

Ritual Roots of the Theatrical Prohibitions of Late-Imperial China

During Qing times, the central and provincial organs of government imposed more than fifty prohibitions on theatre.¹ Some of the prohibitions were directed at specific groups and special occasions. For example, bannermen were forbidden to watch, sponsor, or perform operas until nearly the end of the dynasty; and theatrical performances were proscribed during periods of imperial mourning. A comprehensive discussion about the specifics of these bans is beyond the scope of this work.² Instead, I am concerned with the religious roots of prohibitions of dramatic performances during festivals, birthdays of deities, spring and fall sacrifices, and at temple fairs; and the evolution of the use of “songs and dances” and drama to please the deities.

In what follows, I attempt to trace the prohibitions of such theatrical performances in late-imperial China to a historical tradition of interdictions against popular religious activities known as *yinsi* 淫祀 (variously: improper, excessive, licentious, or heretical sacrifices),³ which had been condemned by the state since antiquity. Although the link between ritual and theatre has already been established,⁴ the historical

¹ Colin Mackerras counted 55 documents in Wang Xiaochuan 王曉傳, *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* 元明清三代禁毀小說戲曲史料 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1958), pp. 88–138. See Colin Mackerras, *The Rise of the Peking Opera 1770–1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 35. Wang expanded the collection of prohibitions and republished the book under the name of Wang Liqi 王利器, *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981).

² For an analysis of the various prohibitions against Chinese drama during the Yuan, Ming and Qing, see Fan Pen Chen, “Ethnicity and Gender in Prohibitions Related to the Performing Arts in Late Imperial China,” *CHNOPERL Papers* 25 (2005), pp. 35–85.

³ Terry Kleeman prefers the translation, “licentious sacrifice,” since “licentious” with its root sense of taking license and its sexual overtones matches the word *yin* mostly closely. Terry F. Kleeman, “Licentious Cults and Bloody Victuals: Sacrifice, Reciprocity, and Violence in Traditional China,” *AM* 3d ser. 7.1 (1994), pp. 185–211.

⁴ See e.g., Piet van der Loon, “Les origines rituelles du théâtre chinois,” *JA* 265.1–2 (1977), pp. 141–68; Barbara Ward, “Not Merely Players: Drama, Act and Ritual in Traditional China,” *Man* 14.1 (1979), pp. 18–39; Tanaka Issei 田中一成, *Chūgoku engeki shi* 中國演劇史 (Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1998), trans. as *Zhongguo xijushi* 中國戲劇史 (Beijing: Beijing guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, 2002); Wang Shenghua 王勝華, “Zhongguo xiju de zaoqi xingtai” 中國戲劇的早期形態, in Hu Ji 胡忌, ed., *Xishibian* 戲史辨 (Beijing: Beijing xiju chubanshe, 1999), pp. 132–61; and the series of books on rituals published by Minsu Quyi in Taiwan.

interface between the two has yet to be studied. This paper examines the history of these theatricals as a representation of and as offerings to entertain the deities, and demonstrates why the theatrical pageantry for officially sanctioned deities came to be banned along with that for illegal, heretical cult festivities. Tracing it to shamanic activities among local popular religious festivals, I show that the practice of pleasing the gods and goddesses with musical and dramatic performances does not seem to have been found in Buddhist monasteries, Daoist observatories, and urban temples during the Tang and Song dynasties. The songs and dances developed with ever increasing refinement in the capitals mainly for mundane, human audiences during the Tang and Song, but from Song onward they became entertainment for local deities in rural temples.

PROHIBITIONS DURING LATE-IMPERIAL CHINA

Prohibitions against theatrical performances and temple festivals were promulgated sporadically throughout the time period of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. The repeated injunctions by the state underscore the authorities' abhorrence of the activities as much as their tremendous popularity. During the Yuan, for example, an edict dated 1317 announced the prohibition of temporary market gatherings, singing performances, and temple festivals. According to the edict, a similar order had already been promulgated three months earlier, but had gone unheeded.⁵ Two years later, the same ban was issued again, revealing that the law was still being violated and that the forbidden activities were now being conducted at night.⁶ A separate order was dispatched during the following month, highlighting the above problem once again.⁷

Extravagance, wastefulness, violence, disorder, and sexual impropriety were frequently given as reasons for these prohibitions.⁸ A 1728 edict proscribing theatrical performances at temple festivals accused "powerful local ruffians" of using sponsorship of theatrical performances as excuses to "solicit contributions to fatten themselves."⁹

⁵ *Yuan dianzhang* 元典章, j. 57, "Xingbu" 刑部 19, "Jinjuzhong 禁聚眾," in Wang, *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao*, p. 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

⁸ The reasons given by Mackerras include governmental distaste for the gathering of large crowds; the occurrence of bad or illegal practices such as gambling, sexual crimes, and robbery during these occasions; their use by rebellious elements as a means of meeting and propaganda; the suspicious nature of many of the Manchu rulers; and the financial difficulties such events imposed upon the general populace. See Colin Mackerras, *Rise of Peking Opera*, pp. 36-39.

⁹ *Da Qing Shizong Xianhuangdi shilu* 大清世宗憲皇帝實錄, j. 67, in Wang, *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao*, pp. 36-37.

Another prohibition, a local one against theatrical performances, especially during religious festivals, claimed that “time was wasted, work neglected, and the vegetables and wheat in the fields were trampled to total ruin.”¹⁰ The edict was probably not widely promulgated, but even officials not aware of the prohibition denounced the practice. As one official noted,

My people in the Suzhou region are totally drained of their resources, yet they continue to indulge in extravagant customs. Come every fourth and fifth month each year, they build high stages to put on theatrical performances, after parading their deities. They choose the best troupes, and the spectators converge as if the entire nation were in a state of madness. Women also arrive, hand in hand, painted with heavy makeup and wearing showy clothes. They squeeze and push each other until the stage collapses and arms and legs are broken. The day after [the show], deaths resulting from fights wind up in the courts. This is also when people gamble in groups and commit sexual wrongdoings. This custom is certainly in dire need of prohibition and complete abolition.¹¹
 我蘇民力竭矣，而俗靡如故。每至四五月間，高搭台廠，迎神演劇，必妙選梨園，聚觀者通國若狂；婦女亦靚妝炫服，相攜而集，前擠後擁，台傾傷折手足；又毆鬥致命者日見告；更有成群賭博，乘間姦淫，俱在此時：風俗之最宜禁戢者。

RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF DRAMA AND THE DENIGRATION OF LOCAL CULTS

Before demonstrating the similarity between governmental condemnations of theatre and those directed at local cult ritual activities since antiquity, I would like to trace operatic performances at festivals to early thaumaturgical ritual dances. Dramatic rituals manifested in religion through two means: first, the performance of a shamanic, or spirit-medium, type of drama, in which priests or actors enact visitations by deities (or they themselves embody and represent spirits/deities who bring blessings upon the sponsors and audiences. Second is the enactment of dramatic performances to please the deities.

The first type was found in *wu* 巫 (shamanic), *nuo* 儺 (exorcist), and Daoist rituals, and was performed during antiquity by male and female

¹⁰ *Tangzi yishu* 湯子遺書, j. 9, “Su Song gaoyu” 蘇松告諭, in Wang, *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao*, p. 99.

¹¹ Lu Wenheng 陸文衡, *Qiang’an suibi* 菴庵隨筆, j. 4, “Fengsu” 風俗, in Wang, *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao*, p. 286.

shamans (shamanesses, shamankas). It survives today in the ritual playlets presented prior to the main performances in many regional operas played by human actors and in shadow plays. By the Ming dynasty, ritual playlets (in which deities bestowed blessings upon the audience) typically preceded the main performances of *chuanqi* 傳奇 operas.¹²

The second type of liturgical role played by drama may also have been performed originally by shamans. Zhou-era records suggest that shamans danced both in order to embody the spirits and to please them. The character *wu* 巫 for shamans and the character *wu* 舞 for dance are one and the same on oracle bones, which contain the earliest Chinese writing.¹³ One of the main functions of female shamans was to use theatrical performance to entice the deities. The second-century AD dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 describes *wu* as women who could serve the spirits and induce the deities to descend through dances. *The Rites of Zhou* 周禮 describes one of the responsibilities of the female shaman as dancing during the performance of the rain sacrifice.¹⁴ According to the *Nine Songs* 九歌, the “Lord Within the Clouds is enticed to descend from his residence by a female shaman, purified by bath and heavily doused with fragrance. She dances for him, as he hovers about her... .”¹⁵ Designed primarily to please the deities, such shows eventually became the main part of local festivities in late-imperial China. Unlike the ritual opening numbers of the first type, these main plays tended to be secular in content. Puppets and human actors eventually displaced the shamans in their functions both as mediums and performers for the deities.

One might consider the denigration of traditional actors and actresses a result of the fate suffered by their predecessors, the shamans. Even though the ancient Shang kings carried out shamanic functions,¹⁶

¹² Zhang Geng 張庚 and Guo Hancheng 郭漢城, *Zhongguo xiqu tongshi* 中國戲曲通史 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiqu chubanshe, 1980) 2, p. 10. For ritual skits preceding plays at temple festivals, see Ch’iu K’un-liang, *Les aspects rituels du théâtre chinois* (Paris: Collège de France, 1991); and Wang Songshan 王嵩山, *Banxian yu zuoxi* 扮仙與作戲 (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1988).

¹³ The trances or ecstatic state achieved by shamans and mediums were frequently referred to as “dances” by observers. See Cheu Hock Tong, *The Nine Emperor Gods: A Study of Chinese Spirit-Medium Cults* (Singapore and Kuala Lumpur: Times Book International, 1988), p. 79. Xiao Yaotian 蕭遙天, *Minjian xiju congkao* 民間戲劇叢考 (Hong Kong: Nanguo chubanshe, 1957), pp. 55-57.

¹⁴ See Deborah Sommer, ed., *Chinese Religion: An Anthology of Sources* (New York, Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1995), p. 29.

¹⁵ Livia Kohn, *Early Chinese Mysticism: Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1992), p. 83.

¹⁶ Kuang-chih Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual: The Path to Political Authority in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1983), p. 45.

the status of shamans was much diminished by Han times. With the secularization of the role of the Chinese rulers – the fact that they now performed only minimal priestly functions – both shamans and their activities eventually came under attack by officialdom. They were accused of cheating people and deluding the masses,¹⁷ and condemned by the literati for presiding over *yinsi*, the offering of heretical sacrifices.¹⁸

The *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), the compilation of which is attributed to Confucius, defines *yinsi* as “the offering of a sacrifice to [a divinity] to whom one has no business in sacrificing” and concludes, “this kind of improper worship does not bring blessings.”¹⁹ Such local cult sacrifices typically included sacrifice of domestic animals, drumming, and dances and singing by male and female shamans that was directed toward deities.²⁰ The prohibitions resonate with the injunctions against theatrical festivities during late-imperial times. According to a 228 AD imperial edict castigating and prohibiting unofficial thaumaturgical activities,

The temples would partition off an area and cause the performance of [proper] sacrificial rites and rituals to be neglected. Inviting female shamans and male sorcerers, they cause the performance of unrighteous/lascivious and improper acts. Killing animals and beating drums, [the shamans] dance; and actors and entertainers perform lewdly and indecently. How can this be the means by which one reveres the gods and sages?²¹ 廟隔非所，致令祠典寢浸，禮章殄滅，遂使女巫妖覘，淫進非禮，殺生鼓舞，倡優媒狎，豈所以尊神明，敬聖道者也。

Indeed, music, dance, and animal sacrifices invariably accompanied popular religious activities and were repeatedly condemned by

¹⁷ Kenneth DeWoskin, trans., *Doctors, Diviners, and Magicians of Ancient China: Biographies of Fang-shih* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1983), p. 38.

¹⁸ Lin Fushi 林富士, *Handai de wuzhe* 漢代的巫者 (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1988), pp. 31, 34.

¹⁹ *Liji zhengzhu* 禮記鄭注, “Quli 曲禮” (SBBY edn.), j.2, p. 28a; see also 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 and London: Yale U.P., 1979), pp. 77–78; Kleeman, “Licentious Cults,” p. 194.

²⁰ See Stein, “Religious Taoism and Popular Religion,” p. 63, and Guizhou sheng minzu shiwu weiyuanhui wenjiaochu 貴州省民族事務委員會文教處, ed., *Zhongguo nuowenhua lunwenxuan* 中國儼文化論文選 (Guiyang: Guizhou sheng minzu chubanshe, 1981), p. 20. Rolf A. Stein lists five characteristics: 1. excessive and ruinous expenditures; 2. prayers, animal sacrifices, songs, and dances; 3. mediums who give oracles; 4. rites of expiation to cure illnesses; 5. pantheon of minor uncoded local gods; Stein, “Religious Taoism and Popular Religion,” p. 57.

²¹ “Gaozu ji, shang” 高祖紀上, *Weishu* 魏書 7 (in *Ershiwu shi* 二十五史 [Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe], vol. 3), p. 2188b.

literati in both official and unofficial documents for the financial burdens they caused.²² Laws prohibiting “improper sacrificial offerings” and aimed at destroying unofficial cults were apparently repeated with little effect. A Wei-dynasty empress-dowager is also reported to have eliminated “all the various improper sacrifices” found when she made a pilgrimage up a mountain.²³ Numerous works by and about Daoist masters, for example, *Baopuzi* 抱朴子, also describe the persistence of local cults despite all the prohibitions.²⁴

Confucians, Daoists, and Buddhists equally condemned popular cults founded on “blood sacrifice” (sacrifices that involved the slaughter of animals), but for differing reasons. The Confucians regarded it as an encroachment by commoners upon the prerogatives of the Son of Heaven and the state, which had the right to sacrifice to nature and canonized deities; they railed against commoners’ rituals as wasteful and pointless. During the Six Dynasties, Daoists decried deities of the traditional local cults as “stale breaths 故氣,” and superseded them with a pantheon of Daoist gods who did not eat or drink, consuming instead a “pure” diet of merit and mist. Buddhists objected to the sacrificial rituals based on the moral implications of killing animals, and consequently considered the sacrifices to be evil. Despite all this, however, popular cults remained so vital that they were eventually coopted by the state and by Buddhist and Daoist establishments – and vice versa.²⁵ Daoism, in particular, eventually absorbed the popular pantheon, and its priests came to officiate at many popular religious rituals.²⁶ The cooptation of local cults by the state – through conferral of titles and legitimizing local deities – is central to this study. The significance of it to prohibitions of theatrical performances at festival celebrations will be discussed, below.

By the Sui dynasty, many local religious celebrations had evolved into lavish spectacles. According to the report of a respected official, Liu Yu 柳彧, the common people rushed in droves to witness amusements during a Lantern Festival on the fifteenth day of the first month. Liu condemned the waste of resources and memorialized the throne concerning its prohibition. Objecting to the unseemly appearance of

²² Huan Kuan 桓寬 (1st c. BC), *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論, in *Baizi quanshu* 百子全書 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1998) 1 (*pian* 29), pp. 130–1.

²³ “Huanghou liezhuan” 皇后列傳, *Weishu* 13, pp. 2210B.

²⁴ Ge Hong 葛洪 (284–364), *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1993) 9, pp. 4715–17; and Stein, “Religious Taoism and Popular Religion,” pp. 53–81; and Miyakawa Hisayuki, “Local Cults around Mount Lu at the Time of Sun En’s Rebellion,” in Welch and Seidel, eds., *Facets of Taoism*, p. 85.

²⁵ Kleeman, “Licentious Cults,” pp. 197–205.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 210–11.

the female impersonators and men wearing masks of beasts, he also found the acts too loud and bizarre, the costumes too gaudy, the music too raucous, and protested that male and female audiences of all classes mingled freely.²⁷ The use of masks might have been a vestige of the *danuo* 大儺 Great Exorcism rituals performed during the Han.

This is one of the earliest records of a local religious activity describing how the common people entertained themselves during a liturgical performance. The audience Liu described was obviously enjoying itself, without heeding the Confucian precepts of gender and class segregation. Moreover, the content was unseemly and the behavior rowdy, a type of complaint that continued on for centuries. The disapproval of local cults and their “licentious sacrifices” became so intense that during the Tang dynasty, Di Renjie 狄仁傑 (630–700) destroyed more than 1,700 *yinci* “licentious shrines” during his tenure south of the Yangzi River.²⁸ A magistrate by the name of Li Kan 李堪 eliminated 315 improper shrines in 1003.²⁹ In 1111, Northern Song emperor Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1101–1126) had 1,038 *yinci* destroyed in the capital of Kaifeng.³⁰ *Yinci* proliferated particularly in the south, and continued to be attacked by avid officials well into the twentieth century.

To sum up, wastefulness and slaughter of precious domestic animals are the most common elements that we see in prohibitions and denunciations of cults,³¹ and grievances about the use of economic surplus in nonproductive ways continued on into late-imperial China. The ancient shamanic ritual practices, with their “blood sacrifices” and shamans singing and dancing to drum beats, have also survived in the shamanic rites among the minority tribes around the peripheral regions of China.³² The shamanic practices and liturgical masked dances called *nuoxi* 儺戲 of southwestern China are likely descendants of ancient rites,

²⁷ “Biography of Liu Yu” 柳或傳, in *Suishu* 隋書 62 (*Ershiwu shi* 二十五史 [Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe], vol. 5, p. 3426A).

²⁸ Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (ca. 1254–ca. 1323), “Zaci yinci” 雜祠淫祠, *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考 (SKQS edn. [Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983]), vol. 90, j. 612, p. 189. On Di Renjie, see David McMullen, “The Real Judge Dee: Ti Jen-chieh and the T’ang Restoration of 705,” *AM* 3d ser. 6.1 (1993), pp. 1–41.

²⁹ *Zhiyuan jiahe zhi*, *Ganshui zhi*, *Sanshan zhi* 至元嘉禾志, 澗水志, 三山志, in *Song Yuan difang zhi congshu* 宋元地方志叢書 (Taipei: Dahua shuju, 1980), vol. 12, j. 9, p. 7718.

³⁰ Ma, “Zaci yinci” 雜祠淫祠, p. 189.

³¹ See Tang Wenbiao, *Zhongguo gudai xijushi* 中國古代戲劇史 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1985), p. 161.

³² The killing of chickens and pigs is still part of religious rituals in southwestern China and Fujian. E.g., Guizhou sheng, ed., *Zhongguo nuowenhua lunwen xuan*, p. 267. Human sacrifice to deities was also once practiced, to a much lesser extent; see Ma Duanlin, “Zazi yinci” 612, pp. 194–95.

such as early shamanic dances and the Great Exorcism masked dance processions of the Qin and Han courts.³³

EVOLUTION OF THE USE OF THEATRICAL SHOWS AS OFFERINGS

Since the operatic theatrical form did not develop until the Southern Song, one can only refer to performances for deities prior to the Song as “songs and dances.” When singing and dancing developed into a more sophisticated form of entertainment, they naturally came to be employed for the enjoyment of the gods and human audiences alike. But before analyzing this leap to the use of professional theatrical performers instead of female shamans, I would like to examine some basic differences between popular cults and the two officially sanctioned religions – Daoism and Buddhism. Certain religious rites changed while others persisted and evolved. As mentioned earlier, Daoism eventually coopted aspects of popular religion and vice versa; Daoist priests, rather than shamans, became the keepers of many popular religious temples and shrines and officiators of communal popular religious activities.

As a patriarchal religion, supposedly superior to the local cults of the populace, Daoism condemned popular religion as a “cult of demons” (*yaodao* 妖道), referring to male and female shamans as sorcerers and sorceresses, and abhorring its “blood sacrifices.”³⁴ Indeed, in medieval China, Daoism defined itself as generally in opposition to popular religion. Even so, by the fourth to sixth centuries, so many elements had flowed back and forth that followers of popular religion were considered adepts of the Daoist church,³⁵ and to this day Daoist rituals are imbued with shamanic elements.³⁶ The patriarchal nature of institutional Daoism eventually resulted in the dominance of men as officiators of popular religion.³⁷ The prominence of Daoist priests in local cults may have also been instrumental in the employment of

³³ For a translation of the Great Exorcism, see J. J. M. De Groot, *The Religious System of China* (1892; rpt. Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe 1969), p. 974.

³⁴ Stein, “Religious Taoism and Popular Religion,” pp. 55–56. On different views concerning the distinction of Daoism from popular religion, see Chi-Tim Lai, “The Opposition of Celestial-Master Taoism to Popular Cults during the Six Dynasties,” *AM* 3d ser. 11.1 (1998), pp. 2–10.

³⁵ Stein, “Religious Taoism and Popular Religion,” p. 59.

³⁶ Kristofer M. Schipper, “Sources of Modern Popular Worship in the Taoist Canon: A Critical Appraisal,” in Hanxue yanjiu zhongxin 漢學研究中心, ed., *Minjian xinyang yu Zhongguo wenhua guoji yantaohui lunwenji* 民間信仰與中國文化國際研討會論文集 (Taipei: Hanxue yanjiu zhongxin, 1994) 1, p. 18.

³⁷ Women’s roles in Daoism became less public with time. They seem to have stopped serv-

professional theatrical troupes that displaced the theatricals of female shamans.³⁸

By comparison, Buddhism embraced popular religion to a lesser degree, and popular religion was accordingly less coopted by it. It also appears not to have had a tradition of using theatricals to entice deities. Theatricals for attracting visitors were, however, observed in Buddhist temples as early as the Northern Wei dynasty in the early 500s. Yang Xuanzhi's 楊銜之 (d. 555?) *Records on Monasteries in Luoyang* (*Luoyang jialanji* 洛陽伽藍記) notes that dance performances frequently accompanied vegetarian feasts sponsored by a nunnery named Jinglesi 景樂寺. Female musicians played flute and strings to the lingering singing voices and flowing dancing sleeves of the performers. Song and dance was not the only attraction of this nunnery, however. Rare birds and animals populated the nunnery grounds; and popular spectacles included magic tricks (such as, skinning donkeys and throwing them into wells, and the instant harvesting of newly-planted seeds of jujubes and melons).³⁹ Indeed, until the Song dynasty (when entertainment quarters began to flourish in the capital cities), Buddhist temples seem to have been the centers of entertainment.

Although musical theatricals and some of the "variety shows" (*baixi* 百戲) performed at Buddhist festivities during the Tang dynasty influenced aspects of full-fledged theatre (such as the Nanxi 南戲, which originated during the twelfth century),⁴⁰ they were not properly operatic, theatrical performances. In addition to skits, acrobatic acts, and songs and dances, temples also presented expositions of transformation texts (*bianwen* 變文) at temple festivals.⁴¹ The variety shows and theatricals seem to have been performed mainly to attract potential donors, not to please Buddhist deities. A monk by the name of Wen Shu 文淑 renovated his temple using the donations garnered from telling "lewd

ing as officiators of rituals after the Tang and it became increasingly difficult for them to become teachers and transcendents of the Dao. See Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn, *Women in Daoism* (Cambridge: Three Pines Press, 2005). For the difficulties encountered by a woman before she could become a Daoist adept, see "A Woman Adept Attains the Way," in Sommer, ed., *Chinese Religion*, pp. 205–10.

³⁸ See K. M. Schipper, "Taoist Ritual and Local Cults of the T'ang Dynasty," *Melanges chinois et bouddhiques* 22 (1985), pp. 812–32.

³⁹ Mao Jin 毛晉 (1599–1659), ed., *Luoyang jialanji*, cited in *Jindai mishu* 津逮秘書 (Shanghai: Boguzhai, 1923), vol. 10, j. 127 (*pian* 1), pp. 18a–b.

⁴⁰ Mei Sun, "Exploring the Historical Development of *Nanxi*, Southern Theater," *CHINO-PERL Papers* 24 (2002), p. 38. On *nanxi*, see also Liu Nianci 劉念茲, *Nanxi xinzheng* 南戲新證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986).

⁴¹ On transformation texts, see Victor Mair, *T'ang Transformation Texts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1989).

and vulgar 淫穢鄙褻” tales supposedly derived from sutras.⁴² Significantly, monastic accounts found at Dunhuang do not include performances among the diverse offerings made at temples. Items listed as offerings included: cash, wheat, millet, oil, soya, hemp, cloth, haircuts, white silk, brocade, oxen, gold, embossed silver dishes, copper, rams, flowers, rice, canonical texts, statues and incense burners.⁴³ Apparently lacking the tradition of shaman-oriented performance, Buddhist establishments used performances to lure donors instead. The fact that singing and such were not performed directly for buddhas, arhats and bodhisattvas is not surprising, given the transcendent nature of these deities. Indeed, the numerous, old theatrical stages found in Shanxi were not built in Buddhist monasteries until the middle of the Ming era. Even then, they were rare and only built at the insistence of local lay worshippers.⁴⁴

Performances by male and female shamans must have continued, however, at religious festivals of the general populace. As late as the Song dynasty, the poet Lu You 陸游 (1125–1210) wrote two “Songs on the Festival of a Deity” (“Saishen qu” 賽神曲) that described dancing by female shamans in front of local shrines, accompanied by singing, drumming, and flutes.⁴⁵ Along with economic development during the Song (when urbanization and merchant and cultural activities reached their height), festivities such as the birthday celebrations of efficacious gods became increasingly elaborate spectacles in the capitals and other prosperous localities. Offerings made to the deities were far more sophisticated than the ancient “blood sacrifices” and shamanic and masked performances. This likely reflected the influence of the entertainment provided at Buddhist temples during the Tang, as described, above.

⁴² Zhao Lin 趙璘 (Tang era), “Yinhualu” 因話錄, quoted in Zhang and Guo, *Zhongguo xiqu tongshi* 1, p. 32.

⁴³ Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia U.P., 1993), pp. 200–10.

⁴⁴ Feng Junjie 馮俊傑, “Shanxi shenmiao yu xitai diaoyan xiaojie” 山西神廟與戲臺調研小結, *Minsu quyi* 128 (2000), pp. 221–22. The earliest theatrical stages date from the Song and Jin dynasties. Other temples which did not feature theatrical stages until the mid-Ming include shrines within mausoleums and temples housing state recognized gods such as Confucius and deities of antiquity such as Nüwa 女媧 and Fuxi 伏羲. By the Qing dynasty, theatrical stages became such a standard part of temple compounds, that even those honoring Confucius and those in Buddhist and Daoist monasteries featured at least music and dance platforms; *ibid.*, pp. 208–9. For description of a rare stage in a Buddhist temple, see Qiao Zhongyan 喬忠延, *Shanxi gu xitai* 山西古戲台 (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 2004), pp. 58–60.

⁴⁵ Lu You, “Jiannan shigao” 劍南詩稿, in *Wenyuange Siku quanshu neilian wangban* 文淵閣四庫全書內聯網版, *jibu* 集部, *biejilei* 別集類, “Nansong Jianyan zhi Deyou” 南宋建炎至德祐, *j.* 16 and 29.

Four Song sources list birthday offerings to deities. According to Wu Zimu's 吳自牧 *Record of the Millet Dream* (*Menglianglu* 夢粱錄; preface either 1274 or 1334), offerings during a birthday festival for the Divine God of the Sacred Mountain of the East (*Dongyue shengdi* 東嶽聖帝) included incense, rare fruits, exotic flowers, delicate pastries, a colorful painting, and a "money banner 錢幡" from which a large sum of money was obtained.⁴⁶ Birthday offerings for the God of Cishan 祠山 (a particularly efficacious deity who had supposedly consumed "blood sacrifices" for more than 1,300 years), were even more impressive. His gifts consisted of: a pavilion of valuable treasures, vessels, jewels, pearls and jade, exquisitely made boots and shoes, scarves and hats, exotic flowers and fruits, rare birds and water animals, elegantly made pastries, and colorful stone carvings. Of particular interest is the fact that, besides these material goods, he also received intangibles such as a horse parade, presentations by the orchestra and dance guilds; even the state-sponsored Music Instruction Office (Jiaoyuesuo 教樂所) had its musicians perform in the temple hall "as offerings 呈獻,"⁴⁷ which may have been intended for the delectation of the deities. But two other lists suggest that it may have been otherwise.

Zhou Mi's 周密 (1232–1308) *Affairs of the Martial Grove* (*Wulin jiushi* 武林舊事) from the same period describes similar gifts, but with performances from an even more extensive group of guilds for the birthday of a deity named Zhang Wang 張王. They include performances of: variety shows (*zaju* 雜劇) by the Red and Green Guild (*feilü she* 緋綠社); ball-kicking by the Reaching the Clouds Guild (*qiyun she* 齊雲社); singing (*changzhuan* 唱賺) by the Cloud Hindering Guild (*eyun she* 遏雲社); lyrics by the Literary Guild (*tongwen she* 同文社); athletics by the Wrestling Guild (*jiaodi she* 角觝社); recitals by the Pure Music Guild (*qingyin she* 清音社); archery by the Championship Guild (*jinbiao she* 錦標社); show by the Guild of Tattooed Bodies (*jinti she* 錦體社); a baton event by the Heroic Guild (*yinglue she* 英略社); storytelling by the Guild of Vigorous Eloquence (*xiongbian she* 雄辯社); entertainment by courtesans of the Kingfisher Brocade Guild (*cuijin she* 翠錦社); shadow plays by the Painted Leather Guild (*huige she* 繪革社); hairstyling and cleaning by the Clean Hair Guild (*jingfa she* 淨髮社); different calls performed by the Beautiful Pitch-Pipes Guild (*lühua she* 律華社); and tricks (*cuonong* 撮弄) by the Cloud Cunning Guild (*yunji she* 雲機社).⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Meng Yuanlao 孟元老 et al., *Dongjing menghualu* (*waisizhong*) 東京夢華錄 外四種 (rpt. Taipei: Guting shuwu, 1975), pp. 150–51.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁴⁸ "Shehui 社會" *Wulin jiushi* 武林舊事, in *ibid.*, p. 377.

Meng Yuanlao's 孟元老 *The Eastern Capital: A Record of the Dream of Hua* (*Dongjing menghualu* 東京夢華錄; preface dated 1147) mentions a similar array of presentations on the birthday of a deity at the Daoist Temple of Spiritual Protection (*Shenbao guan* 神保觀): staff climbing, fancy footwork, rope walking, boxing, drums and clappers, "little songs, "cock-fighting, joke-telling, parodies of country bumpkins, riddles 商謎, impromptus 合笙, comic feats of strength, comic boxing, wastrel comedy, fruit hawking 叫果子, imitation of sounds, broad-bladed knives, dissembling as spirits, stick-drum, shields and staves, and magic tricks.⁴⁹

Of the above, the variety shows, singing, music recitals, performances by courtesans, and shadow plays are antecedents of the operatic theatrical traditions that would develop later to new heights. These shows, however, were apparently not offered as entertainment for gods, since the offerings also included activities that deities could not conveniently participate in: hair grooming, riddles, and games. The offering of haircuts finds consonance with a Dunhuang record of a similar donation to a Buddhism temple during the Tang dynasty.⁵⁰ In his *Recording the Splendors of the Capital City* (*Ducheng jisheng* 都城紀勝; preface dated 1247), Naideweng 耐得翁 says that performers used music to assemble people to guess at riddles.⁵¹ Naideweng refers to the "impromptu games" in the same section as the riddles. According to Wilt Idema's and Stephen West's translation, "[it is] like 'setting tasks/following tasks' in that each has a particular task."⁵²

Since it is highly unlikely that the deity would be groomed by the Clean Hair Guild during the festival or actually participate in a riddle-solving or task game, we can safely assume that offerings were performed to attract spectators. It seems that such offerings were made in the spirit of fundraising, following practices found in Buddhist temples and monasteries of the Tang.⁵³ Rather than performing to delight the deities, the performers probably entertained visitors to the birthday festival and donated the moneys collected to the deity. Indeed, the shows

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 44–48. I use the translation in Wilt Idema and Stephen H. West, *Chinese Theater 1100–1450: A Source Book* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1982), p. 46, and added Chinese characters to items of significance to this discussion.

⁵⁰ A Dunhuang manuscript records the donation of five haircuts for a construction project; Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*, p. 203.

⁵¹ Meng, *Dongjing menghualu* (*waisizhong*), p. 98. See Idema and West, *Chinese Theater*, p. 81, for translation of the thirteen items of different types of riddles and techniques.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Medieval temples and monasteries such as the Jinglesi mentioned earlier may also have hired dance troupes to attract wealthy patrons.

performed during religious festivities may have continued even after communal sponsorship of theatrical performances became a common practice in rural localities. The remains of a stone carving dated 1301 at a temple named Fengbo Yushimiao 風伯雨師廟 at Gushan 孤山, Wanrong county 萬榮縣, Shanxi, commemorates the raising of 100,000 copers (10 *guan* 貫) for the temple by a *zaju* 雜劇 theatrical troupe led by a certain Zhang Dehao 張德好 from Pingyangfu 平陽府 in the north.⁵⁴

Given the fact that during late-imperial China, theatrical shows came to be widely accepted as the main form of entertaining deities – moneys were collected from the populace or provided by the community to hire operatic troupes for this purpose – scholars tend to assume that shows performed at temples were invariably made to delight or entice gods 愉悅神佛.⁵⁵ Although this may have been true during late-imperial China, there is, however, no evidence that Buddhist temples had the tradition of drawing down deities or delighting them through dance.⁵⁶ The situation seems to be more complex during the Song. In and around the capital cities, the temples seem to have followed the practice of Buddhist monasteries in that performances were used to attract potential donors, with the exception that guilds and others donated their services. In the countryside, however, stages were built in temples with the express purpose of presenting shows – possibly hired from the cities – to please the deities.

Meng Yuanlao's *Dongjing menghua lu* on the capital city of the Northern Song mentions a platform (*lutai*) in his description of the birthday celebration at the above-mentioned Daoist Temple of Spiritual Protection, indicating that a platform (露台 *lutai*) at the god's temple was used to hold and exhibit all the material offerings, but no permanent stage was built for the musical, magical, and variety shows.⁵⁷

The building of permanent stages in temple compounds gained popularity since the Song, and were constructed mainly for the purpose of entertaining the resident deities. Known as “music pavilions” (*yue-ting* 樂亭) and built as early as the eleventh century in rural localities,⁵⁸ these covered stages resemble the theatrical stages associated with most

⁵⁴ Ding Mingyi 丁明夷, “Shanxi zhongnan bu de Song Yuan wutai” 山西中南部的宋元舞台, *WW* 1972.4, p. 55.

⁵⁵ Liao Ben 廖奔 and Liu Yanjun 劉彥君, *Zhongguo xiqu fazhanshi* 中國戲曲發展史 (Taiyuan: Shanxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003), p. 156.

⁵⁶ Even during mid- and late-imperial times, Buddhist temples may have preferred to sponsor theatrical shows such as the famed Mulian 目連 plays with exorcist and didactic functions.

⁵⁷ Meng et al., *Dongjing menghua lu wai sizheng*, pp. 47–48.

⁵⁸ Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127–1276* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1990), p. 74; Idema and West, *Chinese Theater*, pp. 89–90; Jiang Bin 江彬 et al., *Wu Yue minjian*

temples during late-imperial times and were built in full view of the presiding deities on temple grounds. They may evolved from the platforms (*lutai*) at palaces and Daoist temples during the Han and Tang for the “descent of deities 降神之所.”⁵⁹ All the temple stages built from 1005 to the fourteenth century were at temples for local deities rather than in the temples of Buddhist or Daoist monasteries.⁶⁰ Also of significance is the fact that the early temple stages of Song and Yuan times were erected without regard to the convenience of their human spectators. The majority of them stood alone in the middle of the courtyard facing the main hall that housed the statue of the deity. Human spectators stood anywhere in the courtyard during the performances. It was not until Ming times that the stage became a coherent part of the building structure, connected to other parts of the temple buildings and providing proper covered seating space for human spectators.⁶¹

Hence, the practices of making offerings to deities in order to raise funds for the temples and to entertain the gods seem to have co-existed during the Song and Yuan periods. The similarity to the Han and Tang “descent of deities” platforms and later stages built in temple compounds expressly to perform shows to delight the deities also suggest that this practice survived mainly in the countryside. As popular religion became more male dominated, theatrical arts, developed and refined in the cities, came to displace the singing and dancing of female shamans in rural localities.⁶²

Human actors’ performances were not the only theatrical arts presented to the deities. Zhu Yu 朱彧 (1048–ca. 1102), describes the sponsoring of a puppet show (marionettes performing skits not yet in the form of operas) as offerings to gods in southern China. Although the villagers obviously enjoyed the shows, they paid for the entertainment primarily to please the gods from whom blessings were sought.

xinyang minsu 吳越民間信仰民俗 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1992), p. 347. For a description of two surviving Yuan-era *yueting* stages in Linfen 臨汾, Shanxi, see Huang Zhushan 黃竹三, “Liangzuo xiongwei de Yuandai xitai” 兩座雄偉的元代戲臺, *Daya shuangyuekan* (June 2000), pp. 74–77. See also, Liao and Liu, *Zhongguo xiqu fazhanshi* 2, pp. 137–49.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 138–39.

⁶⁰ Idema and West, *Chinese Theater*, p. 89. According to Feng, “Shanxi shenmiao,” while Buddhist monasteries traditionally omitted the building of theatrical stages within their temple compounds, some Daoist observatories with closer links to popular religion featured stages while others did not from the Song-Jin to early Ming.

⁶¹ Liao and Liu, *Zhongguo xiqu fazhanshi* 2, pp. 178–80.

⁶² Interestingly, a Yuan painting collected by Baoning Temple of Youyu county, Shanxi, groups together the souls of the following categories of people: shamans, shamanesses, musicians, and opera singers 巫師神女散樂伶官. See Liao Ben, *Song Yuan xiqu yu minsu* 宋元戲曲與民俗 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1989), pp. 234–35.

Also such they [the worshippers of deities in Jiangnan] use puppets to amuse the gods. They call the job [act] of the exorcist doing a play. Whenever there is a troupe, they allow them to put up several tents for plays. At the time of the religious procession, they perform music and manipulate puppets. At first they burn spirit money and incense to pray. It is just like worshipping a god. When they perform, there are dirty jokes that cause the crowds to laugh. Anything is liable to happen. The villagers gather to observe and to drink. When they become intoxicated, they get in fights.⁶³

This early use of puppet shows to amuse the gods in the Lower Yangzi may explain the preferential treatment given to marionettes during religious festivals in Fujian and Guangdong. During such occasions, it has been established that puppet shows had to precede the human actors' operas.⁶⁴ The populace must have believed that local deities enjoyed the same kinds of entertainment, such as lewd jokes, as they themselves did.⁶⁵ This tradition of offering to the deities what the populace found most entertaining also helps to explain the adoption of operatic performances, oftentimes with romantic and lascivious contents, into religious functions.

By the Ming dynasty, operatic performances prevailed during festivals, and the celebrations frequently included elaborate parades as well. No amount of expense was considered too large for such religious activities, a point totally incomprehensible to some officials. One official describes the elaborate pomp of a theatrical production for a local temple festival soon after Wokou pirates had wreaked havoc along the nearby coast.⁶⁶

⁶³ *Pingzhou ketan* 萍州可談 3, p. 13a; trans. Hansen, *Changing Gods*, p. 74 (quoting verbatim). Chen Chun 陳淳 (1159–1223), one of Zhu Xi's 朱熹 favorite students, also described and proposed the prohibition of the communal hiring of puppet and human actor troupes for harvest celebrations. Sichuan daxue guji zhengli yanjiusuo 四川大學古籍整理研究所, ed., "Shang Fusicheng lun yinxi" 上傳寺丞論淫戲, in *Beixi xiansheng daquan wenji* 北溪先生大全文集, as printed in *Songji zhenben congkan* 宋集珍本叢刊 70 (Beijing: Xianzhuang shuju, 2004) 47, p. 274.

⁶⁴ Cai Qiguo 蔡啓國, "Zhongguo chuantong juchang zhi gui ju yu jinji: Chuanju" 中國傳統劇場之規矩與禁忌, 川劇, *Minsu quyī* (1986), vol. 40, p. 87; Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1993) pp. 50–51; and my own field research in Lufeng 陸豐, Guangdong.

⁶⁵ Deities of local cults tended to have been nature and animal spirits, immortals and ghosts (Feng, "Shanxi shenmiao," p. 202) with tastes and morals most likely closer to the masses than to the elites.

⁶⁶ Although referred to as Japanese pirates, some were in fact of Chinese and other nationalities. See So Kwan-wai, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China During the 16th Century* (East Lansing: Michigan State U.P., 1975).

In the year 1590, several towns leased horses for the price of two or three hundred pieces of cloth, and had actors parade the streets wearing bright dragon robes and high boots decked with head-dresses, gauze hats studded full of gold, pearls, and kingfisher ornaments, in the same manner as that of top graduates. The three whips they used were made of pearls costing more than a hundred taels of silver. To these they added some thirty to forty prostitutes who paraded as persona from the plays *Guafu zhengxi* (*The Widows March West*) and *Zhaojun chusai* (*Zhaojun Leaves for the Borderland*). The beauty of their display was overwhelming. Other items such as the colorful pavilions, banners, drums, and military weapons were of such refinement that I cannot describe them all. The streets and bridges were all covered with cloth in case of rain. Gentlemen and commoners vied to take their families there to watch. Boats for visitors and boats for carrying horses congested the rivers. It was precisely what one would call “the entire nation was in a craze.” This went on for four or five days in each town, costing a thousand taels of silver each day.⁶⁷ 至萬曆庚寅各鎮賃馬二三百匹，演劇者皆穿鮮明蟒衣靴革，而襍頭紗帽滿綴金珠翠花，如扮狀元遊街，用珠鞭三條，價值百金有餘；又增妓女三四十人，扮為寡婦征西、昭君出塞色名，華麗尤甚；其他彩亭旗鼓兵器，種種精奇，不能悉述。街道橋樑，皆用布幔，以防陰雨。郡中士庶，爭擎家往觀，遊船馬船，擁塞河道，正所謂舉國若狂也。每鎮或四日或五日乃止，日費千金。

REASONS FOR PROHIBITING LOCAL CULTS AND THEATRICAL FESTIVITIES

Yinsi, and the condemnations of them, continued into the twentieth century. But commencing with the Yuan dynasty, promulgations, in language similar to prohibitions of heretical cults, specifically enjoined the sponsoring of theatrical performances. Akin to the pre-Tang injunctions against activities related to “licentious sacrifices,” the prohibitions in late-imperial China were directed at the disorder, wastefulness and lewdness associated with theatrical shows at community-sponsored festivals. Significantly, the reasons given for banning local cults during the first millennium AD were now used also to prohibit festival theatricals during the second millennium. If theatrical performances had only been presented during the festivities of illegal cults, prohibiting the latter would have sufficed. But this was obviously not the case. The authori-

⁶⁷ Fan Lian 范濂, *Yunjian jumuchao* 雲間據目抄, j. 2, “Jifengsu” 記風俗, in Wang, *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinhui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao*, p. 93.

ties found it necessary to prohibit both “licentious cults” and theatrical shows sponsored during sanctioned religious festivities.

The reason for this expansion to include even the legal deities may lie in the shift in state policy towards local cults since the Song dynasty. Emperors from the Qin dynasty onwards had awarded titles to mountain deities when they performed sacrifices to earth and heaven on mountaintops, but few records of enfeoffments of local deities exist before the Song. Only fourteen references for conferals of title to local deities during the Tang dynasty can be located.⁶⁸ Starting from the eleventh century, however, the Song government routinely granted titles or added local deities to its register of sacrifices.⁶⁹ As many as ninety-one titles were awarded in Huzhou alone during the Song.⁷⁰

Local elites had to apply to the government through their presiding officials for a local cult to be included in the register of sacrifices. Exact canonization procedures were then carried out by other officials to ascertain the efficacy and power of the deity to benefit the people. The government’s rewarding of deities in an attempt to harness their power also provided a way for local officials to obtain favor with local elites (upon whom magistrates, sheriffs, and registrars depended to keep order).⁷¹ The increased government interest in harnessing the power of local cults (both literally and economically), and proliferating accounts of temple building and miracles suggest a rising participation in the worship of local gods. Terry Kleeman suggests that the economic power these religious activities reflected drove the religious innovations of the period.⁷² One might consider the use of theatrical performances for the entertainment of the gods as one such innovation. As a result, large numbers of previously illegal cults became officially sanctioned and began to sponsor theatrical performances to entertain deities.

Accordingly, the prohibitions against theatrical activities during religious festivals were a consequence of the proliferation of local cults legalized by the state since the Song. Other factors compounded the explosion in the number of officially canonized local deities. According to Michael Szonyi’s study in Fujian, numerous clans reshaped,

⁶⁸ *Tang huiyao* 唐會要 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1982) 47, pp. 833–35.

⁶⁹ Hansen, *Changing Gods*, pp. 80–81. See also Jiang Zhushan 蔣竹山, “Song zhi Qingdai de guojia yu cishen xinyang yanjiu de huigu yu taolun” 宋至清代的國家與祠神信仰研究的回顧與討論, *Xinshixue* 8.2 (1997), pp. 191–206.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁷² Kleeman, “Licentious Cults,” p. 207.

manipulated, and re-presented their local cults to resemble those that were officially sanctioned.⁷³

During the Ming dynasty, attempts at local order, communities were presided over by *she* 社 altars under the protection of the god of the altar. The deities and their altars hosted the fall and spring rites, and were funded by the government. By the mid-Ming, however, a widespread consensus in elite discourse reveals that this official religious system had fallen apart.⁷⁴ According to Michael Szonyi, “the simple and dignified *she* 社 altars within the local communities had fallen into disuse and were replaced by lavish enclosed temples to deities who had not received official sanction, with the communities putting on *extravagant and wasteful rituals* (italics mine).”⁷⁵ This displacement of the official deities by unauthorized local cults was accomplished through manipulation of the latter by local clans to present them as *she* altars.⁷⁶ Highly significant too is the common people’s desire for relief from the monotony of their lives, through extravaganzas aimed at pleasing the deities with the best entertainments possible during festivals.

By late-imperial times, numerous local cults gained legitimacy, and others (not recognized by the state) were reshaped to present themselves as official local *she* altars. Consequently, many deities for which extravagant rituals were organized were, in fact, recognized as legal; religious activities honoring such deities could not technically be forbidden as *yinsi*. The rowdiness, dissipation and wastefulness associated with their temple celebrations, which invariably included theatrical performances for the deities’ (and the local population’s) entertainment, were abhorred by the state and some officials.⁷⁷ Since many of the cults were no longer deemed to be *yinsi*, the authorities could only attack and prohibit the elaborate theatrical performances dedicated to the gods.

⁷³ See Michael Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship: Lineage and Descent in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2002).

⁷⁴ See Kenneth Dean, “Transformation of the *She* (Altars of the Soil) in Fujian,” *CEA* 10 (1998), pp. 19–75, 22–29, and 33–41.

⁷⁵ Szonyi, *Practicing Kinship*, p. 178.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 179–96.

⁷⁷ Not all officials acted upon the prohibitions. Some condoned the activities while others actively participated in the building of stages at local temples and the sponsoring of theatrical shows for the deities. See Feng Junjie 馮俊傑, ed., *Shanxi xiqu beike jikao* 山西戲曲碑刻輯考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002). Also, the main target seems to have been extravaganzas associated with local cults. Theatrical performances sponsored by clans and official ceremonies, and religious types of plays featured at Buddhist and Daoist monasteries were excluded from the injunctions.

CONCLUSION

This study links the plethora of injunctions against theatrical performances at festivals to prohibitions of “licentious sacrifices” of local cults. The theatrical performances of late-imperial China and the ancient songs and dances of shamans during local cult religious activities both sought to propitiate and induce blessings through enticing and entertaining the relevant deities. Both types of performances were criticized by orthodox Confucians for wasting economic surplus and for their licentious content. In tracing the development of theater, which somewhat replaced the entertainments of predominantly female shamans, one finds discontinuities along with the above continuities.

Originally under suspicion from the state and from Daoism and Buddhism, aspects of local cults were eventually coopted. They may have tried to elevate their status by such cooptation, but eventually rituals associated with “licentious sacrifices,” such as the use of songs and dances to delight the gods, prevailed. Given the emphasis on asceticism by the persona of the Buddha, as well as by bodhisattvas, arhats, and Daoists, not surprisingly Buddhist and Daoist monasteries during the Tang seem not to have treated their deities to entertainments the way worshippers of local cults had always done for their hedonistic gods. Shows seem to have been used to lure potential donors to Buddhist and Daoist temples rather than to delight the gods. This trend seems to have influenced the practice found in the capital cities during the Song at festivals for celebration of the birthdays of local deities. Offerings were given of both material goods and intangibles such as services and shows performed to attract crowds and donations. However, this development seems to have occurred mainly around the Song capitals. In rural areas, songs and dances by either female shamans or actors and actresses continued to delight deities. By the mid-Ming, theatrical shows were not only sponsored for festivals honoring local deities but occasionally also at some Buddhist and Daoist monasteries.

As local cults were influenced by patriarchal Daoism and as theatrical arts developed in the urbanized capital cities of the Song and the Yuan, female shamans were displaced by opera singers as entertainers for the enticement of local deities. Permanent performing stages were built on temple grounds for shows sponsored to please the gods. Contemporaneous with this development during the Song was the broad canonization of cult deities by the state. Additionally, local cults not sanctified by the state were manipulated to resemble legally sanctioned cults. Hence, in late-imperial China a plethora of religious activities

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related to officially sanctioned local cults proliferated. Since these cults were now deemed legal, the government was no longer able to prohibit them. Hence, the prohibitions targeted instead the sponsorship of the theatrical performances which invariably accompanied religious festivals and represented the extravagance, disorder and lewdness once associated with the “licentious cults.”