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Resident Specialists and Temple Managers in Late Imperial China

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Abstract: This article deals with the religious specialists (Buddhists, Taoists, spirit-mediums) who were hired during the late imperial period to live permanently within temples and provide regular services there. A temple did not absolutely need resident religious specialists to operate properly on a regular basis (temple leaders could instead invite specialists to perform rituals during festivals), and most did not have one. Among the temples that could afford to hire a temple manager, some temple leaders chose not to hire anyone; others chose to employ a cleric (Taoist or Buddhist), called *zhuchi* 住持, and otherswhile yet others chose to employ a lay manager, called *miaozhu* 廟祝. This article uses inscriptions, legal documents, and narrative sources, this article to describes the variety of such relationships between lay leaders and hired resident specialists, and discusses the reasons --- , social, economical, and theological --- , behind such choices. It examines the ritual roles, contractual rights and duties, and patterns of recruitment and succession amongof employed *zhuchi* and *miaozhu*. It argues that the basic patterns of relationships and contractual agreements between lay leaders and their hired managers formed a repertoire of social know-how that could be found throughout China, as documented by instances of very similar contracts and regulations from different parts of China regions. *Zhuchi* and *miaozhu* idioms, embedded in a legal and contractual framework, were part of a China-wide repertoire of temple management, put to use in different ways in each local system and each individual temple community.

Key words: temple managers, Buddhists, Taoists, *zhuchi* 住持, *miaozhu*.

明清廟宇的常駐專家

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摘要：這篇文章主要研究明清受僱常駐於廟宇以提供一般儀式服務的神職人員（包含僧人、道士及靈媒）。一座廟並不一定需要（而且大多數並沒有）一個常駐的專家才能正常運作（廟方主事人員可以在節慶時才僱用這種專家來執行儀式）。有些廟宇主事人員選擇不僱用任何人，有的則可選擇僱用具神職身份（僧人或道士）的專家作為「住持」，或是不具神職身份的「廟祝」。本文以碑文，法律文書及其他敘事資料（筆記等）為主，說明俗家主事及所僱用的宗教專家之間的各種關係，並討論促成雙方關係的社會、經濟及宗教方面的原因。本文檢視這些住持及廟祝在儀式中的角色、合約上的權利義務、以及繼任方式。本文認為這種俗家主事及僱用之經營者之間的雙邊關係及合約協議的模式是全國普遍的，在中國各地所找到的案例中都可見到非常相類似的合約及規定。這種具有法律和契約性質的住持與廟祝行業，不僅傳承了中國廟宇的管理經驗，且能因地制宜調整其經營模式。

關鍵詞：廟宇經營者，僧人，道士，住持，廟祝。

This article¹ is part of a larger project that aims towards a book-length essay on the social history of the late imperial and modern (16th to 21th century) Chinese religious specialists. This project intends to shed some light on the working of the modern Chinese religious system, seen through the perspective of those responsible for transmitting the multi-faceted knowledge and authority required for its functioning. It is deliberately comparative within the Chinese cultural world—and so is this article, that does not explore in detail one local case or one regional system, but compares on each point of the argument data from all over China.

Late imperial China was characterized by a remarkable variety of religious specialists, providing liturgical and spiritual services. Even if, for the purpose at hand, we put aside the Muslim *abong* 阿洪 and Christian priests, who do not belong to Chinese religion proper, the variety of specialists was quite impressive: it included Buddhists; Taoists; Confucians; spirit-mediums; diviners; leaders of sectarian movements; and ritual specialists/musicians. These religious specialists were interrelated by competition/cooperation relationships on the field, as well as more rhetorical relationships whereby some specialists defined their own identity in contradistinction to others (one such well-known relationship is that between Taoists and spirit-mediums). The very rich ritual and spiritual life found in all quarters of Chinese society was organized around a division of ritual and spiritual labor, but this division was highly localized, being negotiated in each village or community, and was also in constant flux as some specialists sometimes took over the roles of others.

Many types of religious specialists worked primarily for individuals or families, and were not much engaged with the building and management of temples (which I define for my purpose here as the most encompassing category of built-up sites with a consecrated deity and a regular cultic activity). This article deals with those specialists who were hired to live permanently within temples and provide regular services there. I distinguish this situation from occasional services, such as when a Taoist, a Buddhist, or a spirit-medium is invited to perform a ritual within a temple on a particular occasion. While the list of such resident specialists is shorter than the array mentioned above, it is still quite large, and allows for situations where temple leaders had a choice between different types of specialists to employ.

Throughout late imperial China, temples could be divided into two broad categories:

1) Buddhist or Taoist monasteries and cloisters. In these institutions, where clerical rules were followed, the clerics were fully in charge; they usually managed or oversaw subscriptions and fund-raising and decided on rituals and other activities to be conducted. Lay involvement, individual or collective, was under the authority and supervision of clerics. I am not discussing this category in the present article;

2) Temples to local saints/gods, that constitute our object here. Some of these were owned and run by Buddhist or Taoist clerical lineages (*fapai* 法派, *zongpai* 宗派) or by entrepreneurial spirit-mediums, and most were owned and run by lay communities

¹ I am very grateful to Ken Dean for his help with exploring the Fujian inscriptions that provide an important part of the source base for this article. The two anonymous reviewers for the journal made very useful comments, and I have attempted to follow as many of their suggestions as possible.

(territorial communities, lineages, guilds, congregations, etc.). Among the latter, some hired religious specialists on a contractual basis, but most did not. Overall, it seems safe to say that most temples throughout China did not have resident religious specialists. The distinction between temples with or without resident religious specialists is straightforward. On the other hand, in the case of temples inhabited and managed on a permanent basis by religious specialists, the difference between temples owned by the specialists themselves (clerical lineages, individual spirit-mediums) and those owned by lay communities hiring the religious specialists is usually difficult to make, as ownership rights were often rather hazy.

The owner of the temple was the family, or community, or institution that was responsible for the last (re)building, hence possible changes in ownership during a major rebuilding. "Owner" should be qualified; as any religious property was inalienable by law² (making them rather similar to Western trusts or Muslim *waqf*), ownership concerned the right of use only, not the right of sale. This right of use was exercised by the leaders of the family, or community, or institution (henceforth "temple leaders"), a position referred to by many different terms in different contexts, including *miaozhu* 廟主, *shanzhu* 山主, *luzhu* 爐主, *dongshi* 董事, *huisou* 會首, etc.

A temple did not absolutely need religious specialists to operate properly on a regular basis, even though in some areas it was considered necessary to have a clerical ritual performed at inauguration and/or at regular intervals. Most temples could not afford to have a resident specialist. Among those who could, some chose to, and other chose not to.

Besides, many of the more affluent temple communities chose to employ a temple manager. Two broad categories can be defined: either this manager is a resident cleric (Buddhist or Taoist) and s/he³ is called *zhu* 住持, or s/he is not a cleric, and is then called *miaozhu* 廟祝. In both cases, historical sources as well as current dictionaries and reference works define the job of a temple manager as the overseeing of the temple's worshipping activities, *si xianghuo* 司香火, and physical condition (cleaning, repairs, watching against theft, enforcing temple regulations, etc.). While this definition is always exact in the more general sense, the precise roles and activities of temple managers vary along many different configurations: it is the detail and variety of such relationships between temple managers and the temple community and leaders that is really interesting, and which I hope to describe here. I would like to explore what kind of persons worked as temple managers, on the basis of what competence, and with what status and relationship with the temple community.

My approach is to gather evidence from different local systems and individual temples throughout China and, while noting specifics, look for the commonalities. My ongoing research has convinced me that situations in individual temples are informed by local religious culture as well as China-wide repertoires of shared idioms and social practices.

² The law was explicitly mentioned in *Lingyun baodian xiangdeng chantian beiji* 靈雲寶殿香燈產田碑記 (*Xinghua* #198, dated 1739).

³ I use gender-neutral terminology here because in some part of China, female clerics formed a substantial part of the religious personnel in temples.

In Chinese religion, I explore both unity and diversity, even though the former is emphasized here. I see the necessity for both localized case studies (as those presented in the other contributions in this volume) and more abstract analyses of the common larger repertoire. In this perspective, I pay particular attention to the terminology, classical and vernacular, for describing situations in the temples, while keeping in mind that the same words have different meanings at different periods and in different local systems. Many of these words were embedded in a legal framework (that by definition worked China-wide) of state control over temples, and a classical vocabulary for describing certain roles in temple life. Such an approach can certainly not account for the staggering variety of organization and division of labor found in late imperial and modern Chinese temples, but it can, I hope, provide a sense of common patterns.

There were and still are geographical variations in the patterns of temple management and clerical employment in late imperial China. First, clerical geography was very uneven, with areas of dense Buddhist and Taoist presence, and others of much lower density.⁴ Second, some local traditions (notably in northern China) tended to favor clerical management and others tended to be wary of it, and to protect the privileges of lay temple leaders. Third, all of these patterns changed with time, as the twentieth-century removal of clerics from the local religious landscape and reorganization of temple life and division of religious labor was more thorough in some areas (again, notably in North China) than in others. The detailed study of such variation needs to be undertaken; it is not my topic here, as I intend to show that, despite their different orientations, the various local systems shared a common repertoire, and that the very same situations and issues could be observed in Peking, Suzhou, Quanzhou, or the Sichuan countryside (even though they might be more or less common or typical here than there). For this reason, I back up each point of my description of temple management practice by examples drawn from different locales. In other words, I intend to document the common China-wide repertoire of temple management practices that can form the background of more focused studies on local variation. I do not discuss the frequency or rarity of the different types of temple employment in each local system (this would require a different methodology from the one used here) but I point to what existed in at least a few well-documented cases.

The sources I draw on to are extremely varied, and deliberately so; while archival or epigraphical documents (notably from Peking, Shaanxi, Suzhou, Sichuan, Guangdong, Fujian, and Taiwan) shed light on formal and legal arrangements between temple communities and religious specialists, such as contracts or records of lawsuits, narrative accounts, including novels and anecdotes, provide information on more day-to-day aspects of these relationships, as well as relevant discourses, critique, and representations among the literati and, less often, ordinary folks. Last but not least, present-day observations by myself and other scholars complete the evidence.

1. Buddhist and Taoist temple managers

⁴ Goossaert, "Counting the Monks."

Originally a Buddhist term for a steadfastly devoted adept, *zhubchi* became the standard term for a leader of a clerical community, that is, an abbot, during the late Tang Chan reformulation of clerical organization. It was hereafter quickly adopted among Taoist communities in a similar sense. By the Song, *zhubchi* appeared frequently in monastic contexts, and began to be used to refer to the clerical manager of a temple as well.

In late imperial times, *zhubchi* referred to a cleric, Buddhist or Taoist, managing a religious institution, to the exclusion of any other kind of religious specialist. Whereas in formal contexts (such as archival documents or inscriptions), resident temple clerics were as a rule named *zhubchi*, narrative sources sometimes, but not necessarily, preferred more colloquial terms, such as temple's [Buddhist] cleric, *miaoseng* 廟僧, or Taoist, *miao daoren* 廟道人. Another term that was colloquially used by both the clerics themselves and the laity, is *dangjia* 當家, "head of household," or "boss."

As far as temples are concerned, since we are not discussing monasteries here, *zhubchi* worked either in a temple that belonged to the cleric's own religious lineage, or in a temple owned by a lay community who had hired the cleric as temple manager. In both cases, clerical temple managers had the right to be supported by some (not necessarily all⁵) income from the temple's endowments and adopt and train disciples, one of whom would later succeed to his/her master's position (the number of generations since the first *zhubchi* is occasionally mentioned in inscriptions or other temple documents). The temple manager's rights were balanced by his/her duties: s/he was responsible for the physical maintenance of the building of the temple and its landed property, as well as its ritual purity; notably, s/he could not sell or mortgage any part of the temple's property, an offence by law that was systematically sanctioned by magistrates when and if a suit was filed.

Both Ming or Qing magistrates and Republican officials were serious about the principle of inalienability of temple property and never upheld its usurpation by a cleric or any individual. The fraudulent sale or mortgaging of temple lands and other property (trees, notably) was the most common kind of offense found in judicial records associated with clerics and temples. Such fraud happened quite frequently and many clerics managed to get away with it, but, when brought to trial, it was always punished. The bad cleric who sells temple property is a stock figure in inscriptions and narrative literature.⁶

However, there was a major difference between the two types of situation (member of the religious lineage owning the temple vs. cleric hired by a lay community), that is, in the latter case, the temple leaders, acting as representatives of the owning community,

⁵ In *Chongjian Songbo lin Guanyin tang ji* 重建松柏林觀音堂記 (*Quanzhou* #1102, dated mid-eighteenth century), the Buddhist clerics in the temple (who were not there originally, pointedly says the inscription, but were later invited), receive 80% of the rent from the buildings owned by the temple. Similarly, in southern Shaanxi, a donor sets up an endowment, half of which is for sustaining a Buddhist manager to be hired, and the other half for running a cemetery: *Li Zongrong chushe bei* 李宗榮出舍碑 (*Ankang beishi*, 83-84, dated 1778).

⁶ *Jiji bei* 紀績碑 (*Quanzhou* #896, dated 1903) lauds a good Buddhist cleric who does not trust other clerics with managing temple property!

were the employers of the clerical temple manager. Clerics, masters in their own house in the first case, were mere employees in the second. Their position varied considerably according to the degree to which the temple community (the owner) was institutionalized. Religious lineages did hardly interfere with a manager, because there existed no lineage organization looking over members, even though other lineage members may bring a lawsuit against a cleric ruining a temple. By contrast, strongly organized lay communities with elected community leaders who kept hold themselves of all the temple deeds and funds and personally controlled the clerics left the manager little freedom. Indeed, a community employing a clerical temple manager, if unhappy with his/her services, could sack him/her and replace him/her with another cleric of its choice, or not replace him/her at all if they decided to work without a resident cleric.

Even short of fraudulent sale, immoral behavior (usually described with the extremely vague and unspecific expression *bushou qinggui* 不守清規)⁷ prompted temple leaders to sue their manager. In such cases, magistrates usually followed the lay patrons' opinion and judged against the clerics. Over-assertive clerics who initiated trials against lay members of the community also often found themselves sacked and secularized, *huansu* 還俗.⁸ The expelled cleric was forever forbidden to return to the temple,⁹ and the temple community was free to hire a new manager of its choice if it wished.

Very similar cases of sacked temple managers occurred in many parts of China. In a 1757 inscription from Quanzhou, the temple manager was accused by temple leaders of improper behavior and expelled by the magistrate; a new *zhuchi* was later invited.¹⁰ A magistrate in Sichuan went further: after several such cases of temple property appropriation by resident clerics, he sacked them, and entrusted the property deeds to a committee of temple leaders, and set up an endowment to pay a salary to a (lay) temple keeper (*shouci ren* 守祠人), in place of the sacked clerics.¹¹

In order to prevent such unbecoming public conflicts, some temple leaders produced documents warning their temple managers of dire consequences if they did not toe the line. For instance, one Suzhou temple had an inscription commenting on "rascal Buddhist and Taoist temple managers" and enacting regulations that threatened their own temple Buddhists with sacking if they let unworthy people in the temple and

⁷ This expression does not refer to a specific text of rules but rather to legal and contractual obligations of clerics, including ritual purity (vegetarianism, sexual abstinence), respect for temple property, and avoidance of contacts with local bullies, gamblers, thieves, prostitutes (or women in general, who were by law forbidden to enter temples!), etc. One case of a Taoist temple manager expelled for *bushou qinggui* (apparently fraud): *Zhouzhi zhixian ren Zhang Laitai zhuchi Wulao dong gaoshi keshi* 周至知縣任張來泰住持五老洞告示刻石 (*Louguan tai daojiao beishi*, 185, dated 1771). See a fictional representation of gods punishing temple clerics for *bushou qinggui* in the Ming novel *Mingzhu yuan* 明珠緣, j. 10.

⁸ Goossaert, "La gestion des temples chinois," 15-16.

⁹ Baxian (modern-day Chongqing) archives have eighteenth- and nineteenth-century documents where an expelled cleric has to sign a declaration of secularization (*huansu*): *Qingdai Qian Jia Dao Baxian dang'an xuanbian*, 60.

¹⁰ *Guandi miao siye bei* 關帝廟祀業碑 (*Quanzhou* #836, dated 1757). Another case of a magistrate expelling a temple manager: *Shengquan gong jinyue bei* 聖泉宮禁約碑 (*Xinghua* #404, dated 1721).

¹¹ *Chuangjian xin Chuanzhu miao ji* 創建新川主廟記 (*Bashu daojiao beiben jicheng*, 330-32, dated 1745).

otherwise "desecrated" the purity of the temple.¹² Among Peking inscriptions, we also find such regulations that adopted a rather authoritarian stance against their manager, whether Buddhist or Taoist.¹³ The bakers' guild threatened the Buddhist manager of its temple (named Mashen miao 馬神廟) to sack and replace him if he did not guarantee a sufficiently prosperous cult (and offerings).¹⁴ Indeed, guilds, the most tightly organized kind of lay communities in Peking, were particularly finicky employers. The dyeing guild (Yanliao huiguan 顏料會館) had two temples, one for its patron saint inside its guild hall, and the other, named Huoshen miao 火神廟, just next door. Both were entrusted to a Taoist manager, who was hired according to a contract and was paid a monthly salary for keeping them. At his death, the guild directors agreed to hire and draw up a contract with a disciple of this manager, even though this disciple had previously been expelled by his master. The disciple began to sell temple property and this resulted into a lawsuit that the guild won; the guild directors thereafter decided never to let clerics handle temple deeds again.¹⁵

In such contexts where clerical temple managers were relegated to a diminutive status of temple employee, they often got scant attention in the written records – which does not mean they were not important in temple life. For this reason, it is impossible to say how many temples, among those documented by inscriptions, had resident clerics.¹⁶ Sometimes the fact might be alluded to very briefly in an inscription.¹⁷ Some inscriptions even seem to pointedly avoid mentioning them.¹⁸ In other cases, as in countless inscriptions throughout China, the name of the resident cleric(s) is listed at the end of the inscription, after or below the temple leaders, and without any mention of his/her role in temple (re)building; s/he might be just credited with the erection of the stele.¹⁹ This, I think, means that the temple cleric is there but played no leading role in the establishing of the temple and subsequent decisions on its operations.

Choosing a clerical temple manager

¹² *Chongjian Caibosi miao beiji* 重建財帛司廟碑記 (*Ming Qing yilai Suzhou shehui shi beike ji* #311, dated 1796).

¹³ *Songyun an tiaogui* 松筠庵條規 (*Beitu*, 90/40, dated 1910).

¹⁴ *Leizhu shenghui bei* 雷祖勝會碑 (*Beitu*, 77/69, dated 1800). In 1947, another guild effectively sacked its Buddhist temple manager to replace him with a more zealous cleric: Peking Municipal Archives 北京市檔案館 file J2-8-1174.

¹⁵ *Chongxiu Yanliao huiguan beiji* 重修顏料會館碑記 (Niida Noboru, *Pekin kôshô girudo shiryô shû*, 2/327-30, dated 1838). Another case of temple leaders threatening clerical managers with sacking: *Zhiguo si buxiu dibaci bei* 智果寺補修第八次碑 (*Hanzhong beishi*, 259-60, dated 1828). In *Chongxiu Wubou mu miao bei* 重修武侯墓廟碑 (*Hanzhong beishi*, 57, dated 1829), temple leaders expel fraudulent Taoist temple managers, and hire new ones who would be salaried and not be allowed to have anything to do with temple property.

¹⁶ Such data only became available with Republican-period comprehensive surveys. For instance, in 1930s Peking, 68% of temples had clerical managers, but this was much higher than in most parts of China: Goossaert, *Peking Taoists*, introduction.

¹⁷ A typical example list "clerics' rooms" among repaired buildings, but nowhere else in the inscription are resident clerics discussed: *Chongxiu Guandi miao jilie* 重修關帝廟記略 (*Quanzhou* #187).

¹⁸ See for instance the long inscription *Chongxiu Jinji ting beiji* 重修金雞亭碑記 (*Quanzhou* #1167, dated 1819), that only mentions the resident Buddhists at the very end as caretakers of the temple's chairs and tables!

¹⁹ For instance, *Chongxiu Fuhui ting beiji* 重修福慧亭碑記 (*Quanzhou* #407, dated 1873).

Why then, if the cleric was not the person who masterminded the building of the temple, did the community let him/her live there? Some inscriptions discuss why resident clerics are useful to a temple.²⁰ As one inscription puts it, if there are temple clerics and a stable income for their upkeep, then the temple can last very long,²¹ that is, clerics guarantee continuity in spite of change within the community or external dangers (wars, famine...).

While the process of selecting and hiring a clerical temple manager is often only implied by the expression "a cleric was invited," *qing* 請 or *yan* 延, it is occasionally discussed in more detail. For example, an 1881 set of temple regulations from southern Shanxi makes it clear who decides on hiring temple managers: "It is temple leaders (*shoushi* 首士) who control and decide whether the [prospective] Taoist manager is a quiet and [ritually] clean person, and who petition the country magistrate recommending that he be hired."²² In this case, because the temple had received official support and was listed on the local register of sacrifices, the magistrate had to formally take part in the hiring process. This was not the case in the vast majority of late imperial temples, where temple leaders enjoyed even more leeway in their choice. A 1731 inscription from Fujian relates how a particular resident cleric was selected and hired:

One of the temple leaders asked: "Who is going to take care of incense and candles?" Some suggested we hired a Taoist. An elder answered: "Our temple prizes purity and quietness; if we hired a Taoist, he would bring his womenfolk, and I am afraid this would desecrate (*xie* 褻) the temple. Our god was a Buddhist, so Buddhist clerics (*shami*) would be all right [as managers]."²³

Here, the choice is in the hands of temple leaders, and considerations of ritual purity guide their opinion. We will come back to the issue of ritual purity but we can note here how Buddhists and Taoists were considered as, to a certain extent, interchangeable *in their role* of temple managers.

Other qualities also inform the choices of temple leaders hiring resident clerics. During the late Ming, a young Buddhist "gifted for music" was called in to restore the fortune of a Fujianese temple.²⁴ Similarly, a 1584 inscription develops on the mutually beneficial relationship between a lineage and the cleric it employs (the cleric controls only a part of the landed endowment of the lineage temple that he manages).²⁵ This inscription explains that the two most important qualities of resident clerics are their ritual purity (*chijie* 持戒) and their ability to manage a collective project (*xie zhongxin* 協眾

²⁰ *Chongjian Qingluo shi ji* 重建青羅室記 (*Quanzhou* #132, dated 1584).

²¹ *Pingshan gongxiu yan kentian ji* 屏山公修巖壑田記 (*Quanzhou* #806, dated 1574/1767).

²² *Hanzhong fu pishi Wuhou ci chengwen bei* 漢中府批示武侯祠呈文碑 (*Hanzhong beishi*, 331-33, dated 1881).

²³ *Gucheng gong xiangdeng chantian beiji* 穀城宮香燈產田碑記 (*Xinghua* #197, dated 1731).

²⁴ *Yong'an yan gongji beiji* 永安岩功績碑記 (*Quanzhou* #933, dated 1620/1751).

²⁵ *Chongjian Qingluo shi ji* 重建青羅室記 (*Quanzhou* #132).

心). This is well in line with later inscriptions where ritual services and fund-raising abilities appear as the two major jobs of temple clerical personnel.²⁶

Clerical temple managers and fund-raising

The relationship between lay temple communities and their resident clerics seems to be expressed, sometimes in subtle ways, through the wordings that inscriptions use to describe the role of the clerics in temple (re)building. The role of the clerics in such operations was crucial to their future situation within the temple. Often, they were required to take an active role in fund-raising towards restoration, enlargement, or complete rebuilding. If the cleric raised funds for an established community, s/he remained an employee, and in certain cases, this was clearly stated in the stele inscriptions, or it appeared in the way his/her name was featured after the donors on the inscription's list of patrons.²⁷ On the other hand, a cleric who has accumulated donations from people unrelated with each other and on his/her own initiative could claim that his/her religious lineage (*fapai*) was the owner of the temple built with these donations.

Local communities thus quite often employed clerics as fund-raisers and managers, which did not entail that such clerics had full control over the institutions and resources they contributed to create, but rather that such control had to be negotiated and shared between lay leaders and clerics. Clerics were often employed as fund-raisers, both because they had a recognized competence for this job and because fund-raising required time, energy, dedication, and even self-denial that few people beyond clerics had.²⁸ For this reason, in many projects, not only local temples, but also lineage halls or lineage-controlled temples,²⁹ or infrastructure projects such as bridges or roads,³⁰ the project leaders entrusted the fund-raising to a cleric. In such cases, the cleric was named as one of the underlings under the general project leaders. As a result, the cleric often earned the right to live in the temple or hall s/he has contributed to build, but s/he was still an employee.³¹

This is different from a project initiated and run by a cleric, in which case the cleric becomes the rightful leader and manager. A standard formulation for such a case is: "X the Buddhist manager rebuilt [the temple] through a subscription," *zhuchi seng X muyuan*

²⁶ See also *Chongxiu Xuefeng yan lou ji* 重修雪峰巖樓記 (*Quanzhou* #626, dated 1607) that details the tasks of the Buddhists in a lineage-controlled temple, and *Zhan dasikon zhiting xiansheng gui si fenxiu tian ji* 詹大司寇愷亭先生歸寺焚修田記 (*Quanzhou* #634) that has interesting developments on the role of Buddhists in temple management.

²⁷ Two examples in Peking: in *Huoshen miao bei* 火神廟碑 (*Beitu*, 82/173, dated 1860) and *Huoshen miao bei* 火神廟碑 (*Beitu*, 86/96, dated 1888), the Taoist manager is said to have done the fund-raising but appears after the community leaders. In *Chongxiu Wuzi shangguan bei* 重修午子上觀碑 (*Hanzhong beishi*, 322, dated 1875), the important but subordinate role of the Taoist temple manager in the subscription process is made extremely clear.

²⁸ Goossaert, "Starved of Resources."

²⁹ In *Xuefeng si shijin bei* 雪峰寺示禁碑 (*Quanzhou* #701, dated 1905), a lineage-controlled temple invites Buddhist clerics for fund-raising.

³⁰ *Chongxiu Xiongshan lu beiji* 重修熊山路碑記 (*Quanzhou* #686, dated 1893).

³¹ For instance, *Changzhou xian shijin baohu Jiangdong miao bei* 長洲縣示禁保護江東廟碑 (*Ming Qing yilai Suzhou shehui shi beike ji* #340, dated 1844).

chongjian 募緣重建.³² An interesting reversal of the usual roles is documented in an 1897 inscription from Quanzhou where the abbot of a monastery asks a member of the gentry (*shendong* 紳董) to run the subscription for him!³³ What we seem to have here is a distinction between roles (community leader / professional manager) and the social status of the persons fulfilling these roles (gentry / cleric – or conversely). Generally, in late imperial China, clerics were in the position of professional managers rather than community leaders, but so were part of the gentry (the *shendong*) working as lineage, or local infrastructure project managers, even though we should note that, as far as I know, no gentry members were employed as temple managers.

The ritual roles of clerical temple managers

The work of temple management is often described with the word *fenxiu* 焚修, "burn [incense] and cultivate oneself," that also refers more generally to daily religious practice (*xiindao* 修道). Indeed, on inscriptions, clerical temple managers often sign as "zhuochi *fenxiu* so-and-so" (*zhuochi seng* / *zhuochi dao* are also extremely common). This means that at the same time as they were managing a religious site, clerics were also expected to practice self-cultivation and maintain their purity. But by contrast to monasteries and hermitages, temple clerics were not expected to practice self-cultivation for its own sake, but in order to be able to provide liturgical services to community members.

The range of liturgical services offered by temple clerics to the laity was large, including rituals and counseling done in the temple, mostly during the temple festivals, and on other days when the temple was open, and rituals performed outside on demand. Temple clerics were usually required to hold the daily morning and evening services (*chaowanke* 朝晚課), and special services on certain days of the year, notably the birthdays of the gods and saints enshrined in the temple (when other religious specialists could also be contracted from the outside); all other liturgical services were done by invitation of the laity. The daily services were the fundamental cult in the temple, that maintained the purity of the sacred space and the alliance between the human community and the saints enshrined there. It happened throughout China, in Buddhist- as well as in Taoist-managed temples, that some devoted laypersons joined the morning and evening services; they donned a blue robe, sat behind the clerics, and chanted along.

Clerics did not stay in their temple all the time; many were part of troupes performing rituals at patrons' homes, notably death rituals, and were more often outside than in the temple.³⁴ A good part of the temple clerics' daily life was taken up by working for a

³² For instance the inscription *Longshan si chongxing beiji* 龍山寺重興碑記 (*Quanzhou* #416, dated 1879). Similarly, in *Chongxiu Feiwa yan beiji* 重修飛瓦岩碑記 (*Quanzhou* #682, dated 1891), the Buddhist manager is listed, both in the text and in the list of names, before the main subscription managers (*dongshi*), which means that he was the project leader, and his religious lineage was the owner of the temple.

³³ *Lingyuan si shijin bei* 靈源寺示禁碑 (*Quanzhou* #440).

³⁴ In an eighteenth-century anecdote, a traveler stays overnight in a temple that has a Buddhist temple manager. The Buddhist goes out at night for performing a death ritual, and asks the traveler to keep the temple (*kanmiao* 看廟) for him, which of course is when ghosts arrive: "Shi xing suyuan 尸行訴冤," *Zi buyu*, 2:46-47.

living. The contractual situation of the temple managers implied that part of temple resources went towards supporting them, but this very rarely amounted to a sinecure. The financial entitlement of temple clerics was not standardized: the clerics were either paid a salary, such as in the case of the dyeing guild's temple mentioned above, or, much more commonly, were given part or the totality of the rent of temple lands or rooms. But often, this entitlement was not sufficient, and had to be supplemented by fees for ritual services.³⁵

The formal relationships: contracts and official decisions

It does not seem that a formal agreement was drawn up on paper each time a cleric was installed as a manager, either when a temple newly recruited a *zhuchi* or when a succession to such a position occurred. This could happen, though, as an unfortunately damaged but nonetheless highly instructive inscription from Quanzhou shows.³⁶ This document details how the leaders of a Mazu temple hired a Buddhist cleric and signed with him a formal contract (*shutie* 書帖). On signing this, the new resident cleric was given thirty *liang* to invest (he invested in a building to be rented out) so as to provide income in perpetuity for him and his future successors.

Similarly, shortly before 1872, the Chenghuang temple of the Daxing county (one of the two counties encompassing Peking city, and an official temple, *guanmiao* 官廟, supervised by the magistrate) hired a Taoist cleric to "keep the place clean and perform the morning and evening rites." The same official also restored as a Guandi temple a nearby hermitage, which the resident Buddhist had managed to "ruin completely." In order to prevent new fraud, all the deeds and official documents pertaining to the two temples were transferred for safekeeping to the magistrate's office, and temple management contracts, *lingmiao ziju* 領廟字據, were drawn up with the Chenghuang miao's Taoist manager as well as a new Buddhist manager for the Guandi temple.³⁷ Such a formal contract was probably an exception, caused by both the involvement of a magistrate and the extreme misbehavior of the previous manager. In most cases, no formal contract was drawn up and if any conflict arose, it was solved according to a set of principles that can be deduced from the jurisprudence that defined the rights and duties of a temple manager.

Most cases of formal documents clarifying the situation of the temple manager were written, and occasionally carved on stone, when a conflict or unexpected situation between clerics and the members of the temple community had occurred, or when magistrates were involved.

First, some temple regulations are mostly devoted to the rights and duties of the cleric in the temple. An 1857 inscription for a Guandi temple in the Quanzhou area provides a very detailed set of such regulations, and its general principles accord well with other

³⁵ For a detailed discussion of the economy of clerical condition in Peking, see Goossaert, *Peking Taoists*, chap. 2.

³⁶ *Shengmu dian zhuchi beiji* 聖母殿住持碑記 (*Quanzhou* #1079, dated 1760).

³⁷ *Chenghuang miao bei* 城隍廟碑 (*Beitu*, 84/37-38, dated 1872).

similar documents found in other parts of China.³⁸ In this document, the temple manager is forbidden to raise funds on his own, without the supervision of the temple leaders and must report to them all spontaneous donations to the temple made through him.³⁹ He is paid a fixed salary, in exchange of which he has to perform specific ritual tasks, and must keep the temple clean and pure, notably by making sure that no vagrant or thief is allowed in. He is responsible for disciplining other temple workers (the *zhaigong* 齋工) but he cannot make them serve him personally. He is also allowed to perform ritual services for people outside the temple, on the condition that this does not interfere with activities within the temple.

These regulations show in detail how temple leaders want to keep control of everything going on in the temple, delegating both ritual and day-to-day management work to a cleric while at the same time building checks and controls to make sure the cleric does not infringe on any of their privileges and authority. Similarly, a very detailed set of regulations for a temple at the core of a complex irrigation system in Shanxi included this item: "the Buddhist temple keeper (*kanmiao seng* 看廟僧) has to clean the temple, burn incense, and light candles everyday, and is paid four cash a day."⁴⁰ Another similar set of regulations insists that the Taoist temple manager was not allowed to entertain other clerics in the temple.⁴¹

Two inscriptions dated 1904, also from the Quanzhou area, relate a case where the previous clerical temple manager has mismanaged the temple, which entailed a loss of landed property. A new cleric (and his disciples) was called in as manager, and, following a spirit-writing séance, an oath was sworn, with the gods as witness, between the temple manager and the lay leaders. According to the oath, the lay leaders were to provide an annual salary to the clerics, while the latter were particularly enjoined to keep ritual purity (*zhaijie* 齋戒).⁴²

Another group of inscriptions document cases where the relations between the community and the cleric turned sour and local authorities intervened to settle things. Magistrates were not usually interested in intervening of their own initiative in temple affairs, but when a case was filed by temple leaders, which was not uncommon, they arbitrated by mostly enforcing the pre-existing contractual obligations of both leaders and clerics. Most cases dealt with conflicts about temple property. While clerics found guilty of misappropriating temple property were punished,⁴³ it was also common that lay

³⁸ *Tonghuai Guandi miao li kanshou zhi bei* 通淮關帝廟立看守字碑 (*Quanzhou* #382, dated 1857).

³⁹ This should be understood, in the light of the above discussion, as limiting the right of overseeing the raising of funds (and hence ownership of the temple) to the temple leaders.

⁴⁰ *Shuishen miao jidian wen bei* 水神廟祭典文碑 (*Shanxi xiqu beike jikao*, 335, dated 1620).

⁴¹ *Dongyang gong shanchang tiaogui bei* 洞陽宮山場條規碑 (*Hanzhong beishi*, 57, dated 1829).

⁴² *Huiquan si chanye beiji* 慧泉寺產業碑記 (*Quanzhou* #698, dated 1904) and *Huiquan si fozu chiling* 慧泉寺佛祖敕令 (*Quanzhou* #699). Inscriptions *Chongxin Tianzhu si bei* 重修天竺寺碑 (*Quanzhou* #675, dated 1836) and *Chongxin Hushan Tianzhu si bei* 重修壺山天竺寺碑 (*Quanzhou* #676, dated 1836) document a rather similar case, where, after seven generations, the resident clerics had misappropriated temple lands. The village leaders who owned the temple had to devise new regulations (*sigui* 寺規), but unfortunately the role of the new clerics in those regulations is not made clear. Yet another similar cases is *Putian xian zhengtang shiyu Shengshou si ye buxu sengmin sixiang dianmai bei* 莆田縣正堂示諭聖壽寺業不許僧民私相典賣碑 (*Xinghua* #238, dated 1808).

⁴³ For instance *Chenshi fenshan shijin bei* 陳氏墳山示禁碑 (*Quanzhou* #428, dated 1889).

people (tenants, local bullies, etc.) appropriated temple property: in such cases temple clerics filed a suit, and won it.⁴⁴ Indeed, in one inscription carved for a Sichuanese Buddhist monastery, a decision enacted by the Ministry of Rites forcefully attacked temple leaders (*shanzhu*) for violating the rights of clerical managers including in monasteries.⁴⁵ In another case, the magistrate re-established the residency rights of clerics who had been unfairly evicted by temple leaders.⁴⁶ The relationship between lay leaders and religious specialists was certainly peaceful in most temples, but it could easily break one way or another.

Transmitting the charge of temple manager

While they were constrained by contractual regulations and customary law, clerics also benefited from rights. Notably, they were entitled to choose their successors by adopting novices as they wished, and the temple had to financially support manager and novices. The imperial state exerted almost no supervision at all on temple managers, seen as contractual leaders or employees of non-official communities (even though magistrates could sack such clerics for breach of laws). After temples were registered by district or municipal authorities following the 1928 temple registration law,⁴⁷ the position of temple manager became less a contractual relation between clerics and lineage or temple communities (which were disbanding and not recognized by the state) than an official status. The law required that any change in the position of manager required the police authorization. Nonetheless, the change was not so brutal, because the principles presiding over manager successions remained the same. The Republican legislation and administrative practice brought much closer control, making temple manager an official responsibility requiring police authorization and supervision, while maintaining the principle of customary principles presiding over their succession.

There were basically two ways to manage the succession of a temple manager: election and filiation. The election was practiced only in ecumenical monasteries (*shifang conglin* 十方叢林). The temples practiced only the succession by filiation, that is, the manager transmitted his charge to his eldest disciple, although it might happen that he chose another disciple. Succession usually took place at the death of the incumbent, but it happened that a manager resigned when he could no longer physically manage the temple and did not want to take on the related administrative and legal responsibilities anymore.

Most successions were from master to eldest disciple and created not more than routine paperwork after 1928, or no paperwork at all in late imperial times. Successions that caused trouble and therefore left some trace in the archival documentation were

⁴⁴ For instance *Chongxiu Qingyuan shangdong ji* 重修清源上洞記 (*Quanzhou* #141, dated 1598) and *Qingyuan shan jide bei* 清源山紀德碑 (*Quanzhou* #159, dated 1608). *Huiming si fengxian shijin bei* 惠明寺奉憲示禁碑 (*Quanzhou* #895, 1894) suggests that some Buddhist clerics felt discriminated against at the *yamen*.

⁴⁵ *Banruo si shijin beiyin* 般若寺示禁碑陰 (*Bashu Fojiao beiben jicheng*, 829-30, dated 1865).

⁴⁶ *Xingai Wuhou ci juzhang shiyu bei* 修改武侯祠舊章示諭碑 (*Hanzhong beishi*, 340-42, dated 1886).

⁴⁷ See Goossaert, *Peking Taoists*, chap. 1.

those differing from this normal procedure: because the manager had no disciple, other members of his/her lineage contested the succession, or the charge was transmitted to somebody unrelated. The possible causes for such a situation included the untimely death of the disciple, or his return to lay life, his expulsion because of crime or unsuitable behavior, and the failure of the manager to adopt a novice. When the manager did not hand over his position to his/her eldest disciple, a formal agreement was likely to be drawn up, so as to avoid future trouble or even lawsuits with members of the former manager's lineage. The few occasions when the contract was carved on stone allow us a glimpse into such negotiations.

While inscriptions that detail the succession rights within a temple manager's religious lineage can be found throughout China,⁴⁸ I have found particularly rich evidence for Peking. An 1822 inscription details the succession at a rather important, but not ecumenical, Buddhist temple in Peking, the Guanghua si 廣化寺.⁴⁹ The retiring manager, whose disciples had all found a position in other temples or monasteries, invited a respected monk from a neighboring monastery, but from another lineage, to succeed him. The agreement they set up, with other Buddhist temple managers serving as guarantors, notably certified that the Guanghua si had no outstanding debts, and that the tablets of the departing manager's spiritual ancestors in the temple's lineage hall would remain in place, never displaced by the tablets of the lineage taking over, and forever accessible to the members of the lineage of the departing manager. A century later, another inscription documents a complex case of a succession among Buddhist temple managers, resolved through the adoption of a young cleric within the lineage of an old cleric without disciple: the text insists on the continuity of the lineage and "succession rights."⁵⁰ In 1880, a Taoist without a disciple who transmitted his charge in a temple to two other Taoists took care of handing over all the deeds and an inventory of the temple property, and wrote an inscription stating that both his family and religious lineage had no right whatsoever on the temple anymore.⁵¹

It would seem that in the Guanghua si's case the departing manager's only concern was to entrust his temple to a worthy cleric. In other instances, the departing manager also entertained economic preoccupations and obtained compensation for the "gift" imparted to the successor. In other words, the retired manager sold his position very much like a doctor or lawyer would sell his practice. This was different from selling a temple as such, a transaction which also occurred, but only in cases of private temples; otherwise the principle of the inalienability of religious property would make such a transaction illicit. In other words, the cleric could sell his charge as temple manager, but not the temple itself; very likely, in all such cases, the temple belonged to a clerical lineage, as no well-functioning lay community would allow such a transaction.⁵² A 1786

⁴⁸ For instance *Kaiyuan zhengpai fen jizhu Qingshui yan ji* 開元正派分基住清水巖記 (*Quanzhou* #808, sixteenth century), and *Jinye dong tianye beiji* 金液洞田業碑記 (*Quanzhou* #947, dated 1886).

⁴⁹ *Guanghua si yidan* 廣化寺議單 (*Beitu* 79/27, dated 1822).

⁵⁰ *Fuqing si zhuchi chengsi ji* 福慶寺住持承嗣記 (*Beitu*, 98/74, dated 1936).

⁵¹ *Guandi miao bei* 關帝廟碑 (*Beitu*, 85/5, dated 1880; the *beiyin*, dated 1881 is on *Beitu*, 85/59).

⁵² Indeed, *Chongjian Caibosi miao beiji* (*Ming Qing yilai Suzhou shehui shi beike ji* #311, dated 1796), *op. cit.*, specifically prohibits this.

inscription from Fangshan county, in the countryside just south of Peking, provides the text of a contract, signed in 1714, that details such a transaction.⁵³ The purchaser, a Quanzhen 全真 Taoist of the Longmen 龍門 lineage, named Su Taixin 蘇太新, paid 54 *liang* for the position of manager of a rather well endowed country hermitage, as well as 16 *liang* for various movable items; the seller would seem to be another Longmen cleric of the same generation.

Some inscriptions frankly say that communities changed an unsatisfactory Buddhist cleric with a Taoist.⁵⁴ As long as the fundamental principle of the succession from master to disciple could not be applied, transferring by contract the position of manager to a cleric of another lineage or another religion made little difference. To sum it up, transactions whereby the charge of temple manager was transferred to an unrelated cleric were exceptional and could only occur when the departing manager had committed an offense or had no immediate member of his/her lineage willing to succeed him.

2. Non-clerical temple managers: the *miaozhu*

Beside *zhuchi*, another term used to refer to temple managers can be found abundantly in late imperial sources of all kinds (bureaucratic literature, inscriptions, narrative sources, etc.): *miaozhu*. The term has a long history and has accumulated several layers of meaning. During the Han, when it is first attested, it referred to an officiant posted in a temple used for official cults.⁵⁵ Literally, it means "the invoker in the temple;" *zhu* refers to the prayer read aloud to a divinity in the course of a ritual, and hence to the person who reads aloud this prayer. The word *ci zhu* 祠祝, synonymous and used in cases when the temple is called *ci* rather than *miao*, is also attested from the Han to the present.

Instances of the word *miaozhu* become common in the extant sources by the Song period. During the late imperial times, *miaozhu* was sometimes used to refer to any person living in a temple on a more or less permanent basis, and playing a role in the religious activities there. In such cases, the term included Buddhists or Taoists employed as *zhuchi*.⁵⁶ For instance, the lexicon *Tongya* 通雅 (dated 1659) says: "nowadays, Taoists who work as temple keepers are called *miaozhu* 今人以守廟道士呼爲廟祝."⁵⁷ A sixteenth-century text, describing an anti-Buddhist campaign in Guangdong where monastic lands were expropriated and monks expelled, says that two old monks in each

⁵³ *Zhuangong yuan jiaojie qiven* 莊公院交接契文 (*Beitu*, 75/66-67, dated 1786).

⁵⁴ For instance, *Chongxiu Babao shan bei* 重修八寶山碑 (*Beitu*, 83/190-91, dated 1870).

⁵⁵ In 152 BCE the "grand invoker," *dazhu* 大祝, in state temples was renamed *ci zhu*, and then, in 104 BCE, *miaozhu*. (*Qinding*) *Lidai zhiguan biao*, 27:15b.

⁵⁶ In the Yuan drama *Kanqian nu*, act 3, a Taoist says: "I am the *miaozhu* of the Dongyue miao;" in *Yuewei caotang biji*, 24:547, a Taoist temple keeper is called *miaozhu*, and also in *Jingpingmei*, chap. 84.

⁵⁷ *Tongya*, 19:23b. The Qing code says: "in Buddhist and Taoist monasteries, Buddhists and Taoist act as *miaozhu*," *siguan yi sengdao wei miaozhu* 寺觀以僧道爲廟祝 (*Qinding Da Qing huidian*, 55:4a), which does not necessarily imply that all *miaozhu* are Buddhists or Taoists, but rather that *miaozhu* is the encompassing category.

monastery were maintained "as *miaoꝑhu*" to clean the temple and carry on the worship (*xianghuo*).⁵⁸

On the other hand, another text describing a similar campaign called for the secularization (*huansu*) and expulsion from temples of "Taoists, Buddhists, and *miaoꝑhu*,"⁵⁹ suggesting that these were three distinct categories of people. In many texts mentioning Buddhists and Taoists on the one hand and *miaoꝑhu* on the other, the distinction is made very clear.⁶⁰ In one late Qing text, an education official (thus posted in a Confucius temple) compared himself to a *miaoꝑhu*, implying that this was a position for a lay person.⁶¹ This usage seems to have become the norm, and I have very rarely found in late Qing sources Buddhists or Taoists referred to as *miaoꝑhu*. In contemporary usage, *miaoꝑhu* is common in Cantonese, Hokkien, and Putonghua worlds to refer to non-clerical temple managers. While a bit archaic-sounding to some, who might prefer business-like titles like *guanliyuan* 管理員, it still come readily in both oral conversation and in the press to describe lay temple managers.

There must have been regional differences in the meaning of the term *miaoꝑhu*, even though my source base does not offer clear evidence on this.⁶² On the other hand, there definitely existed a number of vernacular equivalents of *miaoꝑhu* in use in different parts of the Chinese world. A nineteenth-century anecdote from Hangzhou tells us that in this area, lay temple managers were called *miaogui* 廟鬼.⁶³ The term "temple official," *miaoguan* 廟官, is also sometimes provided as an equivalent, although I am less clear about its geographical extension.⁶⁴

Finally, I would also like to distinguish lay temple managers from mere temple keepers and menial workers, such as *kanmiaoren* 看廟人, *shoumiao(ren)* 守廟(人),⁶⁵ *ꝑhaigong* 齋工,⁶⁶ or *miaohu* 廟戶,⁶⁷ who are all temple workers (salaried or voluntary)

⁵⁸ *Zhuangqu yishu*, 9.45a. On this campaign, see Faure, "The Emperor in the Village" and Schneewind, "Competing Institutions."

⁵⁹ *Beiwang ji*, 5.88a.

⁶⁰ In the sixteenth-century novel *Sansui pingyao zhuan*, j. 10, a temple Taoist sends his *miaoꝑhu* on errands. In *Wenming xiaoshi*, j. 8, the Chenghuang miao in Shanghai has both Taoists and *miaoꝑhu*, the latter described as country bumpkins. "Miaozhu facai 廟祝發財," *Shenbao*, 8 October 1878 insists that there were no Buddhists or Taoists but just *miaoꝑhu* managing the temple being reported. Similar statements can be found in various inscriptions.

⁶¹ *Nantian ben*, 16:264.

⁶² For instance, in late Qing archival material, I have found evidence of the term *miaoꝑhu* used in Guangxi, Guangdong, and Shanxi: Archival documents held in the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, # 015086, 112197 and 073279. I assume this reflects local usage, although it is not entirely impossible that local officials have introduced the term in their report.

⁶³ "Miaogui manshen 廟鬼慢神," *Yongxian ꝑhai biji*, 8:178-79. This anecdote describes a very assertive and entrepreneurial temple manager who goes to Longhu shan and obtains a Taoist canonization for his god.

⁶⁴ See for instance *Jingshi tongyan*, j. 36; *Kanqiannu*, act 3; *Qixia wuyi*, j. 19.

⁶⁵ *Shoumiao*, as well as *miaoling* 廟令, was an official title in medieval times, given to court officials charged with overseeing a state temple. In late imperial times, though, *shoumiao ren/ꝑhe* was used in the most vague sense to refer to anyone watching over a temple.

⁶⁶ *Zhaigong* is a vernacular term in the Fujian-Taiwan area for people doing volunteer or subordinate work in a temple.

⁶⁷ *Miaohu* usually refers in late imperial sources to hereditary households doing labor in state-supported temples as their tax duty.

under the supervision of a temple manager. Whereas *miaoꝑhu* in some cases were in such a position, they more often were temple managers themselves.

Ritual roles, and miaoꝑhu as resident spirit-mediums

Miaoꝑhu were employed by all kinds of lay temple communities, including local temple cults but also lineage temples,⁶⁸ as well as the state.⁶⁹ For instance, the Kangxi emperor visiting the Taishan, lamented that the *miaoꝑhu* "managing the worship," *ꝑhi xianghuo* 知香火 (he later call them "those who take care of the sacrifices," *shou si ꝑhe* 守祀者) were destitute, and he allotted them extra revenue.⁷⁰ Accordingly, their ritual role varied very much. The narrative evidence contains a large number of references to *miaoꝑhu*, but in the vast majority of cases, s/he is only mentioned incidentally as being present in a temple to receive and talk to visitors and s/he appears as the person that any devotee deals with. Indeed, like clerical temple managers, *miaoꝑhu* are mentioned as a matter of fact, and it would seem that the late imperial Chinese people expected to meet either a cleric or a *miaoꝑhu* when entering a temple.

Typically, in narrative sources, a visitor asks a question to the *miaoꝑhu* regarding the deity of the temple, or requires lodging or food in the temple. For instance, in an eighteenth-century anecdote, the rich devotee who wants to be the first one to burn incense in the morning (*shao touxiang* 燒頭香, a very common marker of devotion as well as social status throughout China) bribes the *miaoꝑhu* to be sure to be allowed in before anyone else.⁷¹

In some cases, the *miaoꝑhu* played no ritual role beyond burning incense (something anyone could do) morning and evening everyday.⁷² For instance, in Qing dynasty official regulations for state cult temples, the *miaoꝑhu* was responsible for cleaning the temple before a sacrifice, which was performed by an official. He might also be especially entrusted with safekeeping of ritual vessels.⁷³ Indeed, the *miaoꝑhu*'s primary task was watching over the temple like gatekeepers in private residences, and an eighteenth-century author tells us that in northern China, temples without a *miaoꝑhu* had to be locked to keep thieves away.⁷⁴ This echoes the present situation in a number of temples where the *miaoꝑhu* have no training in ritual at all and are really hired for running the

⁶⁸ *Huangdun wenji*, 53.19a, documents the case of a lineage that employed Taoists during the Song, and then *miaoꝑhu* from the early Ming on (this relationship turned sour as the *miaoꝑhu* family appropriated temple property).

⁶⁹ During the Song, the state employed 90 *cizhu* in the Beiyue miao 北嶽廟: *Jifu tongꝑhi*, 106:48b. During the Qing, a *miaoꝑhu* in a Dragon king temple was on the payroll of the local *yamen* in Taiwan: *Xinꝑhu xian ꝑhidu kao*, 53.

⁷⁰ *Shengꝑu Ren huangdi yuzꝑhi wen ji*, 2:7.2b. It is quite likely that these *miaoꝑhu* actually were Taoists.

⁷¹ "Shao touxiang," *Zi buyu*, 19:470-71; the same story is found in *Shuibu ꝑhuan*, j. 1.

⁷² In *Lu Ban shenghui beiji* 魯班聖會碑記 (*Beijing Dongyue miao yu Beijing Taishan xinyang beike jilu*, 185, dated 1768), the *miaoꝑhu* was responsible for worshipping everyday in the hall, while the association members would come and worship on the first and fifteenth day of the month. It is extremely likely that *miaoꝑhu* here refers to one of the Taoists managing the temple (the famous Dongyue miao in Peking).

⁷³ *Longquan gong teji jielie beiji* 龍泉宮特祭節略碑記 (*Quanzhou* #776, dated 1863).

⁷⁴ *Yunwei caotang biji*, 14:353.

place as a business. In such cases, then, and in contrast to the *zhubu*, the *miaozhu* are not religious specialists.

In some texts, however, *miaozhu* are portrayed as being intermediaries with the deities. Most often, the *miaozhu* enters into communication with the temple's deity through dream, trance, or unspecified means. Such cases can be found from the Tang through the late Qing period.⁷⁵ For instance, in a late eighteenth-century anecdote, the temple god reveals to the *miaozhu* in dream that a devotee about the visit the temple is a swindler and that he will not accept this devotee's offerings.⁷⁶ This raises the possibility that *miaozhu* might have been, in some cases, resident spirit-mediums.

There actually existed cases of resident spirit-mediums in late imperial times. In some late Qing texts, local vernacular terms, such as *jitong* 乩童, are used to describe resident spirit-mediums. An 1883 inscription from the Quanzhou area details how a temple set up a separate endowment for supporting a spirit-medium (*jitong*), who would later transmit his charge (and his right to be supported by the endowment) to his successors, in perpetuity: this arrangement is totally similar to that made in other temples for resident Buddhists or Taoists.⁷⁷

The fact that spirit-mediums also acted as temple managers must have been quite common, as it still is today in certain parts of the Chinese world. Recently, Chao Shin-yi has drawn attention to the entrepreneurial spirit-mediums in contemporary Taiwan who run subscriptions, and build their own temples.⁷⁸ By contrast, my impression is that in northern China the spirit-mediums, often called *xiangtou* 香頭, visited and organized funding for temples, but rarely managed them. Thus, the situation of spirit-mediums in temples, in both the late imperial and the contemporary period, can be quite diverse; while some are employed by temple leaders, either as external resource (coming to the temple for regular séances) or in-house managers, others might themselves be temple leaders.

It is likely that some *miaozhu* mentioned in late imperial sources were such spirit-mediums working as temple managers. This is made quite plausible by the critical discourse against the *miaozhu*, that not only accused them of being swindlers,⁷⁹ but also of abetting spirit-possession. The words *zhu* and *miaozhu* have long been associated with spirit-possession, even though the ritual act of invoking, *zhu*, properly speaking does not involve any possession.⁸⁰ The category "spirit-mediums and invokers," *wuzhu* 巫祝 (an expression already common during the Han period) or in later and more developed form, "*miaozhu* and spirit-mediums," *shiwu miaozhu* 師巫廟祝,⁸¹ both often used in late

⁷⁵ For instance, "Wei Tingxun 衛庭訓," in *Taiping guanji*, 302:2395-96, and *Mingshi*, 299:7644.

⁷⁶ *Yuwei caotang biji*, 3:55. Another case in *Songyin manlu*, j. 15.

⁷⁷ *Chongxiu Jifu tang beiji* 重修集福堂碑記 (*Quanzhou* #1263).

⁷⁸ Chao Shin-yi, "A Danggi Temple in Taipei."

⁷⁹ *Yuwei caotang biji*, 13:306-07 suggests the *miaozhu* may have staged a fake miracle. See also *Saomi zhou*, chap. 22.

⁸⁰ However, a late Qing philologist found classical ground to classify the *zhu* among spirit-mediums: *Chengwei lu*, 31:491.

⁸¹ For an early case, see *Huangshi richao*, 78:47a. This text was authored by Huang Zhen 黃震 (1213-1280), a Song magistrate who made himself famous through his campaigns against popular religion: see Hansen, *Changing Gods*, 157-59 and Hymes, *Way and Byway*, 136-44.

imperial times, refers to this broad category that does not identify *miaoꝑhu* with spirit-mediums but lumps them together under a pejorative label.⁸² Critical authors thus accuse the *miaoꝑhu* of the same ills that they ascribe to spirit-mediums: for instance, one Ming author accuses the *miaoꝑhu* of the temples in his area to ascribe to demonic possessions all problems submitted by devotees coming to pray in temples, and to accordingly require extravagant sacrifices as a solution.⁸³

Other authors confirm the link between *miaoꝑhu* and healing through the help of gods by identifying the *miaoꝑhu* as the latter-day (=late imperial) practitioners of the ancient art of symbolical healing, *ꝑhyou* 祝由.⁸⁴ Whereas *ꝑhyou* (or *ꝑhyou ke* 科) was a highly respected branch of medicine in pre-Song times, it was gradually pushed out of medical orthodoxy by Ming times, and was then considered by literati doctors as the realm of magicians and spirit-mediums.⁸⁵ Such texts reflect the increasing late imperial Confucian hostility to spirit-mediums⁸⁶ and confirm a widespread understanding of *miaoꝑhu* as a kind of spirit-medium.

Yet, in spite of this critical discourse, *miaoꝑhu* was a legally recognized category of temple workers, by contrast to other words for spirit-mediums, such as *shiwu* and others, that designated illegal professions. In some temple-related lawsuits, magistrates adjudicated in favor of the *miaoꝑhu*,⁸⁷ which shows that it was perfectly legal to have a *miaoꝑhu* in one's temple, even though some of the actual practices of the *miaoꝑhu* were actually banned by the code. In other words, the ambiguity of the word *miaoꝑhu* (Buddhist or Taoist; spirit-medium; lay temple manager) served many purposes, and it made sense for stele inscriptions to use the classical term *miaoꝑhu* rather than colloquial words for temple specialists, including spirit-mediums.

Maybe for precisely that reason, the evidence unfortunately does not say much about the details of the ritual activities of the *miaoꝑhu*, when there were any such activities. Other services are occasionally mentioned, such as the interpretation of oracles (*qian* 籤),⁸⁸ a service also routinely provided by temple Buddhists and Taoists as well as diviners, and that required more literary and psychological skills than ritual training. It should be noted in this regard that diviners who often worked near and around temples were in some cases excluded from the temple itself, possibly because they would have been in competition with the regular temple manager for providing such services.⁸⁹ Also, even if they did not play a ritual role, the *miaoꝑhu* were instrumental in spreading lore about the

⁸² For instance, *Yuenwei caotang biji*, 19:478-79. *Shiwu* is a category that encompasses illegal religious specialists, that is, mostly spirit-mediums and "sectarian" teachers.

⁸³ *Jiacang ji*, 33.9a.

⁸⁴ Chen Li 陳櫟 (1252-1334), "Bian *Suwen* zhuyou 辨素問祝由," *Dingyu ji*, 4.18a.

⁸⁵ Fang Ling, "Les médecins laïques contre l'exorcisme sous les Ming."

⁸⁶ Sutton, "From Credulity to Scorn."

⁸⁷ *Zhizhao* 執照 (*Taiwan nanbu beimen jicheng*, 487-88, dated 1858): the *miaoꝑhu* was at the same time the tenant of the temple land.

⁸⁸ *Taiwan waji*, 5:198; *Simei xinzhai zalu*, 45.

⁸⁹ *Tonghai Guandi miao li kanshou zhi bei* (*Quanzhou* #382, dated 1857), *op. cit.* Note also temple regulations from Guangdong that protect the monopoly of the *miaoꝑhu* (here termed *sizhu* 司祝) to sell incense and candles within the temple: *Lieli fengxian shijin hunmai baoꝑhu yi su miaoyu beji* 列歷奉憲示禁混賣寶燭以肅廟宇碑記 (*Guangdong beike ji*, 349-51, dated 1812).

temple deities and how to deal with them; by answering questions about the deities and suggesting rituals to be undertaken,⁹⁰ they played a definite role in the working of local religion.

The contractual terms of miaozhu work

We know relatively more on the *miaozhu*'s status in the temple and relationship with lay people than we do on his/her ritual role. *Miaozhu* were employees of the lay community leaders, paid a monthly salary or allotted temple fields to work.⁹¹ Among them, some were just temple workers subordinate to lay or clerical temple managers; while others were temple managers themselves. In the latter case, *miaozhu* could be entrusted with important non-ritual roles, such as the management of temple income.⁹² An inscription from Fujian dated 1843 provides temple regulations that stipulate the income allotted to the *miaozhu* and his role in managing corporate property.⁹³

In their role as contractual employees and, in some cases, managers, the *miaozhu* were in a situation very comparable to that of the Buddhist or Taoist *zhuchi*. They were forbidden to appropriate temple property.⁹⁴ If found guilty of fraud, a *miaozhu* could be sacked and replaced by another person chosen by temple leaders.⁹⁵ On the other hand, if they did not breach the terms of their contract, they could transmit their charge to a successor. Many *miaozhu* positions were hereditary, either from father to son, or from master to disciple. As early as the late Tang, there seems to have existed *miaozhu* with an official contract who transmitted their charge to their sons and such lines could perpetuate themselves for centuries.⁹⁶ Similar cases can be found down to the late nineteenth century.⁹⁷

This situation with the *miaozhu* as a specialized hereditary job, like those of religious specialists, was common, but not universal. Some communities decided to work differently, with the temple manager not considered as a specialized job, but as a

⁹⁰ In *Siven bianxiang* 斯文變相, j. 6, the *miaozhu* suggests to a devotee that she undergoes ritual adoption by the temple deity.

⁹¹ Cases in Taiwan: a *miaozhu* managed the temple attached to a public graveyard run by gentry members: *Taiwan jianwen lu*, 1:79. Temple leaders arranged lodging and landed income for their *miaozhu*: *Jinmen zhi*, 4:60. Temple leaders paid a monthly sum, fixed by contract, to the *miaozhu* for his own expenses plus temple running costs: *Pengbu xubian*, 1:6. A *miaozhu* in a Wenchang temple was paid a salary: *Xuxiu Taiwan xianzhi* 3:160. Another *miaozhu* was also paid for doing *xizi* 惜字 work (collecting discarded papers with written characters on them): *Zhanghua xianzhi*, 5:153.

⁹² *Chaitou gang Zaiju ci juanzhi youxiang siye beiji* 柴頭港載福祠捐置油香祀業碑記 (*Taiwan nanbu beiben jicheng*, 678-79, dated 1860). In *Shangdi miao dianwu dizu beiji* 上帝廟店屋地租碑記 (*Taiwan nanbu beiben jicheng*, 22-23, dated 1730), a magistrate condemns people having built on temple land to pay a rent to the *miaozhu*. According to *Xiamen zhi*, 15:641, the *miaozhu* noted donations and requests in a register.

⁹³ *Haopu she jinyue bei* 濠浦社禁約碑 (*Xinghua* #273).

⁹⁴ *Dazhong miao Zhongyuan siye bei* 大眾廟中元祀業碑 (*Xinzhu xian caifang ce*, 5:186, dated 1811).

⁹⁵ Such a case is reported in an article entitled "Miaozhu eren 廟祝詭人," published in the *Shenbao* on 21 January 1875, and discussing an incident in the famous Manmo temple 文武廟 on Hong Kong island.

⁹⁶ During the Song, a canonization edict for a local god was officially given to the hereditary *miaozhu*: *Linyan zhai sanbi*, 3:1b. See also *Mozhuang manlu*, 4:2a-b.

⁹⁷ *Chongjian Fuji miao beiji* 重建孚濟廟碑記 (*Quanzhou* #1016, dated 1661); *Chongxiu Jifu tang beiji* (*Quanzhou* #1263), *op. cit.*

responsibility rotating among community members. For instance, in one eighteenth-century case from Guangdong, a new *miaoꝑhu* was selected every year from among the community on a rotational basis,⁹⁸ a situation quite comparable to the selection of temple leaders in many temples.

Given these various options, it is logical that in different circumstances, very different kinds of people became *miaoꝑhu*. While some were entrepreneurial types, such as the spirit-mediums who founded their own temples, others were selected among the poorer segments of the local community. *Miaoꝑhu* positions could be a way to offer a destitute member of the temple community a honorable way of life in exchange for menial services. For instance, the novel *Xiyou ji* has the story of a man who, because of his poverty, became a *miaoꝑhu* to make a living, and ended up managing a temple and doing fund-raising.⁹⁹ Yet, this was no mere charity, and temple leaders demanded ritual purity from their *miaoꝑhu*. In a stele inscription, Taiwanese temple leaders write: "we choose a clean and upright man to be our *miaoꝑhu*, to pay homage to the god on the 1st and 15th day of each month, and to clean the temple."¹⁰⁰ Another inscription from the Quanzhou area dated 1904 runs: "this temple does not have Buddhist clerics, it only has a *miaoꝑhu* who is a permanent vegetarian and who cleans the temple morning and evening."¹⁰¹ A late nineteenth-century anecdote describes how a careless Cantonese *miaoꝑhu* was burned alive by the temple's deity who punished him for defiling the temple.¹⁰² Thus, in the case of *miaoꝑhu* as well as for Buddhists and Taoists, purity rules (most importantly vegetarianism and sexual abstinence) were a crucial part in one's qualifications for being a temple resident, which did not apply to those who came to the temple only at fixed dates to perform services without living permanently there.

3. Conclusion

My approach, that compares data from different areas in China, probably led me to emphasize continuities over differences between the evidence from various areas. Yet, I think that a good case can be made, insofar as the relationships between temple managers and lay communities are concerned, for a shared general framework. I have found in inscriptions from Peking, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Guangdong, Suzhou, Fujian and Taiwan, as well as in narrative sources composed in different parts of China, similar situations where lay communities require the services of resident managers. These services include ritual performances, the permanent presence of a ritually pure person, temple-keeping and cleaning, fund-raising, and organizing events. At the same time,

⁹⁸ Archival documents held in the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, # 073279. This particular *miaoꝑhu* was arrested for organizing gambling in the temple. A similar case in a temple in the Ningbo area: "Miaoꝑhu facai 廟祝發財," *Shenbao*, 8 October 1878: this text insists that there were no Buddhists or Taoists managing the temple.

⁹⁹ *Xiyou ji*, chap. 15. A similar story (the *miaoꝑhu* used to be a servant to a high official, but was then unfairly sacked, and had no option but to take this *miaoꝑhu* job) is found in *Huangqing mishu*, j. 83.

¹⁰⁰ *Juanjian Beiji dian zhaijfang beiji* 捐建北極殿齋房碑記 (*Taiwan nanbu beiben jicheng* 52-53, dated 1751).

¹⁰¹ *Jingshan si shijin bei* 淨山寺示禁碑 (*Quanzhou* #780).

¹⁰² "Dushen canbi 瀆神慘斃," *Dianshizhai huabao*, Si 絲, 43 (published in 1892).

temple leaders were afraid of losing control and did not want to be lorded over by their managers, and they therefore negotiated complex formal relationships that delineated the rights and duties of both parties. These complex negotiations entailed co-operation between different kinds of specialists in order to devise a mutually profitable division of ritual and managerial work. For instance:

I entrusted Buddhist clerics with the front part of the temple [devoted to Guanyin, Wenchang and Zhu Xi] so that they manage the temple and perform the daily ritual services (*fenxiu kesong* 焚修課誦) and I invited the local literati to use the newly built rear halls so that they study together; thereby, we hope this will not become an inactive temple, and it will benefit humans while honoring the gods.¹⁰³

An eighteen-century Confucian academy in Foshan (Guangdong) even employed a Buddhist as manager according to contractual obligations entirely similar to that found in temples!¹⁰⁴

In some parts of China, such as Fujian, temple communities tended to be better organized and formally structured, and therefore exerted tighter control over the temple managers they employed (or managed to maintain such control over longer periods of time). By contrast, in many northern China cases, the temple manager often acted as the real temple leader. For instance, it would seem that in Peking, it usually was the temple manager who kept temple property deeds and collected rents from temple endowments, a task that lay temple leaders from Fujian seem to have kept to themselves. Also, we find many more Taoist temple managers (of the Quanzhen order, that is very sparsely represented in Fujian) in northern China. Yet, an opposition between cleric-dominated temples in the North and lay leaders (local elites)-dominated temples in the south would be mistaken. The available sources from all areas evidence in each case a broad array of situations, and hence the possibility of choice in a shared repertoire.

The evidence quoted in this article strongly suggests that we should distinguish between religious roles assumed by individuals (Buddhist, Taoist, spirit-medium, lay non-specialist) and the professional functions that they assumed in a given temple (*zhuchi*, *miaozhu*, external non-resident specialist, etc.). Such a distinction should clear terminological confusion and help us understand that while temple managers, either *zhuchi* or *miaozhu*, had very similar situations in terms of their contractual rights and duties, their personal religious training and competence could be very different. It is particularly important to note that basic requirements towards temple managers (observing rules of ritual purity) applied to all *miaozhu* and *zhuchi*. This fits within a larger pattern where the overarching theme in temple regulations was purity (hence forbidding people to bring unclean things or foodstuff in temple premises, or gambling, drinking, walking around naked, urinating etc.).¹⁰⁵ A major demand on temple managers, whether Taoist, Buddhist, or *miaozhu*, is that they keep ritual purity, which means first and

¹⁰³ *Jide tang beiji* 集德堂碑記 (*Quanzhou* #1040, dated 1720).

¹⁰⁴ *Chongjian Lianfeng shuyuan xu* 重建蓮峰書院序 (*Guangdong beike ji*, 345-48, dated 1758).

¹⁰⁵ On temple regulations, see Goossaert, "La gestion des temples chinois."

foremost a vegetarian diet and sexual abstinence. It is not clear how often *miaoꝑhu* were asked to keep a permanent vegetarian diet (like temple resident Taoists and Buddhists) as opposed to festival-time only vegetarian observance (like ordinary participants). Today many *miaoꝑhu* eat meat and are married. It is noteworthy, however, that at least some temples, as we have seen, had toward their *miaoꝑhu* exactly the same strict purity requirements as towards clerics.

Furthermore, such a distinction between religious roles and professional functions put into light the array of choices available to some lay temple leaders as how to run their temples. First, it is useful to remember that some temple leaders decided *not* to hire a manager even if they could afford to. For instance, nineteenth-century eunuch leaders of a temple near Peking wrote that they did not want Buddhists or Taoists and their clerical families, but entrusted the temple to "virtuous gentlemen" (i.e. themselves).¹⁰⁶ Such cases can be interpreted as instances of anticlericalism, that is, rejection of clerical intermediaries in religious life.¹⁰⁷ In cases where leaders of a large temple wanted and could afford to hire a permanent resident manager, they had a choice to hire either a clerical specialist (*ꝑhuchi*), who would bring his/her specific ritual competence, but also specific demands, or a more humble lay manager (*miaoꝑhu*). Both choices were commonly observed, suggesting they were pros and cons on both sides. Many temple leaders chose to hire a cleric, while still harboring defiant thoughts: "managing the temple is a difficult business, and if we entrust it to a cleric (*ꝑhuchi*) it is likely that a fraud will be committed sooner or later,"¹⁰⁸ hence detailed temple regulations and complex systems of checks and controls over temple Buddhists and Taoists. Lay managers might sometimes have been considered more reliable, but still very similar regulations and controls were applied to them too.

The repertoire of legally and socially sanctioned possibilities for managing a temple that I have been sketching out is remarkably not deterministic. On the basis of the above configurations (no manager, lay manager, clerical manager), all kinds of particular situations could develop depending on the practices proper to the local religious system as well as each community leaders' and the manager's personalities, abilities, opinions, and charisma, and indeed, their skills at negotiation. Flexibility, and room for choice, was decidedly one of the most fascinating features of late imperial Chinese religion.

¹⁰⁶ *Xiangtang miao bei* 響塘廟碑 (*Beitu*, 82/160, dated 1859).

¹⁰⁷ On anticlericalism, see Goossaert, ed., *L'anticlérisme en Chine*.

¹⁰⁸ *Zhengdun Guanzǐ shan miaochan bei* 整頓觀子山廟產碑 (*Hanzhong beishi*, 294-95, dated 1859).

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Abbreviations

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Xinghua: Fujian zongjiao beiming huibian – Xinghua fu fence

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