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DAOIST PRIESTS AND IMPERIAL SACRIFICES IN LATE IMPERIAL CHINA: THE CASE OF THE IMPERIAL MUSIC OFFICE (SHENYUE GUAN), 1379–1743*

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Established in 1379, the Imperial Music Office (*Shenyue guan*) remained intact until 1743 when the Qianlong emperor (1711–1799, r. 1735–1795) ordered that it be reorganized into the *Shenyue suo*.¹ This institution provided ritual specialists, musicians, and dancers for, and thus had a close connection to, imperial sacrifices. During its 364 years, Daoist priests who had received certificates served as staff rather than gentry-officials. This group of Daoist priests not only controlled the Imperial Music Office, but also had a remarkable presence in the Court of Imperial Sacrifices (*Taichang si*) and even the Board of Rites (*Libu*). They played an indispensable part in imperial sacrifices,

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¹ Romeyn Taylor, “Official Religion in the Ming,” 877–879, gives a brief description of the institution. Joseph S. C. Lam, *State Sacrifices and Music in Ming China*, Joseph S. C. Lam, “Imperial Agency in Ming Music Culture,” and Nicolas Standaert, “Ritual Dances and Their Visual Representations in the Ming and the Qing,” each discusses the institution at some length. The former two provide an introduction to the *Shenyue guan* from the perspective of ritual music, while the latter focuses on ritual dance. Zhang Yongchun, “Zhongguo liyuehu yanjiu de jige wenti,” provides detailed information on *yuewusheng* (ritual musicians and dancers). But by far the most detailed study of the institution is provided by the Japanese scholar Shiga Takayoshi, who explores the history of the institution in the Ming and its connection to the Daoist religion in early Ming in particular. See Shiga Takayoshi, “Minsho no Shingakukan to dōkyō,” 32–45; “Mindai Shingakukan kō,” 15–25.

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either as Confucian masters of rites (*lisheng*) who directed sacrificial rites, or as musicians and dancers (*yuewusheng*) who played music and performed ritual dances. A study of this institution thus provides a rare opportunity to understand the interaction between Daoist priests and imperial sacrifices, which were informed by Confucianism.²

I “discovered” the Shenyue guan several years ago, when I attempted to reconstruct the history of the Confucian masters of rites, the most important ritual specialists for Confucian rituals, and of imperial sacrifices.³ In imperial sacrifices the Confucian masters of rites, called managers of ceremonies (*di-anyi*), ceremonial assistants (*zanlilang*), transmission assistants (*chuanzan*), or chief assistants (*tongzan*), were appointed from among the Daoist priests of the Shenyue guan from 1379 to 1743. It soon became obvious that an inquiry into the institution and its role in imperial sacrifices was in order. The current essay presents the primary findings of this investigation.

Based on information collected from the veritable records (*shilu*), imperial statutes, collected works, miscellanies, and local gazetteers, this article attempts to present a detailed examination of the Shenyue guan and its role in imperial sacrifices. It is divided into five parts: the first part describes the establishment of the institution and its officials and clerks; the second part explores the Daoist background of these officials and clerks; the third part discusses the roles the Daoist priests affiliated with the institution played in the performance of imperial sacrifices; the fourth part examines the discourse concerning the institution among scholar-officials from the mid-Ming to its reorganization in 1743 and the legacy of Daoist religion in the Shenyue guan after the 1743 reorganization; the last part highlights some implications of the study.

1. The Institutional Structure and Personnel of the Shenyue Guan

During the thirty-odd years of his emperorship, the Hongwu emperor (Zhu Yuanzhang, reigned 1368–1398) made a series of institutional innovations.⁴ As far as his religious policy is concerned, he tightened control over the Daoist and Buddhist religions and reformed imperial ledgers of sacrifices (*sidian*). The

² The “imperial sacrifices” here are confined to those rituals mandated according to imperial statutes, including for example, sacrifices to the Lord of Resplendent Heaven (Haotian shangdi) and the August Earth Spirit (Huangdi qi) as well as sacrifices to the Imperial Ancestors, the Great Earth and Great Grain Spirits, offerings honoring the walls and moats, the founding farmers, and Confucius.

³ For the Confucian Masters of Rites, see Li Fengmao, “Lisheng yu Daoshi,” 331–364; Liu Yonghua, “Yi li yi su,” 53–82; Liu Yonghua, “Ming-Qing shiqi de lisheng yu wangchao liyi,” 245–257; David Johnson, *Spectacle and Sacrifice*, 235–282.

⁴ See, for example, Wu Han, *Zhu Yuanzhang zhuan*, 139–211.

sub-canton (*lijia*) system was instituted in the countryside, and sacrifices to the gods of soil and grain (*sheji*) and orphan spirits (*li_a*) were to be performed even at the lowest semi-official level, the *li_b*.⁵ It was in this environment of innovation that the Hongwu emperor established the Shenyue guan.

Work began on the Shenyue guan in the second month of 1379, in Nanjing, which was then still the imperial capital. Construction was completed in the twelfth month of the same year. According to the *Veritable Records of Ming Taizu* (*Ming Taizu shilu*), “The emperor thought that Daoists devote attention to non-action and purity (*wu wei qingjing*), and so he appointed them to take part in sacrifices. It became necessary to erect a building to accommodate them. Thus he ordered the establishment of the Shenyue guan to the west of the Suburban Altar (*Jiaosi tan*).”⁶ This implies that Daoist priests participated in imperial sacrifices even before the establishment of the Shenyue guan. The *Sequel to the Evidential Study of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices* (*Taichang xukao*) indeed notes that, “In the seventh month of 1367, orders were given to recruit refined musicians (*yayuesheng*) from among young and elegant Daoist youths (*daotong*). In the early years of the Hongwu era, orders were issued to recruit musicians and dancers from among Daoist youths.”⁷ It is thus clear that Daoist religion began to influence imperial rituals before Zhu Yuanzhang established the Ming empire.

We can also learn from the above-cited passage that Zhu Yuanzhang allowed Daoist priests to participate in the sacrifices on the grounds that they “devote attention to non-action and purity.” The internal state of mind is crucial in the performance not only of Daoist rituals, but also of Confucian rituals,⁸ and Zhu Yuanzhang may have thought that Daoist priests by profession were the most appropriate to participate in the imperial sacrifices. In an imperial edict issued to the Shenyue guan at the time of its completion in 1379, Emperor Hongwu declared that he established the Shenyue guan “not to follow earlier emperors to seek the art of longevity,” but instead to “follow the way of the ancients to make seasonal offerings to deities above and below,” so that “the Supreme and imperial deities will be happy to bestow peace and harmony to those under Heaven and the population will be in good health.”⁹ In other words, the emperor proclaimed that the purpose of imperial ritual was to ensure the well-being of

⁵ See Qing Xitai, ed., *Zhongguo Daojiao shi*, vol. 3, 384–433; Hamashima Atsutoshi, “Zhu Yuanzhang zhengquan Chenghuang gaizhi kao”; Zheng Zhenman, “Ming-Qing Fujian lishi kao.”

⁶ *Ming Taizu shilu*, 122:4a; 128:1a.

⁷ *Taichang xukao*, 7:7b. This important book was compiled during the Chongzhen era (1628–1644).

⁸ Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simon, *Ritual and Its Consequences*.

⁹ Sun Chengze, *Chunming meng yu lu*, 14:28b–30a.

the populace rather than, as many emperors before him, the longevity of the emperor (i.e., the quest for elixirs of longevity). He thus framed his reliance on Daoist rites in terms of the obligations of a Confucian ruler.

The Shenyue guan was repaired in 1407 and 1413 during the Yongle era (1403–1424).¹⁰ When the imperial capital was moved to Beijing in 1420, three hundred imperial musicians and dancers followed the Yongle emperor and moved to the new capital.¹¹ In the same year, a new Shenyue guan was established in the western part of the Altar of Heaven (Tiantan) complex in Beijing.¹²

The Shenyue guan in Nanjing was located to the west of the Altar of Heaven. In the middle of the compound was the Hall of Exalted Perfection (Gaozhen dian). The Dongyue Hall was located to the north of this hall. The Daoist Yard (Daoyuan), housing stipendiary and expectant musicians and dancers, was located in the southern part of the compound.¹³ The Shenyue guan in Beijing was also located to the west of the Altar of Heaven. In the middle of the compound was a hall called Taihe Hall (renamed Ningxi dian in 1673¹⁴), where music was rehearsed the day before sacrifices.¹⁵ A temple dedicated to Xuandi (Xuantian shangdi) was erected behind the major hall. To the west of the hall were the offices of the superintendent (*tidian*) of the Shenyue guan.¹⁶

The Shenyue guan in Nanjing was kept intact after the capital shifted to Beijing. But sacrifices to Heaven were no longer performed there, since those could only be carried out in the capital. Instead, every year offerings were made to Confucius and it seems that the sacrifices continued to be performed by Daoist priests. This temple, or rather the superintendent of the temple, also supervised a group of ten temples within or around the city of Nanjing, including Longjiang Tianfei gong, Beiji Zhenwu miao, Du Chenghuang miao, all of which were Daoist institutions.¹⁷

When the Shenyue guan was established in the early Ming, the court appointed a superintendent at the official rank of 6b and two vice superintendents at the rank of 9b. The rank of these officials was raised to 6a and 8b in 1382.¹⁸

¹⁰ *Ming Taizong shilu*, 69:7b, 140:4b.

¹¹ *Taichang xukao*, 7:8a.

¹² The 1735 edition of the *Jifu tongzhi*, 51:27a, reads: “The Shenyue guan is located to the southwest of the Tiantan and was established in the eighteenth year of the Yongle era (1420).”

¹³ *Jinling xuan guan zhi*, 13:1a–b. See also the map of the Shenyue guan between vols. 12 and 13. The Gaozhen dian is not on the map. Instead, in the middle of compound there is a Xuandi dian. The Xuandi dian may have been renamed Gaozhen dian by the late Ming.

¹⁴ *Da Qing huidian shili*, 418:2a.

¹⁵ *Chunming meng yu lu*, 14:28a.

¹⁶ *Taichang xukao*, 7:7b.

¹⁷ *Jinling xuan guan zhi*, 13:1a–1b. This gazetteer was compiled in the Ming.

¹⁸ *Ming Taizu shilu*, 145:3b.

Similar positions were created in the Beijing Shenyue guan when the capital was moved to that city, while only a superintendent and one vice superintendent were appointed to serve in the Nanjing Shenyue guan from then on. In 1558, even the sole superintendent was dismissed.¹⁹ Thirty-six positions were created in the early Qing: a superintendent (6a), a left vice superintendent and a right vice superintendent (8b), five chief musicians (*xielulang*, 8a), twenty-six assistant musicians (*siyue*, 9b). All of these were Han Chinese. In 1699, the number of chief musicians was reduced to four and the number of assistant musicians to twenty-four but they increased to the original numbers in 1723. Three more assistant musicians were appointed in 1737.²⁰ There were thus a total of thirty-seven administrative positions, including a superintendent, two vice superintendents, five chief musicians, and twenty-nine assistant musicians, in the Shenyue guan in 1737, when it was reorganized.

The Shenyue guan controlled hundreds of musicians and dancers, whose number changed over time (see Table 1). By 1380, the number of musicians and dancers was six hundred. These were selected from among Daoist priests affiliated with the Shenyue guan who had a loud and clear voice and were well-versed in rituals and acted as managers of ceremonies, chief assistants, musicians (*zhangyue*), and masters (*jiaoshi*) of sacrifices. Of these six hundred musicians, three hundred moved to Beijing and the remaining three hundred stayed in Nanjing when the capital was moved to Beijing.²¹ Not long thereafter, the number of musicians in Beijing increased to five hundred and twenty-seven. Following the ritual reforms initiated by Emperor Jiajing (reigned 1522–1566), the number of imperial musicians and dancers affiliated with the Shenyue guan in Beijing increased, again, to two thousand two hundred in 1536. The number was reduced to one thousand one hundred and fifty-three by the end of the Jiajing era.²² It is worth noting that this number does not include the three hundred fifty musicians and dancers affiliated with the Nanjing Shenyue guan.²³ Five hundred seventy musicians and dancers were appointed in 1644,²⁴ the year the Manchus occupied Beijing, and the number was reduced to four hundred and eighty in 1743.²⁵ Not all ritual musicians and dancers lived and worked in the

¹⁹ *Ming huidian*, 2:13; 3:16.

²⁰ *Da Qing huidian shili*, 1058:1a–1b.

²¹ According to *Jinling xuan guan zhi*, however, there were two hundred seventy stipendiary (*shiliang*) musicians and dancers and two hundred seventy expectant (*houque*) Daoist youths at the Nanjing Shenyue guan. *Jinling xuan guan zhi*, 13/1b.

²² *Taichang xukao*, 7:8a–8b.

²³ With regard to the Nanjing Shenyue guan, *Ming huidian*, 226:1112, mentions “every year there were three hundred fifty musicians and dancers at this temple.”

²⁴ *Da Qing huidian shili*, 528:1a.

²⁵ *Da Qing huidian shili*, 1059:2a–2b.

Shenyue guan itself, however. Many including them were actually appointed to take care of several key court ritual sites: Altars of Heaven, Earth, Morning Sun, Evening Moon, Soil and Grain, and so forth.²⁶

The Shenyue guan was supervised by the Court of Imperial Sacrifices and was thus closely connected to the Board of Rites. This becomes obvious when we look carefully at career patterns or “promotion paths.” According to the principles of appointment recorded in the *Sequel to the Evidential Study of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices*, there were five promotion paths for the certified Daoist priests affiliated with the Shenyue guan:

Table 1. The Number of Musicians and Dancers Affiliated with the Shenyue Guan, 1379–1743 (Nanjing Shenyue Guan included)

Dynasties	Reigns	Years	Changes	Sum	
Ming	Hongwu	1368		Unclear	
		1380		600	
	Yongle	1420		600[1]	
		after 1420		Over 827[2]	
	Jiajing	1526	+215		
		1531	+229		
		1536	+1229	Over 2550[3]	
		1546	-441		
1550		-406			
Qing	Longqing	1551	-200	Over 1503[4]	
		after 1569		1503[5]	
	Shunzhi	1651		570	
	Qianlong	1742			570[6]

Compiled with corrections based on Standaert, “Ritual Dances and Their Visual Representations in the Ming and the Qing,” 82, Table 1.

Notes: [1]–[5] Standaert does not include the three hundred musicians and dancers at the Nanjing Shenyue guan.

[6] The number given by Standaert is four hundred and eighty, which does not include ninety so-called “managing musicians and dancers” (*zhishi yuewusheng*).

- (1) Certified Daoist priest → musician/dancer with cap and sash (*guandai*) → assistant musician → chief musician → assistant minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices;
- (2) Certified Daoist priest → musician/dancer cum chief assistant (*tongzan yuewusheng*) → ceremonial assistant → assistant minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices;

²⁶ *Ming huidian*, 201:1013.

- (3) Certified Daoist priest→expectant musician/dancer→assistant superintendent→superintendent of the Shenyue guan;
- (4) Certified Daoist priest→expectant musician/dancer→assistant sacrificer of altars (*ge tan sicheng*) →sacrificer of altars (*ge tan fengsi*);
- (5) Certified Daoist priest→expectant musician/dancer→assistant sacrificer of mausoleums (*ge ling sicheng*) →sacrificer of altars (*ge ling fengsi*).

According to principles of appointment mentioned above, the certified Daoist priests of the Shenyue guan were first promoted to posts as musicians or dancers, who would be further promoted to chief musicians, ceremonial assistants, assistant superintendents, or assistant sacrificers, and, from these positions, advance to positions as assistant ministers of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, the superintendents of the Shenyue guan, or the sacrificers at imperial altars and mausoleums. It is worth noting that at least two types of promotion pathway can be detected here: musician/dancer and ritual specialist. Thus assistant musicians and chief musicians belong to the first type, while chief assistant (*tongzan yuewusheng*) belongs to the second. In addition, according to the *Ming huidian*, there were five chief musicians, thirty-one chief assistants, thirty-four assistant musicians, fifteen sacrificers, and sixteen assistant sacrificers among officials in the Court of Imperial Sacrifices.²⁷ It seems that they did not belong to the Shenyue guan, but it is not impossible that they were appointed from among musicians and dancers of the institution.

The career for some lucky Daoist priests did not stop there, however. During the Ming, some of them were appointed to the position of the minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices or even minister of the Board of Rites. Thus the *Lidai zhiguan biao*, a book compiled during the Qianlong era, comments that,

The Dazongbo [the minister of the Board of Rites] was appointed to serve deities during the three ancient dynasties [of Xia, Shang, and Zhou], and his obligations were important. . . . During the Ming the managers of Suburban Altars were appointed from among Daoist priests. Positions such as musician officials of the Shenyue guan and sacrificers and assistant sacrificers were all selected by this principle. Worse still, [Daoist priests such as] Shao Shi'en were promoted to serve as the minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, Tao Qinan

²⁷ *Taichang xukao*, 7:15b–16a.

and Gong Kepei, held office as assistant ministers at the Court of Imperial Sacrifices. More were appointed to be assistant ministers [of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices] and Erudites (*boshi*).²⁸

Indeed, there were many such cases. For example, Wu Daoliang (1406–1485) became a musician/dancer during the Yongle era and was appointed as an assistant musician during the Zhengtong era (1436–1449). At the age of 75, he was allowed to retire with the title of vice minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices.²⁹ His career pattern belongs to the first path mentioned above. Cui Zhirui (?–1514) was a Daoist priest before he became a musician/dancer. He was appointed as the chief assistant of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices in 1472 and promoted to assistant minister in 1481. He became a vice minister a year later. He was appointed as minister of this institution in 1495 and promoted further to the minister of the Board of Rites in 1504.³⁰ His career pattern is similar to the second path. According to the *Zhongguo Daojiao shi*, seven Daoist priests were appointed as high officials of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices and the Board of Rites in the early Ming. The number increased to sixteen between 1465 and 1505.³¹ More were appointed as high officials of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices during the Jiajing era (1522–1566), thanks to the reigning emperor's increasing interest in Daoist religion, to the extent that contemporaries remarked that “the Court of Imperial Sacrifices belongs to the Daoist priests of the Shenyue guan.”³² From its establishment to the fall of the Ming, fifteen of one hundred twenty ministers of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices were appointed from among the musicians and dancers of the Shenyue guan.³³ It was thus through these paths that musicians and dancers of the Shenyue guan controlled the Court of Imperial Sacrifices and increasingly penetrated to the Board of Rites and played an important role in sacrificial ceremonies of the Ming dynasty.

2. The Daoist Background of the Staff of the Shenyue Guan

Scholar-officials of the Ming knew very well that Daoist priests served as officials and clerks at the Shenyue guan. Mid-Ming literatus Tian Yiheng (1524–1574?) wrote, “Those who provide assistance in the imperial sacrifices of our dynasty are Daoist priests from the Court of Imperial Sacrifices; those who

²⁸ *Qinding lidai zhiguan biao*, 28:22a–22b.

²⁹ *Ming Xianzong shilu*, 271:3b.

³⁰ *Ming Wuzong shilu*, 113:5b.

³¹ Qing Xitai, ed., *Zhongguo Daojiao shi*, Vol. 3, 526–529.

³² He Liangjun, *Siyoushai congshuo*, 100.

³³ Shiga Takayoshi, “Mindai Shingakukan kō,” 23.

play music are Daoist priests from the Shenyue guan.”³⁴ Shang Lu (1414–1486), a mid-Ming high official, also remarked, “all of the managers and musicians and dancers for the suburban sacrifices are appointed from among the Daoist priests at the Shenyue guan.”³⁵ Both clearly state that the musicians and dancers who performed at the imperial sacrifices were appointed from among the Daoist priests of the Shenyue guan. This was not the case in the early Ming, when musicians and dancers were recruited from different groups of candidates.

I have already mentioned that Daoist youths were recruited as musicians in the seventh month of 1367. In the tenth month of the same year, Zhu Yuanzhang ordered that while musicians continued to be recruited from among Daoist youth, dancers should be recruited from among lay commoners.³⁶ The *Sequel to the Evidential Study of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices* provides more details:

In the early years of the Hongwu era, the emperor gave orders to select musicians and dancers from among Daoist youth. Later on, considering the ancient regulations that civil and military musicians and dancers should be chosen from among the offspring of high officials, it was ordered that Daoist youth should be employed as musicians, while the students of educational officials (*jiaoguan xuesheng*) should be employed as civil dancers and military dancers should be chosen from among the retainers (*sheren*) used by military officials. In the twelfth year [of the Hongwu era], it was decreed that Daoist priests should be allowed to recruit disciples, while other monasteries and temples should not. In the thirteenth year [of the Hongwu era], it was again decreed that children of dukes and marquises as well as military officials should study to be musicians and dancers. It was also ordered that of those musicians and dancers selected by the Board of Rites, those who did wrong or fell sick should be dismissed to be civilians.³⁷

It can be learned from this passage that, originally civil dancers were supposed to be selected from among children of civil officials or government students, while military dancers were supposed to be children of military officials or

³⁴ Tian Yiheng, *Liu qing rizha*, 519. A list of clothing for ritual musicians and dancers at Round Altar and other key court ritual sites specifies that this was attire of Daoist priests. See *Ming huidian*, 201:1013.

³⁵ *Ming Xianzong shilu*, 156:4b.

³⁶ *Ming Taizu shilu*, 26:7a.

³⁷ *Taichang xukao*, 7:7b–8a. The “early years of the Hongwu era” is a mistake, because as I have pointed out, the regulation was promulgated in 1367.

the latter's retainers. Second, this order must have not been widely followed, since Emperor Hongwu later issued several decrees to encourage children of officials and commoners alike to study music and ritual dance. Finally, Emperor Hongwu allowed Daoist priests of the Shenyue guan to recruit disciples after it was established, probably in order to provide a stable and reliable source for musicians and dancers. It appears that the regulations of the Hongwu emperor were not successfully implemented because as a Qing scholar pointed out, musicians and dancers were selected from among Daoist priests from the Yongle era onward.³⁸ This is why sources from the mid-Ming on did not even bother to make any distinction between musicians and dancers. This continued to be the case in the early Qing. Thus the *Da Qing huidian shili* states that,

It was originally decided that the Shenyue guan of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices should employ one hundred eighty musicians, one hundred fifty civil dancers, one hundred fifty military dancers, and ninety managing musicians and dancers. These should be selected from among Daoist youths of the households of the superintendents and assistant superintendents of the temple, chief musicians, chief assistants, assistant musicians, sacrificers, assistant sacrificers, and so forth as well as those of executive musicians and dancers.³⁹

It remained so until the Shenyue guan was reorganized in 1743.

The entrustment of imperial rituals to Daoist priests was nothing new. For example, in the Northern Song, the Palace of Revering the Numinous (Jingling gong) was established by Emperor Zhenzong (reigned 998–1022) to worship the dynasty's "Saintly Ancestor" (Shengzu), Zhao Xuanlang. The Daoist priests housed in the temple performed rituals for the court, funerary rites, and the rite of praying for rain for example.⁴⁰ What differentiated the Shenyue guan from the Jingling gong was the fact that in the former, Daoist priests performed imperial rituals (such as suburban rituals), whereas in the latter, they only performed Daoist rituals. How and why was it that the Hongwu emperor decided to entrust the empire's most important rituals to Daoist priests rather than scholar-officials?

The establishment of the Shenyue guan in the early Ming, like other ritual and institutional innovations, may well have been connected to the Hongwu

³⁸ Zhang Anmao, *Pangong liyue quanshu*, 16:28b, claims: "It started to become an established practice in the Yongle era that [the positions of] musicians and dancers of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices were assumed by Daoist priests."

³⁹ *Da Qing huidian shili*, 1059:1a.

⁴⁰ Azuma Fuji, "Sōdai no Keirekyū ni tsuite-Dōkyō saishi to Jukyō saishi no kōsa," 283–333.

emperor's efforts at both consolidating his political legitimacy and expanding his cultural capital by strengthening the new empire's religious institutions. The appointment of Daoist priests to perform imperial sacrifices may have also stemmed from his profound distrust of the scholar-officials who dominated the central bureaucracy. But why were Daoist priests rather than ritual specialists from other religious traditions entrusted to perform the crucial imperial sacrificial rites?

According to a recent study by Mark R. E. Meulenbeld, Daoist religion played an important role during Emperor Hongwu's many reorganizations of the Chinese empire. He had already contacted the forty-second Celestial Master Zhang Zhengchang (?–1377) in 1360. After that, elite Daoist priests, including Zheng Zhengchang and Zhou Xuanzhen, were often consulted especially with regard to the control of baleful spirits. With the help of Daoist priests, demonic forces were placed under the emperor's spiritual bureaucracy by transforming them into martial gods, "recurring sets of marshals, generals, and celestial lords that could be deployed for exorcist ventures."⁴¹ Frequent and close contact with Daoist priests must have thus familiarized the emperor not only with their rituals, but also with their ritual music, dance, and thought, and this in turn may well have inspired him to establish the Shenyue guan and to entrust imperial sacrifices to Daoist priests.

Daoist priests affiliated with the Shenyue guan were allowed to recruit disciples only when there were vacancies. Thus the Board of Rites reported in 1428 that "recently thousands of Buddhist monks and Daoist priests brought youths to the capital to ask for certificates, among them, the number of those from the [Nanjing?] Shenyue guan, the Taihe shan, and the Wutai shan is largest." Emperor Xuande (reigned 1426–1435) replied that "according to ancestral regulation, there is a limit to the amount of certificates granted to Buddhist monks and Daoist priests. Now that the Shenyue guan, Taihe shan, and Wutai shan have vacancies, it is appropriate to examine and grant [certificates] to those who have not broken regulations."⁴² Twenty-eight years later, in 1456, the Board of Rites, quoting a memorial from the Nanjing Shenyue guan, claimed that "now that there are not sufficient musicians and dancers in sacrifices, firstly, [please allow us to] recruit thirty-eight uncorrupt and healthy Daoist priests from the Nanjing Central Daoist Registry (Daolu si) to occupy the vacancies and order those who provide service in sacrifices to recruit musicians and dancers." This request was reportedly approved by the emperor.⁴³ Six hundred and fifty Dao-

⁴¹ Mark R. E. Meulenbeld, "Civilized Demons," 213.

⁴² *Ming Xuanzong shilu*, 44:3b–4a.

⁴³ *Ming Yingzong shilu*, 267:2a.

ist priests from the Shenyue guan in Beijing and Nanjing received certificates in 1485.⁴⁴ Again, the emperor gave orders that certificates be granted to one hundred Daoist priests of the Shenyue guan in 1508.⁴⁵

Who were these Daoist priests of the Shenyue guan? Which Daoist school did they belong to? The limitations of our sources make it difficult to answer these questions. Indeed, the Japanese scholar Shiga Takayoshi mentions the religious background of only one priest, Zhou Xuanzhen.⁴⁶ From the scanty biographies of the Daoist priests associated with the Shenyue guan, however, we can get a clearer idea of the religious background of these Daoist priests.

First, let us consider the case of Zhou Xuanzhen, who was the first superintendent of the Shenyue guan. According to a biography written by the famous early Ming official Song Lian (1310–1381), Zhou Xuanzhen, styled Xuanchu, was a native of Jiahe (Jiaying prefecture) and later moved to Suzhou. At the age of fourteen, Xuanzhen visited the Zixu guan of Jiahe and became a disciple of the Daoist priest Li Gongrui. Gongrui was a disciple of Du the Perfect (Du zhenren), who was actually Du Daojian, a famous Daoist priest, affiliated perhaps with the Maoshan school, in the Jin-Yuan period. Gongrui taught Xuanzhen the Art of Impeaching and Summoning Ghosts and Gods (*hezhaoguishen zhishu*). The biography notes that Xuanzhen was not satisfied and studied the Great Art of the Numinous Treasure (*lingbao dafa*) with a Daoist priest called Cao Guisun. Finally, he also received instruction on how to summon clouds and control thunder bolts (*huyun yilei*) from a Daoist priest called Bu Zonghao, who turned out to be a third-generation disciple of the famous Shenxiao Daoist priest Mo Yueding in the Yuan.⁴⁷ This biography makes it clear that by receiving instructions on several of the most popular contemporary exorcist arts, Xuanzhen had close connections to several Daoist schools of South China, especially the Maoshan school.

The backgrounds of other Daoist priests are not so clear. It is recorded that Leng Qian (ca. 1310–ca. 1371), a distinguished musician in the early Ming, had been a Daoist priest or hermit at Wushan before he was appointed as the first chief musician of the Shenyue guan by the Hongwu emperor.⁴⁸ From this record it is not easy to determine his background, though it is not unlikely that

⁴⁴ *Ming Xianzong shilu*, 269:4a.

⁴⁵ *Ming Wuzong shilu*, 34:5b.

⁴⁶ Shiga Takayoshi, “Minsho no Shingakukan to dōkyō,” 35–36.

⁴⁷ Chen Yuan, ed., *Daojia jinshi lue*, 1223; Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons,” 190–191. For the life of Du Daojian, see Wang Ao, *Gusu zhi*, *Wenyuan ge*, 58:42a; Chen Yuan, ed., *Daojia jinshi lue*, 903–905. For Mo Yueding, see Qing Xitai, ed., *Zhongguo Daojiao shi*, vol. 3, 332–337; Meulenbeld, “Civilized Demons,” 191.

⁴⁸ Zhang Tingyu et al., *Mingshi*, 61:1500.

he was affiliated with one of the Daoist schools such as Maoshan in South China. Again, it is recorded that Yan Shiyin, a native of Jinxi, Jiangxi, had been a Daoist priest in his native place before he became a chief ritual assistant of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices in the early Ming.⁴⁹ Since Jinxi is close to Longhu shan,⁵⁰ it is possible that he was affiliated with the Zhengyi school.

We know more about the backgrounds of four other Daoist priests affiliated with the Shenyue guan or the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, Qiu Xuanqing, Jiang Leigu, Fu Tongxu, and Yuan Zhi'an. Qiu Xuanqing, a minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices in the early Ming, had been a Daoist priest at Wudang shan and studied the learning of Quanzhen (*quanzhen zhi xue*) there.⁵¹ Jiang Leigu, a native of Guixi, Jiangxi, and a vice superintendent of the Shenyue guan in the early Ming, was a Daoist priest at Longhu shan before his appointment and he returned to Longhu shan later in his life.⁵² Fu Tongxu (literary name Ruolin, 1322–1399), a superintendent of the Shenyue guan, was a native of Jinxi and had been a Daoist priest at Longhu shan.⁵³ Yuan Zhi'an, a superintendent of the Shenyue guan in the Yongle era, had a close connection to Zhang Yuchu, the forty-third Heavenly Master and may also have been affiliated with the Zhengyi school.⁵⁴ The fact that all of these Daoist priests except Qiu Xuanqing were closely connected to Daoist schools of South China should not surprise us, since the Shenyue guan was established in Nanjing and the Hongwu emperor was more suspicious of the Daoist schools of North China than those of South China.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Yang Shiqi, *Dongli ji*, 39:27b.

⁵⁰ Longhu shan, or Mount of the Dragon and Tiger, is located in eastern Jiangxi. The Zhang family emerged in this area as the heirs of Zhang Daoling, the legendary founder of the Way of the Celestial Masters (Tianshi dao), between the eighth and ninth centuries. They were granted official titles since the tenth century and were charged with the responsibility of controlling Daoist priests in China in general and those in South China in particular in the late imperial period. See Vincent Goossaert, "Longhu shan," in Fabrizio Pregadio, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 702–704.

⁵¹ *Ming Taizu shilu*, 225:2b; Ren Ziyuan, *Taiyue Taihe shan zhi*, 7:445–447; Pierre-Henry de Bruyn, "Daoism in the Ming (1368–1644)," 595. Xuanqing was a native of Shaanxi.

⁵² Lou Jinyuan, *Longhu shan zhi*, 7:21a–b.

⁵³ Zhang Yuchu, *Xianquan ji*, 3:24b–28a; Zhang Jiyou, *Tianshi dao shilue*, 147.

⁵⁴ In his *Xianquan ji*, Zhang Yuchu mentions Yuan Zhi'an at least two times. In a preface written for a collection of poems, he mentions that he traveled with the entourage (*sicong*) of Zhi'an in the fall of 1396. In a poem he wrote to bid farewell to Zhi'an, he implies that Zhi'an had studied in Longhu shan. See *Xianquan ji*, 2:36b, 2:38a. Besides the four persons mentioned here, Zhang Daoxian may also have had a background in southern Daoist schools. Daoxian, recruited to be a musician or dancer at the Shenyue guan in 1395, was ordained at the Xuanmiao guan, probably in Hubei, and later became a superintendent at Taihe shan. Ren Ziyuan, *Taiyue Taihe shan zhi*, 7:462–463.

⁵⁵ Here I am confining myself to the discussion of the relationship between the Zhengyi school and the Shenyue guan. This is not to say that the school did not have a strong presence in other religious establishments (the Daolu si for example) and major ritual events at court. However, that issue is beyond the scope of this article.

The situation changed to some degree after the capital was moved to Beijing. Among fourteen musicians and dancers who later became ministers of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices in the mid-Ming, altogether ten were natives of Shuntian prefecture (Li Xi'an, Sun Guang'an, Zhu Fuming, Gu Hong, Cui Zhirui, Jin Yunren, Sang Youlan, Xu Kecheng, Cao Shouqing, and Ma Liangde).⁵⁶ This is partly because of the relocation of the capital. A more important reason is that musicians and dancers were selected from all over China in the early Ming at least theoretically, while after 1485 they were recruited from Beijing and its environs.⁵⁷ As a result, a high percentage of musicians and dancers came from North China, especially Shuntian prefecture. Although we know their native places, lack of direct evidence makes it much more difficult to locate the religious background of these musicians and dancers. We know, of course, that the Quanzhen school exerted a considerable influence upon Daoist religion in North China during the Yuan and it continued to play an indispensable role in the Ming. But it is also clear that the Ming court did not favor this school, probably due to its close connection to the Yuan court. Even the Baiyun guan, the most important Quanzhen monastery in the capital, was actually controlled by the Zhengyi school in the Ming.⁵⁸ For the present we can only tentatively suggest that, given the presence of a specific Daoist lineage in the Shenyue guan (see below), it might have been very difficult for a Daoist school such as Quanzhen to penetrate the institution and the lineage might have maintained its dominance by recruiting lay people instead of Daoist priests from other schools. In contrast, there is more reason to argue that, considering the location of the institution, Daoists from the Zhengyi school maintained a strong presence at the Shenyue guan of Nanjing.

3. The Shenyue Guan and Imperial Sacrifices

We know that the Shenyue guan began to provide ritual services for the imperial sacrifices in the Hongwu era. In a memorial presented in 1382, Liu Zhongzhi, the minister of the Board of Rites, pointed out that “the Shenyue guan is in charge of providing music and dance for the grand sacrifices to Heaven, Earth, deities, ancestors, and the gods of soil and grain.”⁵⁹ Similarly, Wang Zhi (1379–1462), a high official in the early Ming, also stated that in order to emphasize the importance of imperial sacrifices, the court recruited Daoist

⁵⁶ This statistic is based on information on the ministers of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices given in *Taichang xukao*, 7:51b–59a.

⁵⁷ *Ming Xianzong shilu*, 271:3b.

⁵⁸ Wang Zhizhong, *Ming-Qing Quanzhen jiao lungao*, 67.

⁵⁹ *Ming Taizu shilu*, 145:3a.

priests into the Shen Yue guan to play music and provide ritual assistance on the grounds that “those who study the arts of Laozi (*xue Laozi fa zhe*) have the desirable qualities of tranquility and purity.”⁶⁰

The role the Shen Yue guan played in imperial sacrifices can be seen clearly from a list of those who provided ritual assistance. According to the *Ming huidian*, almost all imperial sacrifices, from sacrifices to altars of Heaven, Earth, the sun, the moon, and stars to those to imperial ancestors, the gods of the soil and grain, founding farmers, and Confucius, were performed with the assistance of chief musicians and chief assistants, and the latter were appointed from among the Shen Yue guan musicians and dancers almost without exception. Thus in the grand sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, four hundred and eight officials and clerks provided assistance: a chief musician in charge of raising the *hui* banner (*ju hui xielulang*), seventy-two musicians, sixty-four civil dancers, two directing [civil] dancers, sixty-four military dancers, two directing [military] dancers, one hundred twenty-three ritual managers (among them were a *dianyi*, five transmission assistants, two general assistants [*tongzan*]), sixty-eight clerks in charge of burning incense, and twelve clerks in charge of lighting candles. In sacrifices to the gods of the soil and grain, altogether ninety-eight officials and clerks provided assistance: two chief musicians in charge of raising the *hui* banner, seventy-two musicians and dancers, twelve ritual managers, and ten clerks in charge of lighting candles.⁶¹ According to the roles they played in sacrifices, these officials and clerks can be divided into three categories: musicians playing music, civil and military dancers performing ritual dance, and the so-called ritual managers, including *dianyi*, transmission assistants, and general assistants who guided those who offered sacrifices, including the emperor or whoever he designated to do the job, through the procedures of the sacrifices. The musicians and dancers were clerks of the Shen Yue guan, while the other officials such as the chief musicians were attached to the Court of Imperial Sacrifices rather than the Shen Yue guan. Still, as we have seen even these officials were appointed to their positions at the Court of Imperial Sacrifices from positions among the musicians and dancers at the Shen Yue guan.

In order to deepen our discussion of the role of the Shen Yue guan in imperial sacrifices, it is also necessary to examine the regulations regarding grand sacrifices instituted in 1377. As we know, sacrifices to Heaven had been the most important imperial ritual since the early ages of Chinese history. Theo-

⁶⁰ Wang Zhi, *Yi'an wenji*, 6:38a–38b.

⁶¹ *Ming huidian*, 226:1110–1112. The number of officials and clerks providing assistance in grand sacrifices mentioned here is that before 1530, while the one in the sacrifices to the gods of the soil and grain is that after 1530.

retically speaking, it was performed at the Altar of Heaven on the first *xin* date (*shangxinri*) of the first month every year by the emperor personally. According to the regulations of 1377, a series of rites, including rites of seclusion (*zhajie*), transmission of imperial orders (*chuanzhi*), and inspection of sacrificial animals (*shengsheng*), were performed before the date when sacrifices were offered. The rites performed on the day of sacrifices were even more important. Altogether ten rites were performed on that day: (1) welcoming the spirits (*qingshen*), (2) presenting silk (*dianbo*), (3) proffering the flesh (*jinzu*), (4) initial oblation (*chuxian*), (5) middle oblation (*yaxian*), (6) final oblation (*zhongxian*), (7) granting felicitous liquor and meat (*ci fuzu*), (8) removing the viands (*chezhuan*), (9) sending off the spirits (*songshen*), and (10) watching the burning of offerings (*wangliao*).

(1–3). In the rite of welcoming the spirits, the managers of the ceremonies instructed the musicians and dancers, supervising officials, and those who were to participate in the ritual to take their places, while the conductor (*daoyin guan*) directed the emperor to take his place. Following the guidance of the inner assistant (*neizan*) and the manager of ceremonies, offerings were burned, the hair and blood of sacrificial animals buried, spirits welcomed, and music performed. When all these things were done, the emperor ascended to the highest terrace of the altar and presented jade and silk to the tablets of Heaven, Earth, and Renzu, Emperor Hongwu's own father, under the guidance of the manager of ceremonies and the inner assistant. Again, the rite of proffering the flesh was performed before the tablets of Heaven and Earth by the emperor under the guidance of the inner assistant.

(4–6). After the rite of proffering the flesh, the rites of initial, middle, and final oblations were performed. In this set of oblation rites, the emperor ascended to the highest terrace and presented the *jue* to the altars of the Heaven, Earth, and Renzu under the guidance of the manager of ceremonies and the inner assistant. Music and ritual dance were performed. During the initial oblation, a sacrificial essay (*zhu*) was read aloud by the prayer reciter (*du zhu guan*). This was the central part of the ritual.

(7–10). Unlike other rites, the rite of granting felicitous liquor and meat was performed under the guidance of the minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices as well as the inner assistant. In the following three rites, viands were removed, the spirits sent off, and the sacrificial essay, silk, and viands burned. Music was performed during these rites. They were again performed under the guidance of the manager of ceremonies and the inner assistant.⁶²

⁶² *Ming huidian*, 81/461–464. Cf. Lam, *State Sacrifices and Music in Ming China*, 23–28; Angela Zito, *Of Body and Brush*, 185–206.

Throughout the ritual, there were clear divisions of labor between the manager of ceremonies, inner assistant, musicians, and dancers. The manager of ceremonies and inner assistant as well as the prayer reciter belong to a group of ritual specialists generally called Confucian masters of rites. They were in charge of guiding the ritual. All elements in the ritual including the communication between the emperor and spirits proceeded by following the ritual framework they provided. Under their guidance, musicians played music in each phase of the ritual. Under their guidance the dancers performed ritual dances in the rites of three oblations. The suburban sacrifices, therefore, were almost entirely performed under the guidance of the ritual specialists from the Shenyue guan.

In addition to directing rituals, playing music, and performing ritual dance, the clerks of the Shenyue guan were often appointed to offer sacrifices to gods all over the empire. A Daoist priest from the Shenyue guan, called Jie Xingchu, was appointed to offer sacrifices to the mountains and rivers within the boundaries of Yunnan in as early as 1388.⁶³ Zhou Yuanchu, i.e., Zhou Xuanzhen, the first superintendent of the Shenyue guan, was appointed to offer sacrifices to Zhenwu in 1402.⁶⁴ The sacrifices at the tombs of emperors of preceding dynasties were offered by musicians and dancers from the Shenyue guan in 1432, 1442, 1448, 1510, and 1543.⁶⁵ Musicians and dancers were also appointed to offer sacrifices to mountains, hills, seas, and rivers (*yue zhen hai du*) in 1437 and 1561, in order in the first case to “pray for harvest” and “celebrate the royal birthday” in the second.⁶⁶ In 1564, on the anniversary of Emperor Hongxi’s (reigned 1424–1425) death, *jiao* ceremonies were performed in several places besides Heming shan, the sacred mountain where the legendary Zhang Daoling allegedly created the Way of Celestial Masters, and Daoist priests from the Shenyue guan were commissioned to present incense to the mountains, hills, seas, and rivers.⁶⁷ After the Jiajing era, when emperors showed less interest in Daoism,⁶⁸ the court stopped assigning such jobs to Daoist priests from the Shenyue guan.

The Shenyue guan was also in charge of training musicians and dancers for princely domains (*wangfu*) during the Ming. According to a decree issued in 1384, the musicians and dancers of all princely domains were recruited from

⁶³ *Ming Taizu shilu*, 191:3b.

⁶⁴ *Ming Taizong shilu*, 10:8b.

⁶⁵ *Ming Xuanzong shilu*, 91:9a–9b; *Ming Yingzong shilu*, 95:5a, 168:1a; *Ming Wuzong shilu*, 65:1a; *Ming Shizong shilu*, 276:1a.

⁶⁶ *Ming Yingzong shilu*, 30:4b–5a; *Ming Shizong shilu*, 495:7b. In a memorial presented in 1496, Hu Rui, a supervising secretary of the Board of Rites, claimed that “The sacrifices to mountains, hills, seas, and rivers are among the most important sacrifices and are offered once every three years. This job, however, is entrusted to musicians and dancers of the Shenyue guan.”

⁶⁷ *Ming Shizong shilu*, 534:2a.

⁶⁸ Qing Xitai, ed., *Zhongguo Daojiao shi*, vol. 4, 2–13.

among Confucian government students, and five musicians and dancers selected from the Shenyue guan were commissioned to train them.⁶⁹ In a memorial presented in 1429, when the princes of Zheng, Xiang, Jing, Huai, and Liang left for their domains, the Board of Rites mentioned that it was customary to appoint five musicians and dancers from the Shenyue guan to train musicians and dancers for all royal palaces. The same memorial also suggested that musicians and dancers for the princely domains should be recruited from among local Daoist youths and, if there were not enough of them, from among soldiers rather than local government students. This suggestion was approved.⁷⁰ It is worth noting that the quality of the musicians and dancers affiliated with the Shenyue guan declined in the first three decades of the fifteenth century, to the extent that musicians from the princely domains visited the Shenyue guan in 1436 in order to help the Shenyue guan ritual musicians and dancers hone their performing skills.⁷¹

An important recent study on the connection between Ming princes and Daoist priests by Richard Wang further reveals that in order to house Daoist musicians and dancers sent from the central government, a Daoist temple was established in each of the princely domains. The temple was usually called the Abbey of Performing Music (Yanyue guan) or the Abbey of Exalted Perfection (Gaozhen guan). These were in effect a kind of miniature Shenyue guan. Like their counterparts at the Shenyue guan, the Daoist musicians and dancers of these abbeys were responsible for performing sacrifices at the Altar of Soil and Grain, the Altars of the Wind, Cloud, Thunder, Rain and Mountains and Rivers, and to the generals and military symbolized by flags and banners, as well as Daoist rituals.⁷²

Writing in the mid sixteenth century, Tian Yiheng claims that Daoist priests played music while the rites were performed by scholar-officials at the local level.⁷³ I have not been able to find the relevant regulations in the *Ming huidian*, however. Apparently, when Chen Hongmo (1474–1555) became the prefect of Zhangzhou, he found that the musical instruments of the local Confucian Temple were broken. He had them repaired and invited Daoist priests well-versed in music from the Shenyue guan to train over one hundred local people in their proper use. Evidently, the training was very successful.⁷⁴ In this case, only the instructors were Daoist priests, while those who received musical train-

⁶⁹ *Ming Taizu shilu*, 165:2b.

⁷⁰ *Ming Xuanzong shilu*, 54:4a.

⁷¹ *Ming Yingzong shilu*, 25:1a.

⁷² Richard Wang, "Ming Princes and Daoist Ritual," 65–75.

⁷³ Tian Yiheng, *Liuqing rizha*, 28:519.

⁷⁴ Jiao Hong, *Xianzheng lu*, 40:1662.

ing were local people. However, evidence presented in a recent study of the households of ritualists and actors (*liyuehu*) in the late imperial period show that Daoist priests were indeed recruited to be ritual musicians and dancers for sacrifices performed at the local level during the Ming in several regions including Hangzhou, Yangzhou, and portions of Shaanxi.⁷⁵ This suggests that in some places, Daoist priests were in fact, as Tian Yiheng suggests, recruited to serve as musicians and dancers in local rites. More research needs to be done, however, in order to determine how widespread this practice was.

Because of their Daoist background, sometimes officials and clerks of the Shen Yue guan were commissioned to perform the rites of rain-making, *jiao* offering ceremonies, and so forth for the court. Thus in 1368, when a drought afflicted the capital area (Nanjing), Zhou Xuanzhen was invited to pray for rain.⁷⁶ In 1439, together with a Daoist priest from Taihe shan, a Daoist priest from the Shen Yue guan was awarded one thousand *guan* of paper currency when the rain-making ritual they performed turned out to be very successful.⁷⁷ Less than a century later, in 1540, a Golden Register Propitiatory *jiao* ceremony was performed at the Shen Yue guan to celebrate the birthday of Emperor Jiajing.⁷⁸

Lastly, the high visibility of Daoist priests in the Shen Yue guan and the Court of Imperial Sacrifices meant that Daoist religion had an influence upon imperial ritual music and the cult of deities. Ritual music of the early Ming was a result of the efforts of Leng Qian, who, in 1367 was appointed to create new tunes for the state sacrifices under the order of Zhu Yuanzhang.⁷⁹ The fact that a number of Daoist deities entered the sacrificial register during the Ming may have been closely connected to the control of Daoist priests of the Shen Yue guan and the Court of Imperial Sacrifices.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the Daoist influence on imperial sacrifices appears to have been quite modest. Although the sacrifices were performed under the guidance of Daoist priests, the structure and content of the sacrifices *per se* seem to have been kept intact. If anything, we should examine the influence of service in imperial rituals upon the Daoists themselves instead. But for this poorly documented issue obviously more research needs to be done.⁸¹

⁷⁵ Zhang Yongchun, "Zhongguo liyuhu yanjiu de jige wenti," 58.

⁷⁶ Chen Yuan, *Daojia jinshi lue*, 1233.

⁷⁷ *Ming Yingzong shilu*, 54:5a.

⁷⁸ *Ming Shizong shilu*, 243:2b.

⁷⁹ *Ming Shizong shilu*, 243:2b.

⁸⁰ Zhang Tingyu et al., *Ming Shi*, 61:1500; Huang Yu, *Shuanghuai sui chao*, 37; Lam, "Imperial Agency in Ming Music Culture," 279.

⁸¹ According to a 1488 memorial from Zhou Hongmo (1421-1492), the minister of the Board of Rites, Daoist deities on the sacrificial register included Sanqing sanjing tianzun, Beiji zhongtian xingzhu ziwei dadì, Jiutian yingyuan leisheng puhua tianzun, Santiao fujiao fuxuan da fashi zhenjun, Zitong dijun, Beiji yousheng

4. From the Shen Yue Guan to the Shen Yue Shu

From the time that the Shen Yue guan was first erected in 1379 to its reorganization in 1743, scholar-officials' attitudes changed, and their criticisms increased over time. When the change took place is difficult to say, but we do know that criticism was rare and sporadic before the mid-Ming. Because the Shen Yue guan provided accommodations for officials the day before sacrifices were offered, some officials formed close friendships with, and often wrote poems to, Daoist priests from the Shen Yue guan.⁸² Some scholars even defended the customary practice that clerks of the institution should be recruited from Daoist priests rather than from other social groups.⁸³

The earliest criticism appeared roughly during the Jingtai era (1450–1456). In 1456, Yan Nai, a censor, mentioned that when he visited the Altar of Heaven, he found that musicians and dancers sold wine and pork there, to the extent that the altar looked like a bustling market place.⁸⁴ This practice should not surprise us. The income of musicians and dancers was too meager,⁸⁵ and most musicians and dancers were forced to do business or perform *jiao* offering ceremonies for local people to eke out a living. But it obviously provided an excuse for officials like Yan Nai who took a more and more negative attitude towards Daoist religion.

Forty years later, in a memorial presented in 1496, Hu Rui (*jinshi* 1484), a supervising secretary of the Board of Rites, attacked Cui Zhirui, then the minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, for his “heterodox words and evil deeds” (*xieshuo bixing*). He also criticized the practice of commissioning Daoist priests of the Shen Yue guan to offer sacrifices to mountains, hills, seas, and rivers, and suggested that the job be reassigned to officials and *jinshi* degree-holders. This suggestion was rejected by Emperor Hongzhi (reigned 1488–1515) on the ground that it was a customary practice for the rites to be run by Daoist priests.⁸⁶ When

dijun, Chongzen zhenjun, Longen zhenjun, Jinque shangdi, Yuque shangdi, etc. Zhou claimed that all of these were Daoist deities and should not have been included in the sacrificial register. See *Ming Xiaozong shilu*, 13:5a–12a; Qing Xitai, ed., *Zhongguo Daojiao shi*, vol. 3, 522–526.

⁸² See, for example, Li Shimian (1374–1450), *Gulian wenji*, 7:22b–23a; Wu Kuan (1435–1504), *Jia cang ji*, 29:4b.

⁸³ *Ming Xianzong shilu*, 156:4b; Shang Lu, *Shang Wenyi shugao*, 47a–49a. In a memorial presented in 1476, Shang Lu criticized Emperor Chenghua for the latter having established a shrine within the Forbidden City and commissioned eunuchs to perform the rite of sacrifices. Of the reasons he listed to criticize this practice, he mentioned that it had been a customary practice for Daoist priests of the Shen Yue guan to perform the rite of sacrifices since the early Ming.

⁸⁴ *Xu Wenxian tongkao*, 104:9a–9b.

⁸⁵ According to the *Ming huidian*, the salary of a musician/dancer included: a monthly ration of 3 *dou* and 3 *sheng* of rice, a bonus of 5 *sheng* of rice on the days of Yuandan, Zhongyuan, and Dongzhi, a yearly ration of about 1 *dan* and 1 *sheng* of barley, about 3 *dou* of soy bean, over 5 *sheng* and 7 *he* of sesame, 464 catties of firewood, 1 *pi* of raw *juan* silk cloth, and so forth. *Ming huidian*, 226:1112.

⁸⁶ *Ming Xiaozong shilu*, 118:1a–1b.

a fire took place in the Shenyue guan the next year, Xiong Da, another censor, impeached Cui Zhirui for allowing Daoist priests to drink wine and gamble and suggested dismissing him from his position.⁸⁷

It is worth noting that almost all the memorials mentioned above criticized the illegal practices of the Daoist priests affiliated with the Shenyue guan, but the Daoist priests' role in imperial sacrifices itself was hardly mentioned at all. During the late Ming, Daoist priests became an increasingly ridiculed group and attacks on the Shenyue guan and the role it played in imperial sacrifices increased. According to the *Ancient Rhymes and Proverbs* (*Gu yaoyan*), a collection of folk rhymes and proverbs edited by the Qing scholar Du Wenlan, "the propitiatory rites of the Shenyue guan (Shenyue guan *qirang*)" was one of ten ridiculous things of the capital in the late Ming.⁸⁸ Scholar-officials also showed increasing enmity to Daoist priests' role in imperial sacrifices. In his *Qixiu leigao* (Draft arranged in seven categories), the late Ming scholar Lang Ying called the role played by Daoist priests into question:

I once read the *Ritual of the Zhou*. When the son of Heaven offered sacrifices, it was the minister of the Board of Rites who was in charge of [directing] ritual, and it was the musician-in-chief who was in charge of [performing] music. . . . Now the music is played by those who are in the Shenyue guan, and those who direct and assist in the ritual are Daoist priests of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices. Assigning the grand rituals and music to such people is very much not the way of ordering and harmonizing emotion and culture (*xu he qing wen*). How thus could the deities be communicated with?⁸⁹

Similarly, Tian Yiheng claimed that all the Daoist priests of the Shenyue guan and the Court of Imperial Sacrifices should be considered "heterodox." If they were appointed to direct the rituals and play music, he questioned, how could it be possible to communicate with heavenly deities? He also mentioned that sacrifices at the level of prefecture, subprefecture, and county were performed by "we Confucians."⁹⁰ This binary opposition of the "heterodox" and "we Confucians" makes his attitude clear: imperial sacrifices should be performed by Confucian officials and not Daoist priests because the latter could not possibly communicate with deities.

⁸⁷ *Ming Xiaozong shilu*, 123:2a.

⁸⁸ Du Wenlan, *Gu yaoyan*, 51:9a–9b.

⁸⁹ Lang Ying, *Qixiu leigao*, 18:7a–7b.

⁹⁰ Tian Yiheng, *Liuqing rizha*, 28:519.

During the Jiajing era, as the number of musicians and dancers of the Shenyue guan increased and the Daoist religion became more important, criticism of the Daoist priests of the Shenyue guan became an issue that the Jiajing emperor (reigned 1522–1566) had to address and defend. In a decree issued in the fourth month of 1536, he pointed out that a number of officials criticized the practice of appointing Daoist priests to perform sacrificial rites because they were “heterodox persons.” He did not agree with this opinion, he claimed, because it was an institution established by the founder of the Ming.⁹¹ The Shenyue guan was thus kept intact during the Ming although criticisms of this institution became increasingly prevalent. In fact, it was during the Qing that the Shenyue guan confronted more serious challenges.

As we know, the political climate became less favorable to Daoism after the Manchu conquest. It is true that the early Qing court continued to grant titles to Heavenly Masters of Longhu shan. It is also true that, during the Yongzheng era (1722–1735), the Daoist religion enjoyed a temporary period of popularity at court. The Yongzheng emperor (1678–1735) developed a keen interest in Daoist inner alchemy. He bestowed honors and titles to several eminent Daoist priests, the most famous among them was Lou Jinyuan (1689–1776), “the greatest Taoist [Daoist] chaplain at the Qing court.”⁹² But after this interlude, the court’s attitude toward Daoist religion was increasingly negative. After he assumed the throne, the Qianlong emperor venerated Tibetan Buddhism,⁹³ and at the same time deliberately undermined the importance of the Daoist religion. Two days after his father died in October 1735, the Qianlong emperor turned all the Daoist priests out of the palace. There was a rumor that the Yongzheng emperor had been poisoned by Daoist masters promising him an elixir of immortality.⁹⁴ In 1739, Qianlong forbade the Heavenly Master from recruiting disciples across China. The next year, he discontinued the practice of the Heavenly Master’s routine audience in Beijing. The rank of the Heavenly Master was reduced.⁹⁵ It was time to reorganize the Shenyue guan.

The year 1743 was the eighth year after the Qianlong emperor assumed the throne. It was in this year that the Shenyue guan was reorganized. In a decree, the Qianlong emperor explained the reason that he had the institution reorganized:

At the seasonal banquet, I listened to the music played by [musicians of] the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, only finding that [the musicians]

⁹¹ *Ming Shizong shilu*, 186:9b.

⁹² Vincent Goossaert, “Bureaucratic Charisma,” 142.

⁹³ See, for example, Zito, *Of Body and Brush*, 23–24.

⁹⁴ Mark C. Elliott, *Emperor Qianlong*, 12; Goossaert, “Bureaucratic Charisma,” 146.

⁹⁵ Qing Xitai, ed., *Zhongguo Daojiao shi*, vol. 4, 4–12.

were not even able to differentiate *gong* tone and *shang* tone. How is it possible [for them] to communicate with deities and achieve sincerity and veneration? I appointed Prince Zhuang, Santai, and Zhang Zhao to be overseers-generals of the Music Ministry, their responsibility is not only to exercise control over the Music Office (Hesheng shu). From now on they are also in charge of administering all affairs of the music section of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices. I also heard that musicians of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices have long been recruited from among Daoist priests. The unorthodox learning of the two religions [of Buddhism and Daoism] is unsuitable to be employed by the court. Now Daoist priests are charged with the responsibility of controlling musical instruments and of the burning [of sacrificial essays] and burying [of hair and blood of sacrificial animals] and are appointed to assist in the grand sacrifices of altars and temples. In their spare time, however, they perform propitiatory rites and recite scriptures for local people to eke out a living. How improper it is! From now on the musicians of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices are forbidden to study Daoist religion. Those who are not willing to change their vocation will be dismissed from their positions and will be permitted to be Daoist priests.⁹⁶

At a first glance, the reason the Qianlong emperor ordered the reorganization of the Shenyue guan was the low quality of music played by its clerks. A more important reason turns out to be the fact that musicians and dancers were recruited from among Daoist priests, who, as the followers of “unorthodox learning,” were not suitable to provide liturgical services in imperial sacrifices. The rhetoric he utilized was very much similar to that of late Ming scholar-officials.⁹⁷

In sum, the Qianlong emperor’s reform of the Shenyue guan included two parts. On the one hand, Daoist priests of the Shenyue guan were no longer allowed to study Daoist religion, otherwise they would have to leave the institution. The next year, the institution was renamed Shenyue suo, which was further renamed Shenyue shu in 1755. Daoist deities such as the Heavenly Master

⁹⁶ *Da Qing huidian shili*, 524:1a–1b.

⁹⁷ The Qianlong emperor’s antagonistic attitude toward the Daoist religion should not be overstated, however. For one thing, Lou Jinyuan was retained at the palace and the Qianlong emperor actually bestowed new honors on him and even sent presents and further honorary titles to him on his seventieth birthday in 1757. Remember also the fact that the emperor is represented as a Daoist master in at least two paintings (one dated 1734, the other 1782), which reveals an indispensable aspect of the emperor’s multiple self-images. Goossaert, “Bureaucratic Charisma: The Zhang Heavenly Master Institution and Court Taoists in Late-Qing China,” 146–147; Harold L. Kahn, *Monarchy in the Emperor’s Eyes*, 77, 184.

(Zhang Tianshi) and Wenchang were purged from the Shenyue guan in 1744. Only Xuantian shangdi was kept there.⁹⁸ On the other hand, the administration of musicians and dancers was reformed. A new ministry, the Music Ministry, was instituted in 1743. It controlled the Music Office (previously called Jiaofang si) and the Shenyue suo/Shenyue shu. The ritual music that used to be performed by the Shenyue guan was now under the jurisdiction of this new institution. It seems that the responsibility of the Shenyue suo/Shenyue shu did not change dramatically, but the elements of Daoist religion were expelled from the institution at least partly and Daoist priests no longer played so prominent a role in imperial sacrifices as their forebears.

After the reform of 1743, however, the Daoist religion did not simply disappear from the Shenyue guan. It is true that a number of Daoist priests may have been expelled from this institution. As Vincent Goossaert points out, “[t]hey found positions as temple managers in various temples in the Outer City, not far from the Shenyue guan, and continued into the twentieth century to claim their status as (former) state clerics, as well as a specific lineage, Zhenwu pai.” But even as late as the 1930s, the manager of the Jingzhong Temple introduced himself in the city government’s temple census as a musician/dancer of the Qing imperial rituals, and a Daoist priest from the Dongyue Temple claimed to have performed ritual at the Altar of Heaven. We thus have a number of reasons to believe that heirs of Daoist priests of the former Shenyue guan “maintained some links with the officials in charge of state ritual” and “still played some role” in imperial sacrifices.⁹⁹

5. Conclusion

Compared with its Tang and Song counterparts, it seems that the Ming court took a different policy toward the Daoist religion. To accommodate the Daoist religion, the Tang and Song courts both constructed a genealogical connection between the royal family and a key Daoist deity: Laozi in the case of the Tang, and Zhao Xuanlang in the case of the Song.¹⁰⁰ Under this policy, the Daoist religion was given a special place in imperial ideology. Daoist rituals were

⁹⁸ *Qing Gaozong shilu*, vol. 3, 189:438.

⁹⁹ See Vincent Goossaert, *The Daoists of Peking, 1800–1949*, 190–191; Xu Zhichang, *Tiantan guangji*, 98–99. When the state surveyed temples and monasteries in the capital controlled by the government in 1770, quite a few of them turned out to be former musicians and dancers. See “Lufu Yong-Qian chao Nei wufu zou’an (1645–1911),” Number 1 Historical Archives Museum, 5–0277–032. I am grateful for Professor Marianne Bujard for kindly showing this document to me.

¹⁰⁰ Qing Xitai, ed., *Zhongguo Daojiao shi*, vol. 2, 31–118; Azuma Juji, “Sōdai no Kērēkyū ni tsuite-Dōkyō saishi to Jukyō saishi no kōsa.”

regularly performed to legitimize the dynasty and many Daoist priests enjoyed a remarkable place in society, to the extent that quite a few local officials governed with dual authorities: one from the imperial court, the other from the Daoist authority.¹⁰¹

In contrast, the Ming court did not follow these historical precedents. It is not that the Daoist religion no longer played an important role in the Ming political culture. In fact, the Ming court continued to acknowledge the importance of the Daoist religion in the construction of political legitimacy. It continued to invite Daoist priests to perform Daoist rituals on regular basis.¹⁰² However, it is also true that the Ming rulers took a more suspicious attitude toward non-Confucian ritual specialists, including those of the Daoist religion, who could mediate between the people and the supernatural bureaucratic hierarchy.¹⁰³

More importantly, the case of the Shenyue guan suggests that the Ming court took a different policy to accommodate the Daoist religion. That is to say, it attempted to incorporate Daoist priests in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Because of their religious purity (*wu wei qing jing*), Daoist priests of the Shenyue guan were bureaucratized to provide services in the performance of imperial rituals. In these rituals, it was the emperor rather than Daoist priests who communicated with Heaven. Daoist religion was thus harnessed both to serve imperial ideology and imperial rituals *per se*. The case of the Shenyue guan, therefore, suggests a different mode of relationship between the imperial court and the Daoist religion: compared with their preceding counterparts, the Ming rulers took more interest in monopolizing the mediating power between Heaven and the people and in harnessing the power of Daoist priests to serve that purpose.

This was the political legacy that the Manchu rulers faced when they conquered China. When he reorganized the Shenyue guan, the Qianlong emperor was not only adopting the discourse put forward by late Ming Confucian scholars, but also following the Ming rulers' attitudes toward the Daoist priests' power in communicating between Heaven and the people. But, of course, he challenged the power of the Daoist religion from a more complex context. As a self-conscious emperor-bodhisattva,¹⁰⁴ he had abundant reason to be jealous

¹⁰¹ Judith Magee Boltz, "Not by the Seal of Office Alone."

¹⁰² Judith A. Berling, "Taoism in Ming Culture."

¹⁰³ Daniel Overmyer, "Attitudes Towards Popular Religion in Ritual Texts of the Chinese State."

¹⁰⁴ David Farquhar, "Emperor as Bodhisattva in the Governance of the Qing Empire;" Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 244–263. To be sure, Daoist priests continued to perform Daoist rituals on behalf of the imperial courts during the Qing. But at least theoretically speaking, Daoist priests were expelled from the key imperial ritual space and their influence was basically confined to private rituals of the royal family after the reorganization of the Shenyue guan. See Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 264–294, for a detailed discussion of Daoist priests' roles in private rituals of the royal family.

of Daoist priests' mediating power and, instead of attempting to incorporate these figures into the bureaucratic hierarchy as the Ming founder did, he took measures to purge them from the imperial ritual space.

Glossary

Baiyun guan	白雲觀	Du Daojian	杜道堅
Beiji Zhenwu miao	北極真武廟	Du zhenren	杜真人
boshi	博士	du zhu guan	讀祝官
Bu Zonghao	步宗浩	Fu Tongxu (Ruolin)	傅同虛 (若霖)
Cao Guisun	曹桂孫	Gaozhen guan	高真觀
Cao Shouqing	曹守清	ge ling fengsi	各陵奉祀
chezhuan	徹饌	ge ling sicheng	各陵祀丞
Chen Hongmo	陳洪謨	ge tan fengsi	各壇奉祀
chujia	出家	ge tan sicheng	各壇祀丞
chuxian	初獻	Gong Kepei	龔可佩
chuanzan	傳贊	Gu Hong	顧珙
chuanzhi	傳制	guan	貫
ci fuzu	賜福俎	guandai	冠帶
Cui Zhirui	崔志瑞	Heming shan	鶴鳴山
Daolu si	道錄司	Hesheng shu	和聲署
daotong	道童	hezhaoguishen zhi shu	劾召鬼神之術
daoyin guan	導引官	houque	候缺
daoyuan	道院	Hu Rui	胡瑞
dianbo	奠帛	huyun yilei	呼雲役雷
dianyi	典儀	Jiahe	嘉禾
Du Chenghuang miao	都城隍廟		

Jiang Leigu	蔣雷穀	Lou Jinyuan	婁近垣
Jiaofang si	教坊司	Ma Liangde	馬良德
jiaoshi	教師	Mo Yueding	莫月鼎
Jiaosi tan	郊祀壇	neizan	內贊
Jie Xingchu	解性初	Ningxi dian	凝禧殿
jinlu bao'an jiao	金籙保安醮	qingshen	請神
Jinxi	金谿	qirang	祈禳
Jin Yunren	金贇仁	Qiu Xuanqing	丘玄清
jinzu	進俎	quanzhen zhi xue	全真之學
Jingling gong	景靈宮	Renzu	仁祖
ju hui xielulang	舉麾協律郎	Santai	三泰
jue	爵	Sang Youlan	桑友蘭
Leng Qian	冷謙	Shang Lu	商輅
Li _a	厲	Shangqing lingbao jidu dacheng jinshu	上清靈寶濟度大成金書
li _b	里	shangxinri	上辛日
Li Gongrui	李拱瑞	Shao Shi'en	邵世恩
lijia	里甲	sheji	社稷
lisheng	禮生	sheren	舍人
Li Xi'an	李希安	Shenyue guan	神樂觀
lian su si tao	戀俗私逃	Shenyue shu	神樂署
lingbao dafa	靈寶大法	Shenyue suo	神樂所
Liu Zhongzhi	劉仲質	shengsheng	省牲
liyuehu	禮樂戶	Shengzu	聖祖
Longjiang Tianfei gong	龍江天妃宮	shiliang	食糧
		Shuntian	順天

sidian	祀典	Xuanchu	玄初
siyue	司樂	Xuanmiao guan	玄妙觀
Song Lian	宋濂	Xuantian shangdi	玄天上帝
songshen	送神	xue Laozi fa zhe	學老子法者
sujia	俗家	yaxian	亞獻
Sun Guang'an	孫廣安	yayuesheng	雅樂生
Taichang si	太常寺	Yan Nai	閻鼎
Taihe [Mount]	太和	Yan Shiyin	嚴師尹
Taihe dian	太和殿	Yanyue guan	演樂觀
Tao Qinan	陶啓南	Yuan Zhi'an	袁止安
tidian	提點	yuewusheng	樂舞生
Tian Yiheng	田藝蘅	yue zhen hai du	岳鎮海瀆
Tiantan	天壇	zanlilang	贊禮郎
tongzan	通贊	zhaijie	齋戒
wangliao	望燎	Zhang Daoxian	張道賢
Wang Zhi	王直	Zhang Maocheng	張懋丞
Wu Daoliang	吳道亮	Zhang Yuchu	張宇初
Wushan	吳山	zhangyue	掌樂
wu wei qingjing	務爲清淨	Zhang Zhao	張照
Xiannong	先農	Zhang Zhengchang	張正常
xielulang	協律郎	Zhangzhou	漳州
xieshuo bixing	邪說詖行	Zhao Xuanlang	趙玄朗
Xiong Da	熊達	Zhenwu pai	真武派
xu he qing wen	序和情文	Zhenwu xingong	真武行宮
Xu Kecheng	徐可成	zhishi	執事

zhongxian	終獻	Zhou Yuanchu	周原初
Zhou Hongmo	周洪謨	Zhu Fuming	朱福銘
Zhou Side	周思得	Zixu guan	紫虛觀
Zhou Xuanzhen	周玄真		

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