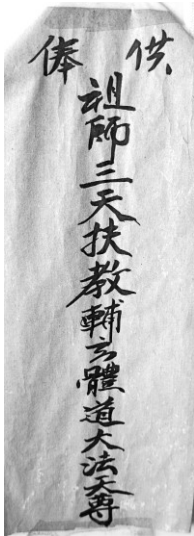
The house has three main rooms in a row, entered by way of a central door. The east room has a traditional *kang* brick-bed, heated by the oven in a little kitchen behind, while the west room, unusually, has two large Western-style beds. Li Manshan and his wife sleep in the east room, but when I come to stay he keeps me company in the west room so we can chat till late. An adjoining separate room to the east, with its own door, is used as a storeroom. The only windows (of glass, unlike the old paper-filled lattice windows) are those for the four south-facing rooms. The floors, laid with synthetic tiles, need sweeping many times a day.

The village has had running water since around 2001. There is a little sink with a cold-water tap in the kitchen, and they have a washing machine—both

amazing advances since the 1980s. But there is no bathroom. Li Manshan's first task upon rising is to fetch straw from the little storeroom east of the main gateway and to heat water in a large wok on the pump-action stove, filling thermoses for use over the day—we pour a modest amount into an enamel bowl to wash our faces. Without making a fuss over me, Li Manshan's wife Yao Xiulian¹ has worked out what kind of food I like, and prepares a range of delicious meals for the family. We eat meat sparingly; the basis is noodles and mostly home-grown vegetables—potatoes, beans, mushrooms, greens, as well as fresh eggs and succulent tomatoes. Actually, Li Manshan is on the road so much that his wife's cooking duties are usually modest.

The courtyard is carefully planted with vegetables and fruit trees. Outhouses to the west and south are used to store equipment; the latrine, as always, is in the southwest corner. The villages have absorbed the urban trend, with small dogs now more common than the ferocious large dogs of yesteryear. In 2011 Li Manshan's cute little doggie Congcong ("Clever") used to follow me avidly to the latrine and watch me peeing; when I reported back to him, he chortled, "He wants to get a look at your Foreign Tool (*yanghuo*)!"

Daoists in Yanggao



Evidence of Li Manshan's filial piety, propped up on the cabinet by the wall of the central room where one enters the house, is a framed photo of his late father Li Qing, beside a paper inscription bearing the formal title of the ancestral master of local Daoists, and a cloth pennant awarded to his band at the 1990 Beijing Festival of Religious Music. A little incense burner stands on the chest in front of the photo. The paper inscription—the only visible clue that Li Manshan may be a Daoist—reads thus:

We make offerings to:
Ancestral Master,
Heavenly Worthy of the Grand Ritual
who Supports the Teachings of the Three Heavens,
Assists the Numinous,
and Embodies the Way.

Fig. 3: Ancestral master tablet.

¹ I give the formal names of women in an egalitarian spirit that is quite misplaced. Married women's names are hardly heard.

This is the title of none other than the ancient founder of Orthodox Unity Daoism, Zhang Daoling, to whom Laozi manifested himself in 142CE. While commonly found in early texts of the Orthodox Unity branch, the title also appears in standard Complete Perfection temple liturgy like the daily services.² It confirms the Li household as part of a wider and ancient Daoist tradition. It is their ancestral god title (*zushi paiwei*), but it's a protective deity for all the Daoists in the area, copied through the generations; once they would make offerings before it at New Year. It won't escape the avid reader that the Li family shares its surname with Laozi, supposed ancient founder of Daoism, but that is just a happy coincidence.

Incidentally, in contrast with south China I have found no household altars in this area, and rather few in the north generally. We found some among household Complete Perfection Daoists in counties just south of Yanggao, but whereas in south China the term *tan* “altar” has become a synonym for a household Daoist group, in the north it is not used.

Before the Communist “Liberation” of 1949 some of the many temples throughout the north Chinese landscape, both urban and rural, were occupied by a tiny staff of Buddhist or Daoist priests. But even in late imperial times they were far fewer than the innumerable household priests, ordinary peasants who supplemented their meager gleanings from the land by performing rituals for the local populace. In adjacent counties we found a few clues to former temple-dwelling priests, but in Yanggao no-one has heard of any.

The Li family Daoists are far from alone. Even in their home county there are at least a dozen Daoist lineages on the plain around the county-town and in the districts of Shizitun, Houying, Baideng, and Pansi just southeast. Before the 1960s over twenty villages there had Daoist bands. Yanggao county extends a long way further south, but even then there were no Daoist groups there.

Since ancient times, elite Daoists travelled widely over China to famous temples and religious mountains, seeking the wisdom of other sages and propagating new revelations. One such master was Kou Qianzhi (365–448), who served the court of the Northern Wei dynasty at their capital Pingcheng (modern Datong), and who is often wheeled out by scholars as an instance of the illustrious ancestry of Daoist ritual in north Shanxi. Still today, temple Daoist priests commonly spend periods “cloud wandering” around the main urban and mountain temples.³

By contrast, household Daoists are active within a small radius. Even those who spent their youth as priests in temples before the 1949 Liberation did so only locally—like several boys in Upper Yinshan village in nearby Tianzhen

² *Xuanmen risong* 228–229, the *Zutianshi baogao*. In the Li family manuals this same text is found in the *Zutianshi shengbao* of the *Qian'gao*. For Orthodox Unity and Complete Perfection, see below.

³ Herrou 2011.

county, who learned their ritual skills in a temple just further east. Occasionally the Li band is invited to do rituals further afield—just east in Hebei or north in Inner Mongolia. Li Qing and the elders used to walk for a whole day to do Thanking the Earth rituals for patrons in Inner Mongolia, because around eighty percent of the Han Chinese population there had migrated from Yanggao, some of whom were quite affluent. But the main area of their work is defined both by walking distances and by the availability of Daoists elsewhere—north around the county-town, west in Datong county, and east in Tianzhen. So even now, with motor-bikes and cars, most of their ritual business is still in the districts of Shizitun, Houying, Baideng, and Pansi. They work quite often just further south in the districts of Gucheng and Lower Shenyu, and sometimes in Dongxiaocun district and in the west of Tianzhen county. But they rarely perform rituals in west Yanggao, or further north in North Xutun district or around the county-town where other groups of Daoists are available. And the poor villages still further south in the county appear neither to have Daoist groups nor to invite any; in dialect and culture this area is quite distinct.⁴

Throughout the vast countryside of China there are many tens of thousands of such hereditary families of Daoist ritual specialists. In north China I haven't heard of many households with a tradition of more than eight generations—in Luowenzao township east of Yanggao county-town, Li Yuan was the eighth generation of Daoists in his family, and in nearby counties like Tianzhen and Shuozhou there are also some Daoist households with similar ancestry. Such groups can help us augment our material and note differences and similarities. There is still much more to do—even in Yanggao, where my focus on the Li family hasn't allowed me to become very familiar with other groups.

Still, even without attempting to document all the Daoist groups active in the county, I have come to realize that the network of the Li family in Upper Liangyuan village extends not only to other disciples within the village, but to some nearby villages where Daoists became disciples of the Lis, or where other Daoist groups have formed from the extended family. So they too will form a subplot of my story.

Terminology

In Yanggao, as across a wide band of northwest China, people refer to household Daoists as *jinyang*, rather than the standard *daoshi*.⁵ Just west in Datong

⁴ Johnson 2009 on festivals, apart from rich material from south Shanxi, also contains a section on south Yanggao (69–91). Though his stress on salvage, and his whole focus, are different from my approach, his work suggests a substantially distinct ritual scene there.

⁵ Jones 2010: 13–14. In Yanggao and elsewhere there are a few *jushi* lay devotees who seek to lead their lives according to the precepts of ancient Daoist wisdom, but here the issue of “belief” is not relevant; and since those who only determine the date and decorate coffins are also known as *jinyang*, I use the term “Daoists” to describe *jinyang* who perform rituals.

county, people refer to them as *erzhai* “two dwellings.” Indeed, the binome *yinyang erzhai* refers to their dual officiation over *yin* and *yang* dwellings for the dead and the living, so the two terms are alternative abbreviations.

More prosaically, locals talk of “requesting the scriptures” (*qingjing*), and the Daoists they invite are known as “responding for household rituals” (*yingmenshi*). A group of Daoists was once known as a “hall” (*tang*), and named after its leader, such as “Li Qing *tang*,” but the common term was *ban* “band,” as in “scripture band” (*jingban*) or “band of *yinyang*.” They are Orthodox Unity (Zhengyi) Daoists of the Numinous Treasure (Lingbao) scriptural tradition.

A simplistic view still prevails that household traditions of Orthodox Unity Daoists are characteristic of south China, and that the only Daoists in the north are celibate temple-dwelling priests of the Complete Perfection (Quanzhen) branch in the major urban and mountain temples—a cliché perhaps dating only from 20th-century urban intellectuals, still parroted by scholars of both Daoism and music. Since that myth has been scotched, other scholars have claimed that north Shanxi is characterized by (household) Orthodox Unity Daoists, south Shanxi by (formerly temple-dwelling) Complete Perfection Daoists. We now find this is wrong too—several other counties in north Shanxi are dominated by household Complete Perfection Daoists, just as in south Shanxi.⁶

But here’s the good news: it doesn’t matter! To stress again, it used to be assumed that Complete Perfection Daoists referred to elite monastic ascetics in north China, whereas Orthodox Unity Daoists always indicated household-based folk priests mainly active in south China. But actually in north China there are countless household Daoists too, who may notionally belong to either branch; the rituals they both perform for the folk, and their manual collections, vary by region rather than by any supposed denomination. Moreover, there may have been few temple-dwelling priests of either branch in Yanggao even before the 1950s, but elsewhere in north China there were many Orthodox Unity temple priests too, and temple and domestic rituals might be part of the livelihood of temple priests of both branches.

The duties of a household Daoist

The Yanggao Daoists earn their livelihood both as a group by performing public rituals, and individually (like *fengshui* or *yinyang* masters elsewhere in China) by doing calendrical and geomantic consultations for auspicious timings and sitings. In the current language of reform-era China, they may be considered household entrepreneurs in the religious market.⁷ The services they offer are commonly and elegantly known as *yitiaolong* “the whole dragon”—the complete

⁶ Jones 2010: 17–18, 85, and *passim*, Chen 2015: ch. 2 and *passim*, and ch. 11 below. For the wider issue, see chapters in Liu and Goossaert 2013, notably Goossaert’s own, pp.19–43.

⁷ Cf. Chau 2006a.



Fig. 4: Advertisement above Li Bin's shop in town, 2011.

chain of procedures necessary to ensure correct handling of mortuary events, a one-stop shop: not just the rituals themselves but also decorating coffins and the soul hall, making and providing all the paper artifacts, liaising with cooks, and so on.

Daoists in Yanggao summarize their skills with the expression “blowing, beating, writing, reciting, looking” (*chuidaxieniankan*). The group outings of the *yinyang* for public rituals are the setting for “blowing, beating, and reciting”—listing them in ascending order of importance: *nian* is vocal liturgy (chanting scriptures, singing hymns and mantras, and so on), *da* is ritual percussion, and *chui* the *shengguan* wind ensemble music. These are addressed in turn in Part Five, and pervade the Ritual chapters that intersperse the narrative.

I describe their solo activities in Ritual 8, but let's outline them briefly here. “Looking” 看 refers to “looking for the date” (*kan rizi*) or “choosing the date” (*zeri*): choosing auspicious days for action, a task that senior Daoists perform often. It may be glossed as prophecy or divination, but I seek a more literal translation. *Kan* seems like a simple verb, but it's hard to find an elegant translation here. Its literal meaning is “looking”—Li Manshan does indeed “look,” both as he moves his thumb around the nodes of his left hand and while consulting his various little almanacs. It could even mean the other common sense of “reading”: “reading the date.” But I will plump for the sense in which Li Manshan responds when I try to help him lift a heavy sack, “*Wo kan!*” (“I will see to it!”)—thus “determining the date.”

Determining the date for the burial is part of the whole series of mortuary procedures performed by the chief Daoist. As Li Manshan observes, this is the most basic skill, without which none of the other tasks can be performed. People also consult him for weddings and common crises (should I rephrase that?). Individual “looking” and group “responding for household rituals” occupy roughly the same amount of time for him monthly, but the latter takes longer, while “looking” is quick and well paid.

“Writing” (*xiè*) 寫 refers to the many complex documents prepared for funerals. For the duration of the funeral the Daoists are allocated a peasant house called “scripture hall” (p.27 below). For the others it is mainly a space where they can relax, but for Li Manshan it is an office. He is constantly busy writing ritual documents, most of which will shortly go up in smoke. He writes them all from memory, like the placard, memorials, and talismans, as well as the matching couplets and the four *diaolian* characters that he has written in advance at home, to be pasted up at the soul hall.

Li Manshan and Li Bin also do grave sitings 點, using a *luopan* Daoist compass to determine the position and alignment of the grave. They decorate coffins 殮, usually on the third day after the death, taking up to seven hours in all. Before the funeral rituals they decorate the soul hall. They provide all the paper artifacts that will escort the deceased to heaven, like houses, carts, treasures, and so on; Li Bin and his wife Jin Hua make them in their funerary shop in town, and back in the village Li Manshan’s wife helps out too.

So by the time Li Manshan leads his band to Open Scriptures on the first morning of the funeral, he has already seen the family several times—even sometimes before the death, and even if he hasn’t already known them for many years. Every burial marks the successful completion of a complex chain of tasks for him; the landscape and calendar are permeated with his decisions. He is on call 24/7.

Of course, all this takes place within a society in constant flux, from late imperial times through the Republican period and Maoism to the current more liberal society. By comparison with the years of Maoism, people now have more decisions to make, choosing from a range of options. They may have rituals performed and seek consultations to determine the date and select auspicious sites, but they are not entirely fatalistic. They tend their fields, save money, gamble, watch TV, play video games online, eat out in restaurants, establish *guanxi* networks, set up businesses, deplore and exploit corruption. State education here may lag far behind the big cities, but it has become ever more important since the 1950s.

