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Licentious Cults and Bloody Victuals: Sacrifice, Reciprocity, and Violence in Traditional China

In recent years the scholarly world has shown renewed interest in the topic of sacrifice. So far, however, there has been no attempt to integrate into this debate evidence from one of the most ancient continuous traditions of sacrificial practice – that of China. Consider this hymn from the canonical *Book of Poetry* (Mao number 210, stanzas 5–6):

5.	6.
I sacrifice with clear wine,	Present and offer it,
Followed by a red bull,	Pungent and fragrant.
Make offerings to my ancestors.	How bright the sacrificial service,
Grasping my belled-knife,	Illuminating our forefathers.
To split open its hide,	They respond with great blessings,
Take the blood and fat.	Limitless longevity!

Sacrifice is central to the Chinese religious tradition. Religious activity in ancient China consisted primarily of the ritualized slaughter of animals (and sometimes humans), presentation of the victim to supernatural beings, and the eventual consumption of the meat by the living. Today, meat-offerings, with or without a killing ritual, remain the dominant means by which the Chinese people interact with the sacred realm.¹ How, when, and to whom to make sacrifice were matters of prime interest to the state cult, which sought both to monopolize worship of the more exalted gods of the pantheon and limit worship of all other gods. China's institutionalized religions of Taoism and Buddhism originally rejected blood sacrifice. Their

¹ D. Howard Smith characterizes sacrifice in China as "the principal method of approach to gods and ancestor spirits." See S. G. F. Brandon, ed., *Dictionary of Comparative Religion* (New York: Scribner, 1970), p. 546. In accepting all meat offerings as sacrifice I reject the distinction van Baal makes between sacrifice and offering. In present-day China there are both elaborate celebrations involving ritualized killing and casual preparation of meat in parallel offerings in homes – typical of van Baal's low-intensity rites. See J. van Baal, "Offering, Sacrifice, and Gift," *Nûmen* 23.3 (1976), pp. 161–78.

own pantheons for the most part did not overlap with those of the state or the populace, but eventually the two religions accommodated sacrificial practice. By analyzing the attitudes of the state, the people, and these faiths toward sacrifice it is possible to suggest a fundamental reconceptualization of Chinese religion.

The Chinese religious world has often been portrayed as the three elite traditions of Buddhism, Taoism, and the state cult, all of which developed from a common popular substrate.² In this paper I argue that state and popular cults not only both practiced blood sacrifice, but they contested for power in relation to it. Buddhism and Taoism, however, were seen as largely irrelevant to and outside of this competition. They condemned the profane gods of the cults, and contested instead over the role as China's transcendent, salvific faith. Below, I discuss the place of blood sacrifice in traditional China, then show the ways in which the state and other cultural institutions sought to restrict this route of access to the divine by creating and enforcing standards of ritual praxis. Next I delineate a process of ethicization that, by recasting the relationship of man to the sacred, laid the foundation for Taoism and Buddhism, influencing even the "Confucian" state cult. Finally, I demonstrate how the competing conceptions of the divine and its relationship to man shaped the development of one particular deity cult, that to the Divine Lord of Tzu-t'ung 梓潼, also known as Wen-ch'ang 文昌.

BLOOD SACRIFICE

Blood sacrifice was an integral part of the society of Shang and Chou China. The earliest history of the Spring and Autumn period, the *Tradition of Iso*, tells us that "the great affairs of state are sacrifice and warfare."³ In his ground-breaking *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, Mark Edward Lewis portrays an ancient China where "the ritualized taking of life constituted the defining feature of the political realm," and where a member of the ruling nobility was above all "a man who took life in order to feed the

spirits who gave him power."⁴ One's place in society was defined by one's position within a clan, which was, in turn, ordered on the basis of the members' sacrificial relationships to the clan ancestors. A hierarchical network of clans culminated in that of the ruling family and its sacrificial priest, the king. The king was the sole legitimate link to his deceased, divinized forebears, who owed their divine position to their own previous service as chief officiants at the state sacrifices.

Warfare and its peacetime equivalent, the hunt, were themselves types of sacrificial activity. Consider the key role played by the sacrifice and consumption of meat in Lewis' reconstruction of the rituals performed before embarking on a military campaign:⁵

Every campaign began at the temples, where the rulers performed a series of rituals to assure the success of the campaign. The state's ruler first sacrificed at the *she* altar [社 - the altar to the god of the soil that symbolically represented the state or community] and at the ancestral temple, where he announced the campaign to the spirits of the previous rulers. Religious insignia from the *she* and the spirit tablets of the ancestors were then brought out from their temples to accompany the army on its march. The commander of the army received his charge in the ancestral temple and made an offering of meat at the *she* altar. . . . Leaders of participating sublineages likewise sacrificed at the temples of their ancestors and exchanged meat from these sacrifices with the ruler of the state. After the rulers had purified themselves through fasting, the weapons of the army were issued at the ancestral temples. Finally, the troops were assembled in their ranks at the *she* in a special ceremony and with the rituals completed, they set out to battle.

The imperial sacrifices to the ancient gods of nature continued apace, interrupted only briefly by isolated examples of devotion to Taoism or Buddhism.⁶ During the T'ang and Sung periods the number of local

² Erik Zürcher, "Buddhist Influence on Early Taoism," *TP* 65.1-3 (1980), p. 146. Cf. Peter N. Gregory and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, "Religious and Historical Landscape," in Ebrey and Gregory, eds., *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 1993), p. 12.

³ *Ch'un-ch'iu Iso-chuan* 春秋左傳 (Cheng 13.2) (Harvard-Yenching Index edn.), p. 234.

⁴ Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1990), p. 17. Lewis here speaks only of the Chou, but these statements should hold for the Shang as well.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶ A notable example is the suspension of state blood sacrifices by emperor Wu of Liang (r. 502-49). See Michihata Ryōshū 道端良秀, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shisōshi no kenkyū* 中國佛教思想史の研究 (Tokyo: Shoen, 1979; rpt. as vol. 3 of *Chūgoku Bukkyōshi zenshū* 中國佛教史全

divinities granted official status and added to the biannual sacrifices of the local magistrate increased. Sacrifice remained the most important element of the religious program of the state up until 1911.

Sacrifice was also the primary religious activity of the common man then as it is now.⁷ The three types of offering – those directed to gods, ancestors, and ghosts, as delineated by modern anthropologists – corresponded to a three-fold division of Chinese society into officials, commoners, and outcasts. Each type involved blood-sacrifice.⁸ Ancestral sacrifices invariably included food-offerings; and even such occasional rites as those performed before travel could involve the killing of animals.⁹ Sung sources tell of mountains of slaughtered sheep offered to regional gods of the day like the God of Tzu-t'ung and the divinized Li Ping 李冰.¹⁰

China was far from unique among traditional civilizations in the emphasis it placed on sacrifice. Consider Marcel Detienne's comment concerning ancient Greece: "... [W]e see in the Greeks a society in which the basic ritual acts in daily practice are of a sacrificial type. For nearly ten centuries, guided by immutable cultic statutes, the Greeks never failed to maintain relations with the divine powers through the highly ritualized killing of animal victims, whose flesh was consumed collectively according to precise strictures."¹¹ This statement is equally true of ancient China, except that the distribution of sacrificial flesh was perhaps more restricted. The archaic religions of India and the ancient Near East, including Judaism, also centered on sacrifice as their primary religious praxis, as do many traditional religions of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific still active today.

The key to the wide popularity of sacrifice is the range of benefits its practice is thought to confer. Although the act demands that the sacrificer

give up something, it is often only a symbolic loss, and is far outweighed by the gains enjoyed by both the sacrificer and his community. Prime among these are the positive effects, both physical and spiritual, that derive from the consumption of the (remaining) sacrificial provender. As in ancient Greece, India, and pre-Deuteronomic Israel, meat in ancient China was consumed only after being offered in sacrifice.¹² Meat came to be so closely associated with the official class, which was trained in sacrificial ritual, that they were known simply as "meat eaters" 肉食者.¹³ Schipper has argued that the conspicuous consumption of sacrificial meat at the time of a major festival functioned as a means of redistributing wealth from the richest members of society to its poorest and of supplying these undernourished misfortunates with an important dietary supplement.¹⁴

Beyond their nutritive value, the items offered to the gods were thought to be sanctified in the ritual of offering and thereby imbued with magic power that conferred health, fortune, longevity, and social status.¹⁵

¹² Ibid., p. 3; J. C. Heesterman, *The Broken World of Sacrifice: An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1993), p. 228, n. 5, citing Manu 5.51; Leviticus 17:3-7. The Biblical restriction on eating unsacrificed meat from domestic animals was lifted in Deuteronomy 12:15, but according to the Temple Scroll, did not apply to individuals living in the vicinity of the Temple; see Yagael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll: The Hidden Law of the Dead Sea Sect* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983). I am indebted to Jeffrey Tigay for this point. All references to the Bible are to the *New English Bible with the Apocrypha* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1972). For the Chinese case see the *Kuo-yü* passage, translated below, n. 28, which states that the type and amount of meat one could sacrifice and consume was closely regulated according to status; the diet of commoners was essentially vegetarian, with the occasional fish offering and no meat.

¹³ *Ch'un-ch'iu Tso-chuan* (Chuang 10.1), p. 57; see *Ch'un-ch'iu Tso-chuan cheng-i* 正義 (Shih-san ching chu-shu edn.) 8, p. 22b.

¹⁴ Kristofer M. Schipper, *Le corps taoïste* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1982); James L. Watson, "From the Common Pot: Feasting with Equals in Chinese Society," *Anthropos* 82 (1987), p. 395. This is clearly a more important factor in popular festivals than in state ritual, where all likely recipients of sacrificial meat were comparatively wealthy, but even for mid-level officials meat may not have been part of their regular diet.

¹⁵ The characters 祚 and 祿, used to refer to sacrificial meat, also had the sense of "to bless, blessing," and in this sense were glossed by commentators as 福. The spirit of the dead recipient was thought to have infused the offering; when it was later bestowed upon a vassal, it was referred to as "the sacrificial meat of so-and-so," as in the "sacrificial meat of King Wen and King Wu" (*Wen Wu tso* 文武祚) presented to duke Hsiao of Ch'in by the Chou king Hsien in 360 BC. See *Shih-chi* 史記 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1962) 4, p. 160; cf. *Ch'un-ch'iu Tso-chuan* (Hsi 9.4), p. 100, where an emissary bringing meat to the duke of Ch'i announces, "The Son of Heaven has offered sacrifice 有事 to Wen and Wu." Valerio Valeri describes a similar transfer of "mana" through the consumption of sacrificed meat in traditional Hawaii; see *Kingship and Sacrifice: Ritual and Society in Ancient Hawaii*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 1985), pp. 58-59. An interesting correlation between flavor and numinous energy is revealed in a later theory: whereas high gods, who have little real

樂, 1985), pp. 480-96.

⁷ Compare von Falkenhausen's recent comment on the sacrificial aspects of the ancestral cult: "To this day, the rituals performed have continued with few modifications to follow the basic patterns laid out in the Zhou dynasty"; Lothar von Falkenhausen, "Sources of Taoism: Reflections on Archaeological Indicators of Religious Change in Eastern Zhou China," *Taoist Resources* 5.2 (1994), p. 7.

⁸ Arthur P. Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford U. P., 1974).

⁹ Bruno Schindler, "On the Travel, Wayside and Wind Offerings in Ancient China," *AM* 1 (1924), pp. 624-56.

¹⁰ See Li Shih 李石, *Fang-chou chi* 方舟集 (SKCS edn.), p. 18b; Chu Hsi 朱熹, *Chu-tzu yü-lei* 朱子語類 (Chu-tzu ta-ch'üan edn.) 3, pp. 212-b.

¹¹ Marcel Detienne, "Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice," in Marcel Detienne and Jean Pierre Vernant, eds., *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1989), p. 1.

During the Chou, sacrificial meats were regularly distributed among high members of the nobility and other officers of the state, who then would share them with subordinates and retainers. The mere display of such potent provender implied status. Confucius was proud of the fact that he never kept overnight the meat from a sacrifice in which he had participated, nor meat from other sacrifices longer than three days.¹⁶ Even the meat from the sacrifice of an inferior, charged with the divine power of his clan ancestors and gods, might be offered to a superior, but the giver in such a case was to make no mention of the blessings it conferred.¹⁷

The essence of sacrificial offerings, consumed by the designated god or spirit, engendered in return a debt of gratitude that could translate into this-worldly benefit. Traditional religious practice, including that found in state, popular, and ancestral cults, was based on this concept of reciprocity or requital (*pao* 報).¹⁸ Gods and spirits in the other world required sustenance in the form of meat, grain, and wine, and depended on the living to supply them through sacrifice. When the god Li Er-lang 季二郎 was "converted" to Taoism and placed on a vegetarian diet, he complained to a renowned general who had come to worship him:¹⁹

Up until now I have been enfeoffed as king and have received offerings of bloody victuals. It is through them that my might and blessings have been manifest. Now although my title of perfected lord is exalted, all sacrifice to me with vegetarian offerings. Deprived of the nourishment of bloody victuals, I consequently lack the numinous power of my awesome might and blessings.

need of any individual offering, leave much of the virtues of food offered to them intact, food offered to ravenous demons has been stripped of this power and is often discarded as "tasteless." See Emily Martin Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1981), p. 39.

¹⁶ *Lun-yü* 論語 2/6; *Lun-yü yin-te* 引得, Harvard-Yenching Inst. Sinol. Index Ser. suppl. 16 (rpt. Taipei: Chinese Materials and Research Aids Service Ctr., 1966), p. 18; D. C. Lau, trans., *The Analects* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 103. There are explicit prohibitions in the Bible against keeping sacrificial meat past the second day; meat of the paschal sacrifice must be consumed that night; see Leviticus 19:5-8; Exodus 12:10, 23:18, and 34:25.

¹⁷ *Li Chi cheng-i* 禮記正義 (sect. "Shao i" 少儀) (Shih-san ching chu-shu edn.) 35, p. 26a; James Legge, *Li Chi: Book of Rites*, ed. by Ch'u Chai and Winberg Chai (1885; rpt. New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1967), vol. 2, p. 81.

¹⁸ This is the same term translated as "respond" in the poem with which I began this article. Its wider implications are discussed in Lien-sheng Yang, "The Concept of 'Pao' as a Basis for Social Relations in China," in John K. Fairbank, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 1957), pp. 291-309.

¹⁹ *Chu-tzu yü-lei* 3, p. 21b.

The very ability of the gods to bestow blessings was dependent upon the sacrificial offerings of men. The sacrificer was empowered in his relationship with the gods and consequently able to extract from the gods supernatural aid. The state was understandably concerned by the free access to divine power this implied.

TRADITIONAL RESTRICTIONS ON SACRIFICE

State limitations on religious expression probably existed in the Shang era (roughly from the sixteenth to eleventh centuries BC). The Shang king legitimized and maintained his status primarily through his role as the patriarch of the ruling family with the exclusive right to sacrifice to the divine ancestors and through them to the supreme god, Ti.²⁰ The king's unique position was confirmed at death by his translation into the sacred realm and his apotheosis as one of the powerful ancestral spirits who controlled the climate, human fertility, natural fecundity, the fate of nations, and the health of rulers. He and his representatives seem to have monopolized access to the sacred, and, though there is no direct reference to such a matter, we can assume that the attempt by anyone other than the Shang king to pray or offer sacrifice to the royal ancestors or Ti would have been suppressed as subversive behavior.

Beginning with the classical period, we have explicit record of attitudes toward religion. The focus of concern was on who sacrificed to whom. One of the earliest explicit statements of proper sacrificial conduct is found in a discourse in *The Tradition of Tso*, attributed to the tenth year of duke Hsi 僖公 (650 BC):²¹

I have heard it said, "The gods do not partake of [the offerings of]

²⁰ On Shang kingship, see David N. Keightley, "The Religious Commitment: Shang Theology and the Genesis of Chinese Political Culture," *History of Religions* 17 (1978), pp. 211-25.

²¹ *Ch'un-ch'iu Tso-chuan* (Hsi 10), p. 104; *Ch'un-ch'iu Tso-chuan cheng-i* 13, p. 16a; James Legge, trans., *The Ch'un T's'u with the Tso Chuan*, vol. 5 of *The Chinese Classics* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1872), p. 157. This anecdote cannot reliably be dated to 650 BC, but the final compilation of *Tso-chuan* can be no later than the beginning of the third century BC and this passage, part of a large body of material thought to derive from a record of the state of Chin, may be considerably earlier. See the article by Anne Cheng in Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, 1993), pp. 67-76.

those not of the same strain 類; the people do not sacrifice to those not of their clan 族.”

This refers to sacrifice as a type of ancestor worship. The gods mentioned are deified ancestors and are available only to members of clans claiming descent from them. In the feudal world of Chou China most of the ruling families of regional states were from cadet branches of the ruling family and could therefore approach illustrious culture-heroes like king Wen, who, the *Book of Poetry* tells us, “ascends and descends on the right hand of Ti (the high god).”²² Lacking these illustrious forebears, the common people in this formulation were barred from sacrificing to any unrelated deity. Offerings to dead members of their clan were permitted, however, and such figures could no doubt offer some degree of help and protection. The political significance attached to the supernatural support of the dead is revealed in the incident preceding the above passage: the ghost of a dead elder brother of the ruling duke of Chin, thus a ghost without a place in the Chin ancestral temple, threatened to aid the state of Ch’in in return for sacrifices there.

Moreover, sacrifice from the time of the Shang had been offered to a variety of natural forces, including sacred mountains and the Yellow River. These practices carried over into the Chou and their performance was strictly regulated according to rank. We find in the *Record of Rites* (*Li-chi* 禮記), a Han-dynasty compilation of ritual codes dating from the Warring States period, an explicit statement of who is entitled to sacrifice to these gods:²³

The Son of Heaven sacrifices to Heaven and Earth; the feudal lords sacrifice to the gods of soil and grain; the great officers sacrifice to the five tutelary cults. The Son of Heaven sacrifices to the famous mountains and great rivers throughout the empire. . . . the feudal lords sacrifice to the famous mountains and great rivers within their domains.

Access to these gods and their supernatural support was carefully rationed according to rank, as was access to ancestral spirits.²⁴ Lists like the preceding

occur in various early sources, but most refer to no figure below the status of knight-gentry (*shih* 士); it is in *Comprehensive Meanings of Mores and Customs* (*Feng-su t'ung-i* 風俗通義), a second-century AD collection of information on ritual practice and popular custom, that we find the first explicit reference to the common people. There the *shih* are permitted to sacrifice to door gods, but the common people are still limited to their ancestors.²⁵ Even as late as the Ming, commoners were, at least in theory, restricted to the village earth-god, the grain-god, the hearth, and their parents and grandparents.²⁶

The objects sacrificed were also subject to sumptuary regulations of considerable detail. The following passage from *Discourses of the States* records a discussion of this matter at the court of king Chao of Ch'u 楚昭王 (r. 515-489 BC). When his younger brother, the great officer Tzu-ch'i 子期, sacrificed an ox to their father and presented the meat to king Chao, the king asked a minister about the restrictions on sacrifice. The minister replied:

A sacrifice 祀 should be greater than a banquet 舉.²⁷ The Son of Heaven uses a *t'ai-lao* 太牢 (“large set of penned animals,” a set of one pig, sheep, and ox) for the banquet and a *hui* 會 (“collection,” or three *t'ai-lao*) for the sacrifice. The feudal lords use a single ox for the banquet and a *t'ai-lao* for the sacrifice. The ministers of state 卿 use a *shao-lao* 少牢 (“small set of penned animals,” a set of one pig and one sheep) for the banquet and a single ox for the sacrifice. The great officer uses a single animal (that is, a pig) for the banquet and a *shao-lao* for the sacrifice. The *shih* eat fried fish and use a single animal for the sacrifice. The common people eat vegetables and use a fish for the sacrifice.²⁸

Here we see that both the ritual sacrifice and consumption of domestic animals were regulated. We also see in this passage an early confirmation of

²⁵ Ying Shao 應劭 (ca. 140-ca. 206), *Feng-su t'ung-i t'ung-chien* 通檢 9, p. 67.

²⁶ *Ming-shih* 明史 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1974) 47, p. 1226.

²⁷ A feast held each new and full moon with music and slaughtered animals brought as tribute by vassals from surrounding areas 四方之貢. Such auspicious gatherings were suspended during times of famine or disaster or when criminal punishments were carried out. See the commentary to this passage and *Ch'un-ch'iu Tso-chuan cheng-i* (Chuang 20) 9, p. 19b.

²⁸ *Kuo-yü* 國語 (Shanghai: Ku-chi, 1978), pp. 564-55; Tung Tseng-ling 董增齡, ed., *Kuo-yü cheng-i* 正義 (Chengtu: Pa-Shu shu-she, 1985) 18, pp. 6a-7a.

²² *Mao-shih cheng-i* 毛詩正義 (Shih-san ching chu-shu edn.), Mao 235, ch. 16A, p. 6b.

²³ *Li-chi cheng-i* (sect. “Wang-chih” 王制) (Shih-san ching chu-shu edn.) 12, pp. 16a-b. Cf. *Li-chi cheng-i* (sect. “Ch'ü-li” 曲禮) 5, p. 17a.

²⁴ *Li-chi cheng-i* (sect. “Chi-fa” 祭法) 46, pp. 8a-b.

the fact that commoners were indeed permitted to make offerings to their ancestors.

Restrictions upon sacrifice are implicit in the above statements, but we find explicit proscriptions in the *Record of Rites*, which defines a key term for the comprehension of traditional Chinese religion:²⁹

Sacrifice to one to whom you should not sacrifice is called licentious sacrifice (*yin-ssu* 淫祀). Licentious sacrifice brings no blessings.

"Licentious sacrifice," then, means offering sacrifice to gods or spirits not among those permitted according to rank, social status, official place of residence, or agnatic line of descent.³⁰ One example is sacrifice made to the ancestors of others, as mentioned above. But the term is actually broader in scope, referring to the unauthorized worship of a variety of gods, such as Heaven and Earth, nature deities of the mountains and streams, and the tutelary gods of the household. It was precisely this sort of usurpation of sacrificial authority that earned for the Chi 季 family the condemnation of Confucius when they offered sacrifice to Mount T'ai.³¹

These formulations maintained social order in two ways. First, they were sumptuary rules, like the regulations governing types of clothing, carriages, and houses, rules intended to maintain the distinctions between

²⁹ *Li-chi cheng-i* (sect. "Ch'ü-li") 5, p. 18b.

³⁰ The translation of this term has occasioned some controversy. Loewe, describing its use during the Former Han, says that it "... implies practices of an impure or lewd nature, or religious abuses such as sacrifices to deities which were not acceptable. For later periods the term may imply sexual practices, but there is no direct evidence to prove that these were involved in shamanistic exercises of the Han period." Loewe's remark about sacrifice to unacceptable deities comes closest to the mark; the term does not to the best of my knowledge ever refer to sexual conduct. The word *yin*, with its root meaning of overflowing water, often refers to wanton or flagrant sexual conduct, specifically conduct that obliterates social distinctions, but in this phrase, it refers specifically to conduct that overflows (transgresses) explicit limitations of who may sacrifice to whom, how often, and with what sacrificial objects. Thus Stein's "excessive cults" only captures one aspect of the offense, the quantity of sacrificial items, whereas the more essential matter was the identity of the sacrificer and recipient, as shown in the quote from the *Record of Rites* above. "Licentious," with its root sense of taking license (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines it as "lacking moral or legal restraints" and "marked by disregard to the rules of correctness") and its sexual overtones, seems to match the word *yin* most closely. See Michael Loewe, *Ideas of Life and Death: Faith, Myth, and Reason in the Han Period* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), p. 109; and Rolf A. Stein, "Religious Taoism and Popular Religion from the Second to Seventh Centuries," in Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, eds., *Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1979), pp. 77-78.

³¹ *Lun-yü* iii/6; *Lun-yü yin-te*, p. 4; Lau, *Analects*, p. 67.

various strata of society. At the same time they had a pragmatic aspect. One of the instruments of rule in traditional China was the supernatural support, aid, and protection of the gods. To usurp this aid through unauthorized sacrifice was to raid the state's arsenal and threaten it with its own weapons. Heterodox religious behavior in these terms was a species of rebellion.

In spite of explicit regulations, few scholars think that the religious activity of the commoner at that time was in fact restricted to his ancestors. Rather, village and personal sacrifices were directed toward the gods of the household, particularly the god of the hearth, to nature spirits thought to inhabit sacred spots like springs, waterfalls, and mountains in their region, and to the unquiet dead. It was this last category that posed the greatest perceived threat to the state.

The unquiet dead were individuals who had died a violent death, who died away from home, whose bodies were not intact at death, or who left behind no male descendants. Because these ghosts could not receive normal ancestral sacrifice, they wandered the world in search of food. Their liminal status, neither of the living nor among the safe, provided-for dead, gave them numinous power (*ling* 靈). The absence of any effective ancestral sacrifice to them made them available to anyone, even nonrelations. Thus they were a reservoir of unclaimed supernatural power. Today in Taiwan they are worshipped at numerous small shrines under names like Sire-Who-Responds (*yu-ying kung* 有應公) or the Good Brothers (*hao-hsiung-ti* 好兄弟).³² Because they are not integrated into the supernatural bureaucracy, they are seen as having a looser relationship to the established order and are therefore more open to private, self-centered entreaties.³³

The state was obviously concerned that private individuals would have access to this power. During the Chou, the state concerned itself with only the most powerful of these dispossessed dead, usually referred to as *li* 厲.

³² See Lawrence G. Thompson, "Yu Ying Kung: The Cult of Bereaved Spirits in Taiwan," in Lawrence G. Thompson, ed., *Studia Asiatica: Essays in Felicitation of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of Professor Chen Shou-yi* (San Francisco: Chinese Material Resource Center, 1975), pp. 267-77; David K. Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: The Folk Religion of a Taiwanese Village* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1972), pp. 31 ff.

³³ Robert P. Weller, studying the worship of such ghosts in modern Taiwan, comments, "Most gods will not help gamblers or people with illegitimate business requests like prostitutes and gangsters. Ghosts, on the other hand, are desperate. They will grant any request at all."; idem, "Capitalism, Community, and the Rise of Amoral Cults in Taiwan," in Charles F. Keyes, Laurel Kendall, and Helen Hardacre, eds., *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 1994), pp. 143-44.

Ancient kings, feudal lords, and great officers of state who died without posterity were offered sacrifice by the current possessors of that rank.³⁴ During the Han popular sacrifices to the *li* were conducted in autumn. At some point this practice fell into abeyance, but it was revived under the Ming, when the state established altars to the unquiet dead, the *li-t'an* 厲壇, at the metropolitan, commandery, and village levels.³⁵ In this way the state sought to preempt popular sacrifice to these miscreants, but it avoided the unsavory implications of sacrificing to such antinomian figures by making the local city-god the primary recipient of the sacrifice and arraying the tablets and images of the unquiet dead to the east and west of the altar.

The structure of religious practice laid out in these Han-dynasty texts remained the normative model for the rest of imperial Chinese history and is cited repeatedly in government memorials and edicts. The common people were restricted, at least in theory, to worshipping their ancestors and a clearly demarcated group of worthy dead. Officials had a wider range of deities from whom to draw support in their administrative tasks; the emperor and his court monopolized access to the high deities who formed one of the bases of state power. Any religious activity outside these bounds could legitimately be termed heterodox or licentious and suppressed.

In practice, cults or individual practitioners were attacked rather arbitrarily when they were thought to present a threat to the state or when a particularly zealous advocate of state prerogatives came to power.³⁶ Thus, success, in terms of leading large numbers of people to participate in and

³⁴ *Li-chi cheng-i* ("Chi-fa") 46, p. 12b. *Mo-tzu* 墨子 xxxi/31; *Mo-tzu yin-te* 引得, Harvard-Yenching Inst. Sinological Index Ser. suppl. 21 (rpt. Tokyo, 1961), p. 50, records a priest in charge of sacrifices to the *li* who was struck down by a supernatural figure for the impurity of his sacrifices.

³⁵ *Ming-shih* 50, p. 1311. At first sacrifice was offered on the day of the Pure and Bright festival 清明 and on the first day of the tenth month. Later a sacrifice on the day of the ghost festival, the fifteenth day of the seventh month, was added.

³⁶ Kojima argues that licentious sacrifice can be reduced to the worship of gods not in the canon and the worship of gods by unauthorized individuals. This accords well with the interpretation of classical statutes presented above but does not address the question of why such cults were tolerated by the majority of officials. See Kojima Tsuyoshi 小島毅, "Seishi to inshi Fukken no chihōshi ni okeru kijutsu to ronri" 正祠と淫祠福建の地方志における記述と論理, *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō* 東洋文化研究所紀要 114 (1991), pp. 87-213. Oda has shown through an examination of Ch'ing legal codes and proclamations that a variety of religious activities associated with sectarian groups, including scripture recitation and limited vegetarian fasting, was officially tolerated; only those forming seditious groups were to be punished. See Oda Noriko 小田則子, "Shinchō to minkan shūkyō kessha Kakeitei no 'Jakyōsetsu' o chūshin to shite" 清朝と民間宗教結社嘉慶帝の邪教説を中心として, *THG* 88 (1994), pp. 69-84.

support a cult might itself lead to suppression, but the key factor must instead have been the temperament and religious background of the individual official who ordered the suppression.³⁷ We should not rashly conclude that cults were particularly numerous in a given region based on reports that a newly-appointed official destroyed huge numbers of "licentious shrines." These cults must have existed in the area through the tenure of previous officials; such accounts tell us only that the new official was particularly intolerant of popular religion. Similarly, Taoism and Buddhism were occasionally decried but seldom openly attacked because, as I show below, they worshipped independent pantheons that did not overlap with those of the state. Smith's comments on the Ch'ing seem to have held true through most of imperial Chinese history: ". . . [O]n the whole the state displayed remarkably wide latitude in its toleration of other religious and secular idea systems."³⁸

CRITIQUES OF SACRIFICE

Many early religions indicate a transactional mode of sacrificial interaction between the divine and profane. According to Baruch A. Levine, "In mythological religions, gods are usually pictured as requiring sustenance, and the supplying of food and other energizing substances to them was thought to increase their potency, thus rendering them more capable of assisting their worshippers."³⁹ Gray argues that ancient Israelite sacrifice was based upon such an understanding, a relationship especially clear in the votive-offering, wherein a supplicant pledges a certain gift to a deity, to be paid only upon the granting of his request.⁴⁰ The Greeks shared this understanding, as shown by Plato's comment, "Is not sacrifice a gift to the gods, and prayer a request?"⁴¹

³⁷ Hung Mai 洪邁 records one case where the unsanctioned cult that was spared was specifically the largest and most successful of them; *I-chien chih* 夷堅志 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1981) A, ch. 1, p. 2.

³⁸ Richard J. Smith, "Ritual in Ch'ing Culture," in Liu Kwang-ching, ed., *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1990), p. 304. Cf. Oda, "Shinchō to minkan shūkyō kessha," who reaches similar conclusions. But note that during the Ch'ing, basic Buddhist and Taoist practices like vegetarianism and presentation of memorials to the gods were illegal; again, these regulations seem to have been enforced only in rare instances.

³⁹ See Baruch A. Levine's "Prolegomenon," in George Buchanan Gray, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament: Its Theory and Practice* (1925; rpt. New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971), p. xxx.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, esp. p. xxxi.

⁴¹ Plato, *Euthyphro*, 14e-15a.

A reaction against this view of sacrifice because of its implications for the conception of the divine is evident in Judaism. The prophet Hosea relays God's denial that he has need of sacrifice, "[L]oyalty is my desire, not sacrifice, not whole-offerings but the knowledge of God."⁴² The point is made even more explicitly in Psalm 50, ix/13:

I need take no young bull from your house,
No he-goat from your folds;
For all the beasts of the forest are mine
And the cattle in thousands on my hills.
I know every bird on those hills,
The teeming life of the fields is my care.
If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
For the world and all that is in it are mine.
Shall I eat the flesh of your bulls
Or drink the blood of he-goats?

This is a rejection of any conception of the deity that would make him dependent upon man and human ritual actions or that would portray him as less than absolute in his ethical standards.

A similar concern with the import of sacrificial ritual has led many Western scholars to seek a deeper meaning that accords with their refined conceptions of the nature of deity. Thus W. Robertson Smith saw the biblical sacrifice of animals as merely a prelude to their shared consumption by the god and his people, a communion aimed at reestablishing kinship ties with the father-god.⁴³ Hubert and Mauss saw sacrifice as communication rather than communion, an approach to the sacred that served to either bring its blessings or divert its disasters.⁴⁴ Adolf Jensen advocated an even more metaphysical interpretation, seeing in all sacrifice a reenactment of a primordial myth of a divine being who dies or is killed, giving birth to vegetation.⁴⁵ More recently, René Girard has seen in blood sacrifice a

sanctioned expression of violence that, if left unresolved, would rend the social fabric.⁴⁶ Van Baal makes a more nuanced objection. He affirms that sacrifices are essentially gifts, but points out that gifts are not bribes or contracts but rather ritualized interactions conveying messages concerning the relationship of the giver and receiver.⁴⁷ Unbalanced reciprocity is to be expected in exchanges between parties of different power and wealth; the key point is the establishment, affirmation, or amelioration of a relationship between the two parties. Still, van Baal admits that such an unequal relationship was open to abuse, and I argue, below, that in the Chinese case such an understanding is at the root of many of the objections to sacrifice.

Some of the same questions raised by modern Western critics troubled the Confucians. Although sacrifice was at the foundation of the state rituals whose performance was the *raison d'être* of Confucians, many were concerned by its implications. One tack they took was to define sacrificial ritual as a this-worldly activity meant to further the personal development of the sacrificer. Confucius had already expressed reservations about excessive concern with the spirits and the nature of prayer, but few dared go as far as Hsün-tzu, who denied that Heaven spoke through portents or responded to man's actions.⁴⁸ Han Confucianism sought, instead, to make of Heaven an abstract and omnipotent force that rewarded good conduct, including the appropriate performance of ritual, but did not rely upon man. One chapter of the *Record of Rites* ("Li yün" 禮運) downplays the content of the sacrifice in stressing the rite's function of "conveying reverence" 致敬.⁴⁹

Han Confucians also sought to tighten restrictions governing just who could avail himself of sacrificially-obtained power. There had always been implicit standards of ritual purity for the effective performance of sacrifice.⁵⁰ The "Sacrificial Order" chapter of the *Record of Rites* notes that because a

⁴² René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1977).

⁴³ Van Baal, "Offering, Sacrifice and Gift."

⁴⁴ See *Lun-yü* vi/22 and vii/35; *Lun-yü yin-te*, pp. 11, 13, respectively; and *Hsün-tzu* 17.

⁴⁵ *Li-chi cheng-i* ("Li-yün") 21, p. 9a. Cheng Hsün's note to this passage emphasizes that even simple offerings are acceptable because the gods and ghosts feast on the virtue with which the offering is made rather than the actual flavor of the sacrificial viands. A similar view of sacrifice as a primarily symbolic activity may have informed the substitution of the imitation grave goods known as *ming-ch'i* 明器 for real, full-size articles during the Eastern Chou. See von Falkenhausen, "Sources of Taoism," p. 5.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Lun-yü* iii/3; *Lun-yü yin-te*, p. 4; Lau, *Analects*, p. 67: "What can a man do with the rites if he is not benevolent?"

⁴² Hosea 6:6. See also Isaiah 1:11-12; Jeremiah 7:22.

⁴³ W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religions of the Semites: The Fundamental Institutions* (New York, 1899).

⁴⁴ Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice," *L'année sociologique* 2 (1899), pp. 29-138.

⁴⁵ Adolf E. Jensen, *Myth and Cult among Primitive Peoples*, trans. Marianna Tax Choldin and Wolfgang Weissleder (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 1963), pp. 83 ff.

sacrifice must spring from the heart, only a worthy individual 賢者 can fully express the meaning of the sacrificial ritual and hence be assured that things will always go his way 百順.⁵¹ We find explicit moral standards in the second century AD *Discourses of a Recluse* (*Ch'ien-fu lun* 潛夫論) by Wang Fu 王符 (85-163 AD):

Only when there has been no transgression of the principles of virtue will the spirits and gods accept and partake [of the offering]. Only if the spirits and gods accept and partake of the offering will the blessings be great.⁵²

This new view of gods as fulfilling some greater moral purpose than simple self defense and gratification was no doubt related to Han ideas of Heaven as a purposive, moral force that involves itself actively with individual human conduct.

We find the same sort of concern with the moral prerequisites to effective religious activity in the writings of Ko Hung 葛洪, a fourth-century representative of the southern occult tradition.⁵³ He maintained that good moral standing is necessary for the performance of any ritual, including those of alchemy. Moreover, he praised those responsible for the suppression of licentious cults, noting how they had been blessed for their actions, and warned of the gods of minor mountains who were, in his view, not duly appointed deities but mostly "sprites of wood or stone, ancient thousand-year-old creatures, the ghosts of blood sacrifice."⁵⁴

The same concerns about sacrifice are evident in religious Taoism, but they elicited a very different reaction. Arising in the second century AD, Taoism responded to these concerns about morality and sacrifice by fundamentally redefining the relationship between man and god. Taoism

⁵¹ *Li-chi cheng-i* (sect. "Chi-t'ung" 祭通) 49, pp. 1a ff.; Legge, *Li Chi*, p. 236.

⁵² Wang Chi-p'ei 汪繼培, ed., *Ch'ien-fu lun chien* 潛夫論箋 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1979) 6, p. 302.

⁵³ Although Ko Hung is often cited as a religious Taoist, Strickmann has pointed out that in fact his learning is essentially that of the Han New Text Confucians, which survived among early immigrants to the south long after it had been superseded by Mysterious Learning 玄學 in the north. There is no evidence that Ko was ever ordained into the Taoist church nor that he ever participated in the communal rites of that religion. See Michel Strickmann, *Le taoïsme du Mao Chan: Chronique d'une révélation* (Paris: Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1981), p. 103.

⁵⁴ *Pao-p'u-tzu* 抱朴子 (Chu-tzu chi-ch'eng edn.) 4, p. 20.

characterized all the gods of the traditional pantheon as "stale breaths of the Six Heavens" 六天故氣, and associated them with the hells and the earth. They superimposed on this structure three new heavens populated by Taoist gods, pure breaths of the Tao dwelling in astral palaces or microcosmic grotto-heavens far removed from mundane affairs. These new gods required new religious professionals to serve them and the community, men of resolve and impeccable conduct, who could treat with these immaculate deities unashamedly and command the profane spirits to do their bidding. The new deities offered to mankind a fresh dispensation, embodied in what was called the Pure Covenant (*ch'ing-yueh* 清約). This covenant proclaimed:⁵⁵ "The gods do not eat or drink. Priests 師 do not accept monetary compensation." This simple but revolutionary statement overturned the *modus vivendi* with the old gods. Not only were these old gods superseded by new, more exalted and powerful deities, but the new deities could not be propitiated in traditional ways. They responded only to written memorials issued by legitimate authorities, specifically, ordained Taoist priests. Nor could the Taoist priests be induced through bribery to perform rituals for the unworthy. Misconduct was not an offense against a particular god, who could be propitiated and mollified, but an infraction of constant laws enforced by the bureaucracies of the Three Offices that could only be resolved through penance, an enforceable pledge to reform, and the intercession of a trained, professional priest.⁵⁶

Taoists saw the performance of blood sacrifice as a crime punishable by the heavenly tribunal. The fifth-century *Scripture of Divine Incantations Piercing the Abyss* (*Tung-yüan shen-chou ching* 洞淵神咒經) contains the following warning to men of its day:⁵⁷

⁵⁵ The covenant is found in *Lu hsien-sheng tao-men ko-lieh* 陸先生道門科略 (Cheng-t'ung Tao-tsang edn.; Harvard-Yenching Sinological Index Ser. 25, no. 1191), pp. 1b, 8a. According to the commentary at p. 8a, this pact also involved the rejection of drugs and acupuncture in favor of cures through rituals of penance and magical charms and the eschewal of all divination. Cf. *Chen-kao* 真誥 (Harvard-Yenching no. 1010), ch. 14, p. 12a, where a man possessed by demons squanders his possessions on profane gods and exorcists then is cured when he accepts the Pure Covenant of the Great Tao.

⁵⁶ On the legalistic nature of the Taoist reformation, see Angelika Cedzich, "Ghosts and Demons, Law and Order: Grave Quelling Texts and Early Taoist Liturgy," *Taoist Resources* 4.2 (1993), pp. 23-36.

⁵⁷ *Tung-yüan shen-chou ching* (Harvard-Yenching no. 335) 8, p. 9b. Christine Mollier translates a passage with several variants from Pelliot 2365 (cited as 2353); *Une apocalypse taoïste du Ve siècle: Le Livre des Incantations divines des Grottes abyssales* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1990), p. 74.

O, you men of this later age, you do not serve the great Tao. Worse, common men and vulgar priests beat drums and sacrifice to gods, killing pigs, dogs, chickens, and suckling pigs in threes, in meadow and stream summoning the hundred demons, offering cult to gods of the wilds 野神. This is reckless and evil. The gods will not aid [such] men. Their family members will be bound and indicted before the Three Officers, interrogated and tortured with myriad poisons.

There are many other passages condemning gods who subsisted on a sanguine diet, often using the terminology of the state.⁵⁸ There are even examples of the use of state power to impose Taoist orthodoxy on the popular pantheon, as when the Sung emperor Hui-tsung 徽宗 ordered large numbers of local deities elevated to the Taoist rank of Perfected Lord (*chen-chün* 真君) and switched to a pure diet.⁵⁹

It would be wrong, however, to assume a commonality of interest between the state and Taoism in rejecting popular cults. On the contrary, the worship of the traditional gods of the state pantheon is denounced in the same terms.⁶⁰ This break with the state is reflected in an early collection of precepts that specifically condemns other practices associated with the scholar-official class such as writing in cursive script, writing letters, having frequent contact with the emperor or his officials, and studying astron-

⁵⁸ *Discourse on Primal Ether* (*Yüan-ch'i lun* 元氣論; in *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien* 雲笈七籤 [Harvard-Yenching no. 1026] 56, p. 15b) proclaims that: "Those who eat the five flavors and invoke licentious ghosts 淫鬼 will all die a thousand myriad deaths"; *Twenty-seven Precepts of the Forest of Wonders* (*Miao-lin erh-shih-ch'i chieh* 妙林二十七戒; *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien* 38, p. 18a) prohibits "the killing of sentient beings for licentious sacrifice"; *Twelve Precepts of the Scripture of the Conversion of the Barbarians* (*Hua-hu-ching shih-erh-chieh* 化胡經十二戒; *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien* 39, p. 17b), prohibits "licentious sacrifice to evil demons"; *The Supreme Correct and Orthodox Scripture for the Incantation of Demons* (*Tai-shang cheng-i chu-kuei ching* 太上正一祝鬼經; Harvard-Yenching no. 1184, p. 5a) dispatches officers from the Capital Ministry (Tu-ts'ao 都曹) to encamp in the supplicant's home and ride herd on a host of supernatural beings of dubious intent, including demons of stale vapors and bloody victuals." None of these scriptures can be accurately dated, but those quoted in *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien* can be no later than the beginning of the Sung.

⁵⁹ *Sung hui-yao chi-kao* 宋會要集稿 (sect. "Li") 20, p. 14. As noted above, at least one such god, Erh-lang 二郎 of Kuan-hsien, Szechwan, was unhappy on this meager diet and demanded demotion so that he could regain his numinous power from sanguine offerings. See *Chu-tzu yü-lei* 3, pp. 212-13.

⁶⁰ Kristofer M. Schipper, "Purity and Strangers: Shifting Boundaries in Medieval Taoism," *TP* 80 (1994), p. 70.

omy.⁶¹ To the early Taoists, at least, the state, its cult, and its sacerdotal representatives were profane.

A second philosophical objection to sacrifice centers around the moral implications of killing animals. A clear example is found in the mystery religions of ancient Greece. The Orphic school considered the death of any animate being as murder and its members pursued a diet of such natural substances as grains and honey. Strict Pythagoreans also eschewed the consumption of meats.⁶² This same objection is raised in India, where, except in certain Tantric contexts, animal sacrifice has been abandoned under the influence of the doctrine of *ahimsā* – doing no harm to sentient beings.⁶³

Buddhism made a similar distinction. Buddhist deities would accept only offerings of flowers, fruit, and incense. Following Indian models, all of the deities of the state and popular pantheons were considered merely as more fortunate members within the system of rebirth known as the Six Paths. Offerings to them might prompt this-worldly boons but did not advance the individual toward the ultimate goal of nirvana. Further, all collections of Buddhist precepts include the injunction against killing sentient beings.

To the Buddhists then, all sacrificial ritual was evil, misbegotten actions destined to tie the individual, be he emperor or peasant, closer to this world of suffering. It was the violence of the ritual that offended them. An excellent example of this position is the "Declaration to Mount Tai" 檄泰山文, an indictment of the traditional offerings to the Eastern Sacred Peak from the pen of Seng-yu 僧祐 (445-518).⁶⁴ In this work, Seng-yu states that the true god of the Eastern Peak is "the pure *yang* energy of the beginning of spring that nurtures sprouting life" and wonders about the current

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67, citing the "One Hundred Eighty Precepts Proclaimed by Lord Lao" 老君說一百八十戒 in *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien* 39, pp. 12-14a.

⁶² Detienne, "Culinary Practices," pp. 7-8, points out that other Pythagoreans made significant concessions in enforcing this meatless regimen and that they opposed meat-eating in order to define themselves as separate from Greek society as much as to protest against sacrifice.

⁶³ Louis Renou and Jean Filliozat, *L'Inde classique* (1947-49; rpt. Paris: Maisonneuve, 1985) 1, p. 578.

⁶⁴ Seng-yu, ed., *Hung-ming chi* 弘明集 (Taishō daizōkyō edn., work no. 2102), vol. 52, ch. 14, p. 91c. This tract is traditionally attributed to the otherwise unknown Chu Tao-shuang 竺道爽. For its attribution to Seng-yu, see the editorial comments in *Gumyōshū henkyū* 廣弘明集研究 (Kyoto: Kyoto Daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1973-1975), vol. 3, p. 748, n. 1.

carnivorous recipient, "What demon of evil portent is this, what goblin's sprite, who has assumed the Way of the Eastern Peak and passed himself off as a mountain-dwelling spirit, who relies upon the crazed schemes of roaming souls to delude the foolish emotions of the vulgar?" He concludes, "The masses possess compassion and, in accordance with heaven, they do not kill. Yet he slays pigs and sheep and drinks their blood! On this basis, he is surely not a god!" Here one of the most ancient and hallowed of imperial cults is reduced to demon worship.

Confucians, Taoists, and Buddhists could agree in condemning popular cults founded on blood sacrifice, but did so for different reasons. The Confucians saw commoners encroaching upon the prerogatives of the Son of Heaven and the state. With their native skepticism buttressed by classical disclaimers that licentious sacrifice brought no blessings, they railed against the waste of extravagant but pointless rituals. Ultimately, however, they were unable to reject the principle of sacrifice and reciprocity because it was too fundamental to the state and to their role as ritual specialists.

Buddhism and Taoism joined in the condemnation of blood sacrifice, but extended the criticism to both popular deity worship and the state's ritual program. If the condemnation of the state seemed sometimes muted in the discourses of the two faiths when compared to their statements on popular worship, one should recall that there were legitimate reasons to fear state anger. Many Taoist and Buddhist leaders were themselves younger sons of important families, with elder brothers, uncles or fathers in government positions.

What then of relations between China's two great institutionalized religions? Taoism's relationship to Buddhism is complex. Originally Buddhism was understood in China as a variant form of Taoism, and Taoists through the ages have worked to reinforce this view by championing the claim of "Conversion of the Barbarians" that the historical Buddha was just another manifestation of the divinized Lao-tzu.⁶⁵ At the same time, Taoist polemical literature never wholly condemned Buddhism; Buddhism was, in the Taoist view, a perfectly good religion for the Indians, with their over-

weening desires and limited self-control; it was just not the appropriate faith for the Chinese.⁶⁶

Buddhists were more sweeping in their condemnation of Taoism, perhaps because as a foreign faith trying to justify its place within the Chinese world, Buddhism needed to discredit any native alternative to itself, and only Taoism could begin to compete with the religious technology of the Buddhists, including statues, paintings, temples, hymns, robes, scriptures, and ritual program. The Buddhists were incensed by Taoist theories of their origins and by the adaptation of Buddhist terminology and concepts into Taoist scriptures. They were also quick to point out the revolutionary political character of early-Taoist movements and to mutter darkly about half-understood sexual rites. They did not, however, object to standard Taoist ritual praxis.⁶⁷

ACCOMMODATION

Popular cults remained vital, and thus the state, Taoism, and Buddhism each, in striving to share in that vitality, made various accommodations. The state had probably never actually enforced the drastic limits on popular sacrifice enshrined in the earliest codes of sacrifice described above. Mountains, springs, trees, and rivers have always had their gods, as have the hearth and door, and everyone had ancestors who demanded food and service. These cults were part of daily life and must have been tolerated. Still, it was in the state's interest to limit the scope and nature of these nature and tutelary cults, to restrict the growth of antinomian demon worship, and to coopt the more popular of these cults into support of the state and its official ideology.

The ritual canons offered a means to assimilate selectively elements of popular worship. The *Record of Rites* specifically authorizes worship of

⁶⁵ Schipper, "Purity and Strangers," takes essentially this position, but he argues for an increasing alienation from Buddhism that culminates in the T'ang with a virulently anti-Buddhist scripture and a gradual convergence with Confucianism, except in the matter of blood sacrifice.

⁶⁷ Buddhist attitudes toward Taoism are evident in the many anti-Taoist polemics writing during the late-Six Dynasties and early-T'ang periods. These are collected in two works, *Hung-ming chi* 弘明集 (*Taishō* edn., no. 2102, vol. 52), pp. 1-96; and *Kuang* 廣 *Hung-ming chi* (*Taishō* edn., no. 2103, vol. 52), pp. 97-361. Secondary studies of this literature are voluminous.

⁶⁵ On the "conversion of the barbarians" topos, see Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), chap. 6; Ōfuchi Ninji 大淵忍爾, *Shoki no Dōkyō* 初期の道教 (Tokyo: Sōbunsha 1991), pp. 470-84. The earliest reference to this theory is a stele from 166 AD. See Fan Yeh 范曄, *Hou Han-shu* 後漢書 (Peking: Chung-hua, 1974) 30B, p. 1082; Anna Seidel, *La divinisation de Lao Tseu dans le taoïsme des Han*, Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient 71 (Paris: EFEO, 1969), p. 49.

individuals who had performed acts of merit for the local community.⁶⁸

When the sage kings established the sacrifices, if a man had promulgated a legal code for the masses, they sacrificed to him; if a man had died in performance of his duties, then they sacrificed to him; if a man had through his efforts brought stability to the state, then they sacrificed to him; if a man had been able to fend off great calamities, then they sacrificed to him; if he had forestalled major disasters, then they sacrificed to him.

The intended recipients of this status were officials or members of the local elite. Each was to embody a virtue that the state wished to promote. Initially worship of these individuals was the responsibility of the state. Wang Fu speaks of sacrifices to officials and scholars who had benefited the people as being part of the charge of the Son of Heaven and feudal lords.⁶⁹

Through the enshrinement of worthy individuals the state was able to accommodate local religious practices, thereby extending its control into local communities. These authorizations formed a "canon of sacrifice" 祀典, which listed the acceptable cults.⁷⁰ Direct state support was offered to these cults both in the form of funds to erect, renovate, and maintain shrines and in ritual action by the local representative of the state (usually the county prefect), who worshipped at local shrines twice a year in his official capacity. In this way, local nature spirits, dead soldiers, wayward demons and famous sorcerers could all be transformed into exemplary citizens worthy of emulation and their new identity fixed by a temple plaque and official certificate of ennoblement. Such a conferral did not automatically silence all those who conceived of the god differently, but it gave a powerful boost to those of the god's faithful who worshipped the god in a government approved

identity. Long into late-imperial times, the formal definition of a "licentious shrine" 淫祠 was one that "did not conform to the canon of sacrifice."⁷¹

The granting of titles to gods was an ancient practice, beginning at least in the Han, but it is seldom recorded in early historical sources.⁷² There are few detailed records of enfeoffments before the Sung, consequently it has been argued that there was a dramatic increase in conferrals over previous periods.⁷³ We are probably safe in assuming both that ennoblements of gods were much more frequent in earlier periods than the fragmentary record would suggest, and that there was a significant increase in the practice during the Sung.

We are also, I think, justified on the basis of this increased government interest and on proliferating accounts of temple building and miracles, in assuming that popular interest in and patronage of deity cults were increasing during the same period. It was this rising participation in the worship of named gods with local identities, and the economic power it entailed, that drove the religious innovations of this period. As noted above, Taoism, Buddhism, and the state all condemned such cults, although for different reasons. Now, however, each had to come to some sort of accommodation with the political and economic power of these groups. The state's conferral of ennoblements was one such accommodation. It was effective in "taming" many local gods and bending them to the state's interests, but it did have limitations: Since gods rise and fall with their reputation for spiritual efficacy, the state was often left promoting gods the populace no longer cared about and fighting to suppress worship of the new gods deemed most powerful. Further, fundamentalist officials would often try to limit popular worship at officially designated temples, thereby nullifying any gains made in bridging the gap between official and popular religion.

Buddhists were similarly limited in their ability to respond to the growth in popular cults. A small number of popular deities could be accommodated as door gods and temple protectors, but their comparatively low status within the Buddhist hierarchy left their followers unsatisfied.

⁷¹ *Ming-shih* 50, p. 1306.

⁷² For the three centuries of the T'ang dynasty we have only two pages of enfeoffments, recording fourteen conferrals of title; *T'ang hui-yao* 唐會要 (Taipei: Shih-chieh, 1982) 47, pp. 833-35.

⁷³ Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127-1276* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1990), pp. 79-104.

⁶⁸ *Li-chi cheng-i* ("Chi-fa") 46, p. 14b.

⁶⁹ *Ch'ien-fu lun chieh* 6, p. 306.

⁷⁰ Although a canon of sacrifices is often mentioned, it is difficult to determine the specific reference. It certainly involved a list of gods and the places where they were to be worshipped, and perhaps some details of the ritual to be performed. Given the frequent changes to the canon, it seems likely that it was a file of documents rather than a physical book. *Ming-shih* 50, p. 1310, cites the canon of sacrifices in the context of a list: nineteen individuals who worshipped at ten different sites around the empire during the reign of the dynastic founder (1368-98); only one god at one site for the reign of Ying-tsung 英宗 (r. 1436-49). This can only be a partial listing, perhaps representing gods added to the canon during each reign. Gazetteers often have a section titled "Canon of Sacrifices," which records the authorized cults of that area, but this also does not represent the canon itself.

Moreover, the gods first had to be converted to Buddhism and renounce their sanguine diet, thus leaving them beyond the reach of manipulation by the faithful.⁷⁴ There are rare examples of successful integration, such as the appropriation of the Wu-t'ai Mountain cult by followers of Mañjuśrī,⁷⁵ and the creation of new local Buddhist cults like Miao-shan 妙善,⁷⁶ but on the whole, gods adopted by Buddhism remained distinctly subsidiary figures. Kuan Yü 關羽, the Three Kingdoms period general, is the exception that proves the rule.⁷⁷ First raised from the status of local unquiet dead to Buddhist guardian god by a nearby temple, his cult grew far beyond that region and little remained of his previous Buddhist identity in the mature cult. On the whole, Buddhism was unsuccessful in contesting for control of the popular religious arena.⁷⁸ Perhaps the true fusion of popular religion and Buddhism is to be found in the White Lotus-related sectarian groups of later-imperial China. They were consciously syncretic, worshipping Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist gods, yet granted pride of place to the Buddhists and generally abstained from sacrifice and meat consumption.

Taoism also went through a period when, like Buddhism, it tried to convert the profane pantheon from its bloody regimen to a pure diet of merit and mist. The last gasp was in the reign of Sung Hui-tung, who, as mentioned above, converted by proclamation hundreds of popular divinities into Taoist Perfected. It was in this context that the god Li Erh-lang had begged for demotion back to mere "king" because of the loss of his fleshly provender.

⁷⁴ There are rare references to blood-sacrifice within Buddhist monasteries but the practice was apparently too at odds with Buddhist doctrine to become the norm. See the inscription from Ts'ao Hsün 曹勛 cited in Kanai Noriyuki 金井徳幸, "Nan Sō ni okeru shashokudan to shabyō ni tsuite" 南宋における社稷壇と社廟について, in Sakai Tadao 酒井忠夫, ed., *Taiwan no shūkyō to Chūgoku bunka* 台湾の宗教と中國文化 (Tokyo: Fūkyōsha, 1992), p. 191.

⁷⁵ Raoul Birnbaum, *Studies on the Mysteries of Mañjuśrī* (Boulder: Society for the Study of Chinese Religions, 1983).

⁷⁶ On the Miao-shan cult, see Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miao-shan*, Oxford Oriental Monographs 1 (London: Ithaca Press, 1978), and idem, "Miao-shan on Stone: Two Early Inscriptions," *HJAS* 42.2 (1982), pp. 589-614.

⁷⁷ On the cult to Kuan Yü, see Inoue Ichii 井上以智為, "Kan U byō no yūrai narabi ni henshen" 關羽の廟由來並びに變遷, *SR* 26 (1941), pp. 41-51, 242-83; Prasenjit Duara, "Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, God of War," *JAOS* 47.4 (1988), pp. 778-95.

⁷⁸ See the perceptive comments of Bernard Faure on the different approaches of Buddhism and Taoism to local sacred places; "Relics and Flesh Bodies: The Creation of Ch'an Pilgrimage Sites," in Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü, eds., *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1992), p. 156.

There is also evidence from early in church history of a limited accommodation with popular practice. After relating how the Most High had attacked temples and killed demons so that the universe was flushed clean and there were no more "licentious, deviant demons," a Taoist text goes on to list the following approved observances:⁷⁹

The Son of Heaven sacrifices to Heaven, the Three Dukes sacrifice to the Five Sacred Peaks, the feudal lords sacrifice to the [gods of] mountains and streams. The common people sacrifice to their ancestors on the five auspicious *la* festival days (that is, the first day of the first month, the second of the second, seventh of the seventh, first of the tenth, and eighth of the twelfth) and sacrifice to the God of the Soil and God of the Hearth in the second and eighth months.

Even sacrifices to the ancestors, the God of the Soil, or the God of the Hearth on days other than those specified constituted an infraction of the ban on licentious sacrifice. Another text, dating to no later than the tenth century, gives an even more positive assessment of this type of activity. A text titled *Various Yin and Yang Fête Days* (*Yin-yang tsa-chai-jih* 陰陽雜齋日) states that: "On the five *la* days you should always offer cult and make offerings to dead ancestors. This is called 'instructing children' and will bring limitless blessings. All other days are licentious sacrifice."⁸⁰ Thus at this stage only the most ancient of practices, sacrifice to the ancestors and tutelary deities, was permitted, and only on specified days. A positive interpretation was, however, given to them.

In the end a new sort of quasi-Taoist god evolved who combined the characteristics of the Taoist and popular pantheons. An early example is that of the cult to Hsü Hsün 許遜, a fourth-century wonder worker. Schipper has shown that the Way of Pure Brightness had formed around him already in the Tang.⁸¹ Another is the god of Tzu-t'ung, also known as Wen-ch'ang, whom I have studied at some length.⁸² This god began as a flesh-

⁷⁹ *Lu Hsien-sheng tao-men k'o-lieh*, pp. 1a-b.

⁸⁰ *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien* 37, p. 17a.

⁸¹ Kristofer M. Schipper, "Taoist Ritual and Local Cults of the T'ang Dynasty," in M. Strickmann, ed., *Tantric and Taoist Studies: In Honour of R. A. Stein* (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1985) 3, pp. 812-34.

⁸² See my "Expansion of the Wen-ch'ang Cult," in Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory, eds., *Religion and Society in Tang and Sung China* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1993), pp.

eating serpent deity called the Viper, who wielded thunder and made rain. By Sung times he had evolved a human form and a reputation as both a military protector and a prescient oracle. In the late-twelfth century a new identity was claimed for the god as Wen-ch'ang, controller of official careers, through the revelation of a number of scriptures. The new god was Taoist, with recensions of standard Taoist scriptures published under his name and a place in the Taoist heavens; Taoist abbeys played a key role in introducing the cult to new areas. But the revelations also included an autobiography of the god's many lives. There we see him as a Confucian official aiding the duke of Chou and composing poems found in the *Book of Poetry*; he also meets and is enlightened by both Śākyamuni Buddha and Lao-tzu. He functions for much of the biography as a terrestrial god, protecting the inhabitants of his community and accepting their sacrifice. When he summons a group of mountain spirits to aid in the extermination of an aged but powerful tiger spirit, he promises that for their assistance they will receive bloody victuals for thousands of years. His only truly Taoist appointment before his final apotheosis is as the perfected lord of a paradisaical grotto-heaven. This episode precedes his incarnations as local god; he finds the perfected life of a Taoist transcendent restful and enjoyable but unsatisfying because he can make no contribution to bettering the world. Thus in this cult the profane and perfected realms merge seamlessly.

We see this merger of the Taoist and terrestrial pantheons exemplified in a late scripture directed to the epidemic gods:⁸³

The numinous gods of commandery and village are the rulers of men.
The Prefect of the Earth Altar 社令 and God of Walls and Moats will
enjoy bloody victuals a thousand years. The numinous spirits of shrines
and temples all shine resplendently.

Here Taoism has turned from a steadfast opposition to all forms of popular devotion to a willing acceptance of most profane worship as a proper,

45-78; and *A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1994).

⁸³ *Correct and Orthodox Divine Lamp Ritual of the Controllers of Epidemics for the Avoidance of Poisons* (Cheng-i wen-szu pi-tu shen-teng i 正一瘟司辟毒神燈儀, Harvard-Yenching no. 209) 5, p. 5b. The editors of *Tao-tsang i'i-yao* 道藏提要 (Peking: Chung-kuo she-hui k'o-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1991) date this text to the Yuan or Ming, which would accord well with my understanding of the development of beliefs in epidemic gods and the accommodation with popular practice discussed here.

though subordinate, form of religious praxis, and thereby gained control and superintendency of vast portions of the popular pantheon.

It was through such mixed cults, I believe, that Taoists came to assume a sort of custodianship over the popular pantheon. Today, Taoists officiate at rituals for almost any god who is not explicitly Buddhist. They differentiate the profane and perfected pantheons in rituals, placing the profane gods on the south side of the temple, where they gaze upon and worship their Taoist betters, and communicating with the two groups of divinities in different terms. When the Taoist priest addresses the terrestrial spirits or performs acts related to them, he removes a metal flame from atop his cap, symbolizing his descent into the status of popular priest. But he sees no harm in performing profane rites, as long as they are clearly differentiated, and the populace is unaware of the ritual distinctions he makes in the ceremony.

And so we see that sacrifice has, in a sense, prevailed. For nearly two thousand years the state has tried to restrict sacrifice while Taoism and Buddhism vied to eradicate it entirely. Each produced reasoned arguments and heartfelt pleas in favor of its position, each suggested alternatives to the blood-thirsty traditional pantheon, but ultimately each failed to alter popular behavior significantly. The sacrifice to the gods was too similar to permitted ancestral sacrifice to be dismissed as inefficacious or deviant, and the pattern of personal interaction known as reciprocity was too deeply rooted in Chinese society to be eliminated. Instead the state, Taoism, and Buddhism all came to a grudging accommodation with the popular pantheon, finding ways to sanction the piety they could not prohibit. All these forces joined in creating the syncretic religious world of late-imperial and modern China.