

# 1 Introduction

**Summary** 1.1 Sources. – 1.2 Structure of the Book.

This book is about the history of a temple, the Tongbai Palace 桐柏宮 of Tiantai County 天台縣. I first realised the importance of this temple for late imperial Daoism when I began to approach the Longmen lineages of the 18th and early 19th century. Even though Longmen today is the most widespread affiliation among monastic Daoists in Mainland China, this was not the case in the first half of the Qing dynasty. I was at first fascinated with the development and growth of this religious community and wanted to understand more about it, especially in relation to its founding and early stages of development. Through my studies I realised that Daoism in southeast China constituted a good starting point to improve my knowledge of Longmen lineages during the Qing dynasty. I set out to make a list of the main Longmen temples in the region and it was then that I first stumbled across the name ‘Tongbai Palace’. This place had a few peculiarities that made it quite interesting in its own right: it had been a prominent temple tied with the court during the Tang and Song dynasties, but it had later declined during the Ming dynasty and until the 18th century, when imperial sponsorship restored it and left

it to Daoist lineages that described themselves as belonging to the Longmen tradition. Moreover, it had received very little attention in the scholarly literature, in spite of being a node in the Longmen temple network during the late 18th century. It also seemed to me that sources after the Taiping Rebellion seldom mentioned this temple: although I was to prove myself wrong with regard to this last point, it made me more determined to understand what Tongbai Palace's role had been in the expansion of Longmen lineages in southeast China.

In writing this book, I wanted at first to focus on the late imperial side of the temple's history, but I realised that I needed to understand its history from the beginning if I wanted to make sense of its recent past. I needed to understand why it was built in the first place, what significance it had through the ages and to what extent the different layers of symbolic capital accumulated over the centuries influenced the way it was portrayed and its significance during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Therefore, I decided to study more in detail also the period that went from the temple's construction in 711 to the Yuan dynasty. I found out that the temple underwent different stages of prosperity and decline, which usually represented important watersheds in its history. These critical periods sometimes corresponded to radical shifts in what symbolic significance and what aspect of its historical past acquired prominence.

Tongbai Palace is a Daoist temple, so this research is part of a long list of works on late imperial Daoism that have been published recently. Academic interest in Daoism, though, is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the past, scholars often neglected this institutional religion, based on the assumption that it was not really a religion at all, that it was practised by the lowest echelons of the population, or that its modern version was but a degeneration of the philosophical Daoism of ancient times. Fortunately, in the last few decades an increasing number of scholars have devoted time and efforts to better understanding Daoism, helping us to achieve a more profound insight into one of the great native religious traditions of China. Scholars have discovered not only that Daoism played a major role in Chinese politics from the 3rd century onwards, but also that it accounted for fundamental religious aspects, such as liturgical frameworks and ways of thinking about divinity, for the people of China.

As a result of this newfound interest in Daoism, the latter has found a place alongside the other religions of the Chinese empire as a valuable subject of study. Confucianism was the religion of the scholarly elite: it undergirded the political system and constituted the ethical and liturgical framework of the government. In the minds of the elite and in late imperial political discourse, it was qualitatively separated from the other two institutionalised religions, Daoism and Buddhism. The latter were often associated in public discourse. This perspective was certainly upheld by Confucians, who wanted

to mark the qualitative difference between Confucianism on the one hand and Daoism and Buddhism on the other. This paradigm can be found in imperial writings as well. In the “Instructions [to Exhort] Local Officials to Pay Special Care for the Sustenance of the Self-cultivation Practitioners and Monks [According to the Doctrine of] the Common Origin of the Three Teachings: Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism” 諭儒佛道三教同源地方大臣當加意護持出家修行之人, for example, the Yongzheng Emperor stated:

I think that the principle of each one of the Three Teachings that enlighten the people in the realm comes from the same origin: if one practices the Way, he cannot fall into error. Human beings cannot understand the whole clearly, so each of them has a different heart-mind and each heart-mind has a different perspective.<sup>1</sup>

朕惟三教之覺民於海內也, 理同出於一原, 道並行而不悖。 人惟不能豁然貫通, 於是人各異心, 心各異見。

Implicitly, though, the emperor admitted that in the early 18th century Buddhism and Daoism were often separated from Confucianism when, in the same work, he added:

Those who worship the Dao say that the Buddha is not as worthy [of praise] as the Dao [itself], while those who favour the Buddha say that the Way is not as great as the Buddha. Confucians censor both [teachings] as heterodox. They hold selfish motives, dispute to gain victory, and do not yield to each other.<sup>2</sup>

慕道者謂佛不如道之尊, 向佛者謂道不如佛之大, 而儒者又兼闢 二氏, 以為異端。 懷挾私心, 紛爭角勝, 而不相下。

In another text, again authored by the same emperor, this difference becomes even clearer:

I have received a responsibility from my royal parents so I am not a person who can dedicate himself to spiritual life. If I wish people to lead a peaceful life, I can only follow the path of Confucius. Therefore, ascending to the throne, I did not deal with Chan Buddhism for ten years.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Yongzheng chao hanwen yuzhi huibian* 3:285b. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Chinese texts are my own.

<sup>2</sup> *Yongzheng chao hanwen yuzhi huibian* 3:285b.

<sup>3</sup> “Yuxuan yulu zongxu” 7a-9a, in *Yuxuan yulu*.

朕膺元后父母之任，並非開堂秉拂之人，欲期民物之安，惟循周孔之轍。所以御極以來，十年未談禪宗。

Such ways of conceptualizing the relationship between the three teachings (i.e. by positing either various modes of coexistence or the separation and mutual incompatibility of the three traditions) may have trickled down to the popular level, but among the population we also witness another mode of interaction. We find popular movements, especially in late imperial times, that produced a peculiar kind of integration of elements from the three religions, which resulted in their amalgamation at the doctrinal and moral levels, and in the permeability of their divine figures and liturgical features in praxis. Such is the case of the movements that were, improperly, labelled as the White Lotus or Luo teachings 羅教.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the institutional and officially recognised 'three religions' (*san jiao* 三教), in the last few decades scholars have increasingly focused on popular religious movements. Although it is often referred to as one category, popular religion did not represent a single religion, but was made up of the myriad local and regional cults that were practised by the population at different geographical and social levels, regardless of whether they were officially recognised by the state or not. These cults included both ascriptive societies and voluntary associations that operated through different forms of organisation, from the subvillage to the supra-village level.<sup>5</sup> Finally, another category that I think deserves being mentioned separately is that of the imperial rituals, the liturgies performed by the state (i.e. directly by the emperor or by officials) for the sake of the state and of the general population. Even though they are usually conceptualized as having developed out of the Confucian framework, we know that in certain periods state rituals were also influenced by Daoism, and even, as in the case of the sacrifice to Heaven, performed by Daoists.<sup>6</sup>

Each of these five categories was not necessarily separate from the rest on the level of practice or doctrine: only those who devoted themselves to the study and practice of one of them could consider themselves to be exclusively Confucian, or Buddhist, or Daoist, and even in their case, this does not mean that they never dealt with the other religions. Indeed, as some scholars have noted, we should think of the religious landscape of late imperial China as dominated

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Goossaert, "The Heavenly Master", 229-45. On the amalgamation of the different institutional religions at the popular level, see Seiwert, *Popular Religious Movements*, 439-45; ter Haar, *The White Lotus*.

<sup>5</sup> On ascriptive societies and voluntary associations, see Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State*, 15-16, 118-57.

<sup>6</sup> Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, 34-9; Liu, "Daoist Priests and Imperial Sacrifices", 55-88.

by a pervasive 'Chinese religion', of which the three institutional religions discussed above are only a partial expression.<sup>7</sup> According to this interpretive framework, the different religious denominations rested on a common cosmology and world-view and shared ethics that allowed many authors, including some emperors, to claim that the differences in phenomenal expression concealed a common origin or purpose. Historically speaking, this was the result of a centuries-long process of interaction that in fact never led to complete integration and instead resulted in the various religious domains occupying separate, but intersecting areas in relation to the activities of the state and the life of the population. This meant that they were often experienced as coexisting rather than as mutually exclusive. This does not mean that the coexistence was always pacific: in late imperial times we find strong attacks by Confucians against Buddhism, Daoism, and popular religion, as well Daoist criticisms of Buddhism and vice-versa. What I have just described represents the theoretical foundation for the present study in respect to my conceptualization of Chinese religiosity.

This book can be described as a study in social history concerned with the case of Tongbai Palace. Yet, my aim is not simply to retrace the history of the temple, but to read its history – and especially the period between the 17th century and the first half of the 19th – as a cultural product of the social actors who interacted with this institution. To achieve this aim, I focused on two aspects that I consider fundamental: the cultural and the social spheres. The former pertains to the symbolism and cultural knowledge that came to be associated with the temple and its surrounding territory over the centuries. The latter aspect, instead, concerns the people who frequented the temple and their social networks. These two aspects not only influenced each other, but were mutually dependent. As has been clearly explained by Peter Berger, society and culture are human creations, but once externalised they take on a life of their own that provides them with the semblance of an objective reality apparent to anyone examining them. Throughout this book I will describe how previously sedimented symbolic and cultural strata functioned as a magnet for specific groups of people and how different persons responded in different ways to the different strata related to the temple. The basic assumption of this book, then, is that temples and institutions have no volition or agency in themselves which is separate from that of the human beings who inhabit and frequent them: their history and the stories that people tell about them become seemingly objective elements that people must engage with, assimilate, rethink, and rewrite. In other words, they are facts that must be dealt with by those inter-

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<sup>7</sup> On this topic, see Goossaert, Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, 20-7.

acting with the Tongbai Palace. For this reason, my study focuses on individuals and their mutual interactions, as well as on the relationships between them and their communities, and between them and the cultural and material products that they generated.

In late imperial China, human action was also related to divine action. As the most responsive beings in the world, humans enjoyed a special relationship with Heaven, Earth, and the supernatural. Therefore, late imperial people understood human agency and more specifically human action as fundamental for any divine response, as exemplified by the following excerpt from the *Qingsheng Ci zhi* 清聖祠志 (Gazetteer of the Qingsheng Shrine):

Although the statues of the [two] wise and virtuous men were protected by the spirits of the mountain, they could not have made it without the merit of the Daoist's determined care [for them].<sup>8</sup>

雖聖賢遺像由山靈呵護，道士苦守之功正不可沒。

Gods could operate through human beings and their actions in the world, an aspect that has been highlighted by a series of studies demonstrating that, far from being 'superstitious', these cults were ways of interacting with the cosmic reality envisioned by traditional Chinese culture. As a consequence, the univocal interpretation of rituals and cult activities and religious policies from an exclusively political or economic perspective is problematic to me, because it erases from history a set of important drives and motivations that acted on both the personal and the social level.<sup>9</sup> although 'religion' also intersects with the economic, social, and political dimensions, it is a complex phenomenon, that cannot be reduced to any one of them. In other words, I also take as legitimate the claims founded on religious motivation.

Another important concept to which I refer in this book is that of religion. While a single definition of religion remains elusive, I find recent work in the psychology of religion persuasive, in particular the theories of Raymond Paloutzian and Crystal Park.<sup>10</sup> These two scholars state that religion is "a multidimensional variable that is among

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**8** *Qingsheng Ci zhi* "fanli":4a. The statues mentioned here refer to those portraying Bo Yi 伯夷 and Shu Qi 叔齊: more on them in chapter two.

**9** For example, we may consider Benn, "Emperor Hsüan-tsung's Taoist Ideology", 127-45 and compare it to Victor Xiong's critique of Benn's interpretation of the cult of Laozi as motivated by political reasons (Xiong, "Ritual Innovations and Taoism", 258-316). Similarly, Jia Jinhua's study of ordained Daoist princesses highlights the panoply of reasons that led them to enter Daoism, including political, religious and personal ones. Jia, *Gender, Power, and Talent*, 18-32.

**10** Paloutzian, Park, *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*.

the most complex properties of the human mind” and that “[o]ne way that religion seems to be unique is that it provides people with ultimate meaning in life [...], centred on what the individual perceives to be sacred [...], especially in a way that is nonveridical such that its truth claims or the person’s idiosyncratic meanings derived from them can carry the weight of absolute reality without being bound by the rules of evidence”.<sup>11</sup> According to these scholars, religion has to do with the sacred, truth claims, and absolute reality. Crystal Park describes two basic aspects of meaning in relation to religion: global meaning and meaning making. The former is the “general meaning in life”, consisting “of three aspects: beliefs, goals, and subjective feelings”. Associating religion with these three dimensions implies that religion can be considered as the weft supporting an individual’s sense of reality and his or her position within it. Meaning making “in contrast to meaning in life, refers to a *process* of working to restore global life meaning when it has been disrupted or violated, typically by some major unpleasant or terrible life event”.<sup>12</sup> This position is remarkably close to that expressed by Jonathan Smith in his ‘Map is not Territory’: “religion is one mode of constructing worlds of meaning, worlds within which men find themselves and in which they choose to dwell [...] Religion is the quest, within the bounds of the human, historical condition, for the power to manipulate and negotiate one’s ‘situation’ so as to have ‘space’ in which to meaningfully dwell. [...] Religion is a distinctive mode of human creativity [...] which both discovers limits and creates limits for humane existence. What we study when we study religion is the variety of attempts to map, construct and inhabit such positions of power through the use of myths, rituals and experiences of transformation”.<sup>13</sup> Elaborating on Paloutzian, Park, and Smith’s theory of religion, I came to tentatively define religion as *practised* meaning.<sup>14</sup> My focus on practice is necessary in order to allow the process whereby the interiority of the individual is poured into the world and becomes ‘real’ (in the sense discussed above) by means of actions and their products. This allows us to understand and explain how knowledge about a place such as Tongbai Palace became interwoven with the more general

<sup>11</sup> Paloutzian, Park, “Integrative Themes”, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Park, “Religion and Meaning”, 297-9.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *Map is not Territory*, 290-1.

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that at least another scholar of Chinese religion has arrived at a position that resonates with mine. John Lagerwey defined religion as “the practice of structuring values”. Lagerwey, “Introduction”, 2. While I consider a system of values as a fundamental part of a meaning system, I think that my approach is more encompassing and it helps to account for other aspects that are included within the concept of meaning, such as the feeling of being anchored in a cosmic order that ‘makes sense’ as well as provides coordinates and direction.

religious fabric of imperial China and how it was able to exert a certain amount of influence on the subsequent generations of people who dealt with the temple.

At the sociological level, I have benefited from Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's paradigm on the sociology of knowledge. What I have found particularly useful is their discussion of the process of socialisation and of the production of meaning as the defining feature of human beings. Robert Bellah's theory of religion has also contributed to the development of my own approach to religion. His paradigm of multiple realities, which he shares with Berger and Luckmann, and that of Being Cognition and Deficiency Cognition, which he borrowed from Abraham Maslow, have been very inspiring for me and have provided a way to tie together the theories of psychology of religion with those of sociology. Thanks to these scholars, I was able to develop a perspective on the history of a place of worship that sees it as resulting from the sedimentation of different 'strata of meaning', by which I mean layers of religious significance. These strata are made up of the stories told about the temple, of the historical events remembered and recorded in a variety of texts, of the knowledge about deities, important locations, useful flora, fauna, and minerals, and everything that constitutes religiously significant information about the temple and its surrounding area. The way in which these strata interact, intersect, come to replace one another, and arise and disappear over the course of the temple's history is therefore determined by how people transmitted this knowledge and these stories, by what they did at the temple and in relation to it, by the importance that they attached to each stratum and to the perceived relationship between different strata.

According to what I have stated above, it is clear that, while being the main focus of this book, Tongbai Palace is not its sole subject. In fact, we could easily change our perspective and see the temple as nestled within the surrounding territory and therefore expand our view to encompass Mt. Tongbai and the Tiantai Mountains as fundamental features of the landscape studied in this book. I discuss these in detail in the first chapter, but I deem it necessary to offer a few preliminary reflections here on the importance of mountains in traditional Chinese religion. Many studies have analysed the symbolism of mountains in China and their function both within Daoism and in other contexts. First of all, we find a long-standing tradition that considers mountains to be a setting for supernatural encounters and the dwelling place of deities and transcendental beings. As I will discuss in the first chapter, mountains were considered liminal places where human beings could witness and interact with supernatural elements. This is true for their surface and even more so for their inner territory, made up of grottoes and tunnels. The *Shanhai jing* 山海經 (Classic of Mountains and Seas; DZ 1031) appears to be one of the earliest

atlases of supernatural landscapes, although the date of its composition is debated.<sup>15</sup> It details a territory marked by supernatural features where strange creatures and deities abound. Ancient Chinese culture gave prominence to some specific mountains, both real and mythological, such as Mt. Kunlun 崑崙山, which tradition described as the dwelling place of Xiwang Mu 西王母 (in the *Shanhai jing*) or of Laozi (in the *Xiang'er* 想爾), the Five Marchmounts 五嶽, distributed in the four directions plus the centre, and functioning as ‘regulators’ (*zhen* 鎮) of the empire, or specifically Mt. Tai 泰山, where sovereigns performed the critical *feng* and *shan* rituals 封禪.<sup>16</sup>

As noted by Franciscus Verellen, mountains were not important just for their outward appearance, which easily turned them into landmarks in the sacred landscape, but also for what they contained, what he called “the beyond within”.<sup>17</sup> Gil Raz similarly noted that the Daoist landscape was not constituted merely by the topography of its external features – although this territory certainly presented many supernatural elements – since its underground territory was often equally, if not even more, important.<sup>18</sup> Mountains held a creative power evident in the clouds surrounding them, which was conceptualized as the outflowing *qi* generated within them. The supernatural features of the landscape, therefore, extend to what is not visible, to the hidden realm below the surface. A set of interconnected tunnels traversing the bowels of mountains were believed to conceal parallel worlds filled with supernatural elements, and even having their own sun and moon and day-night cycles. Starting with the Shangqing revelations of the 4th century, a list of grottoes and of their related mountains began to be systematised, reaching maturity by the end of the Tang dynasty. A number of peaks in Zhejiang, including Mt. Tongbai, were also included in this ranking of sacred grottoes that extended all over the territory of the empire. Starting in medieval times, we find texts containing an increasing number of descriptions of journeys to supernatural places, such as distant lands and underground mountain tunnels. By travelling underground, one could reach fabled lands, come into possession of sacred texts (either revealed or found ones), and encounter supernatural beings. The different parts of a mountain were seen at the same time as a kind of

<sup>15</sup> Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann states that most of the *Shanhai jing* was drafted in the 1st century BC. Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, “Text as a Device”, 148. Marianne Bujard argues that the first five chapters of the text date from the end of the Warring States period. Bujard, “State and Local Cults”, 788.

<sup>16</sup> On the Five Marchmounts, which he calls Sacred Peaks, see Robson, *Power of Place*, 25-44.

<sup>17</sup> Verellen, “The Beyond Within”.

<sup>18</sup> Raz, “Daoist Sacred Geography”, 1400.

natural laboratory and as an altar, both aspects being necessary to the ascension of the gifted practitioner. Although they were indeed dangerous places, mountains – as argued by Verellen – served a series of beneficial functions for the practitioner: they acted as a place of initiation, made possible by the encounter with supernatural beings or sacred texts, and – most importantly – functioned as a refuge from war, social turmoil, and indeed civilisation itself.<sup>19</sup> Mt. Tongbai too is described by the sources as a safe refuge, a *blessed land*.

Early examples of hagiographies of transcendents, such as the *Liexian zhuan* 列仙傳 (Biographies of Exemplary Transcendents; DZ 302; 2nd century) and the *Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳 (Biographies of Divine Transcendents) bear witness to the close relationship between transcendents and mountains.<sup>20</sup> The Shangqing revelations further developed the links between sacred mountains and successful practitioners. This is also true in the case of Mt. Tongbai, which was related to the figure of Wangzi Qiao during the Tang dynasty, while during the Qing dynasty the temple was linked to a practitioner of inner alchemy of the Song dynasty, Zhang Boduan 張伯端 (987?-1082). In the context of individual practices, mountains were not only places where self-cultivation was possible: they were considered liminal spaces where human beings could enter in contact with supernatural beings, and where they could gather special herbs and mushroom to be eaten or used for medical purposes. Following James Robson, “the numinous nature of Chinese sacred mountains was constituted by elements within the site, such as potent herbs, magical waters, deep caves, strange plants, and noteworthy people”,<sup>21</sup> but also sacred scriptures, divine objects and supernatural beings.

Their condition of liminal places, their function as access to a supernatural world, perhaps explains why mountains have been a preferred site for self-cultivation in China since ancient times. This aspect has already been discussed in detail elsewhere, so I will not delve into it more than it is necessary. Descriptions of mountains as favourite places for self-cultivation are found in texts from the first part of the imperial era or even earlier. One early example is found in the *Zhuangzi*, where a *shenren* 神人 pursues self-cultivation on Mt. Guyi.<sup>22</sup> Ge Hong’s 葛洪 *Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇 (The Master

<sup>19</sup> Verellen, “The Beyond Within”, 267-8.

<sup>20</sup> Raz, “Daoist Sacred Geography”, 1406. In this book I have decided to translate the term *xian* 仙 as ‘transcendent’ instead of opting for another viable and frequently used translation, ‘immortal’. In this, I follow Bokenkamp’s reflections on the term. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 22-3; Penny, “Immortality and Transcendence”, 109-33. For a different approach to the issue, see Jia, *Gender, Power, and Talent*, 209 fn. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Robson, *Power of Place*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Campamy, “Seekers of Transcendence”, 350.

Who Embraces Simplicity; 4th century) is probably the source that most scholars have in mind when discussing early systematic texts on transcendence on mountains. This text contains many passages that explain the preparations needed to access mountains and avoid their dangers as well as practice self-cultivation. It is worth noting that Ge Hong himself was also critical of some practitioners whom he considered to be charlatans for spreading fake stories about their supernatural encounters on mountains. Therefore, even at this early stage the lore surrounding mountains was not univocal and universally accepted, but we find different perspective on the issue.

The importance of mountains for Daoism also derived from their ritual significance. Not much can be said in general about local mountain cults in early imperial times, but we know a great deal about ancient royal cults and early myths that were based on mountains. Perhaps the most famous – and least practised – mountain rituals were the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, which were performed to communicate to Heaven that the empire had been reunited and pacified under one dynasty.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, mountains were also the stage for popular cults, as in the case of the transcendents of Mt. Huagai 華蓋山 studied by Robert Hymes.<sup>24</sup>

The very close relationship between mountains and temples, in traditional China and especially in Daoism, is witnessed by the use of symbolic language. All Daoist temples are called mountains or caves. The close relationship between orography and cult places is confirmed by the use of the expressions *shanmen* 山門 (literally: ‘gate of the mountain’, or ‘access to the mountain’) and *dongmen* 洞門 (‘entrance to the cave’ or ‘main gate’) to indicate the main gate of a temple. Moreover, in biographies about Daoists we often find expressions such as ‘he visited famous mountains’, which can be understood both as a direct reference to mountains with a particular cultural and religious significance, and as an indirect reference to the temples located on or near these mountains. The close connection between the concept of mountain and that of temple should be understood as being not only metaphorical, but factual. Like mountains, temples were a liminal place, where the boundary between the immanent and the transcendent worlds became permeable. If, as argued by Gil Raz, within the grottoes under the mountains the mundane spatial and temporal limits were abrogated, then – by analogy – the same could be said of temples, from a religious perspective.<sup>25</sup> While mountains in the Chinese tradition are ‘places of initiation’, temples too often perform the same function. The kind of discipline and aus-

**23** Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, 170-94; Bujard, “State and Local Cults”.

**24** Hymes, *Way and Byway Taoism*.

**25** Raz, “Daoist Sacred Geography”, 1404.

terity that Verellen attributes to the lifestyle of those who live in the mountains also characterises the life of temple dwellers, as illustrated by the codes of conduct of monastic communities preserved in the *Daoist Canon*.

This confirms the point stressed here that the significance of a (Daoist) temple does not reside in its material form as a set of walls and buildings, nor merely in it being a setting for the activities of Daoists and visitors, but should rather be studied both as a tool for the production of meaning and as the very outcome of such process. This view resonates with the difference between place and history that James Robson made in his study on the Nanyue, which can be found also in traditional Chinese local history, which “evolved along two intertwined axes: the biographies of individuals on one hand, and stories about particular places or localities on the other”.<sup>26</sup> I am therefore convinced that it is the human presence that gives shape to a place, that provides it with symbolic layers, and that makes it significant through time and space. For these reasons, in this book I dedicated much space to the study of the activities of persons and Daoist lineages that have been related to Tongbai Palace and Tiantai.

## 1.1 Sources

In order to conduct the research behind this book, I have used a variety of sources, which I have classified as official, Daoist, and private. Official sources encompass all those texts that were produced by emperors, members of the court, or officials serving in this capacity. These include official histories and related documents, edicts and memorials, inscriptions, and other similar sources. Daoist sources include those texts produced by Daoists qua Daoists, such as temple gazetteers and doctrinal and ritual books dealing with Daoist doctrine, rituals, and institutions. Finally, private sources are not limited to texts produced for private use, but also include ones written by individuals who were not acting as public officials, such as poems, essays, and travelogues. Sometimes these categories overlap: for example, some local gazetteers were not state-sponsored, but were undertakings by individual officials working at a given post or by local literati that were later employed by other officials, sometimes to compile state-sponsored gazetteers.

Among the sources that I quote the most are a series of gazetteers on the Tiantai region, such as the *Tiantai Shan zhi* 天台山志 (Gazetteer of the Tiantai Mountains), the *Tiantai Shan fangwai zhi* 天台山方外志 (Gazetteer on What Lies Beyond the Secular of the Tiantai Moun-

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<sup>26</sup> Robson, *Power of Place*, 24.

tains), the *Tiantai Shan quanzhi* 天台山全志 (Complete Gazetteer of the Tiantai Mountains), and the *Qingsheng Ci zhi*. The last of these works, in particular, constitutes the foundation for the third chapter, focused on the Qingsheng Shrine on Mt. Tongbai. The *Qingsheng Ci zhi* is divided into two parts. The first is a collection of communications and memorials that the author Zhang Lianyuan 張聯元 himself wrote between 1712 and 1722. The declared purpose of this gazetteer was to record the development of the legal case against the Zhang clan of Tiantai (unrelated to Zhang Lianyuan) and to preserve the final ruling that returned the land to the shrine – which belonged to Tongbai Palace – for future reference. The official missives collected in the *Qingsheng Ci zhi* allow us to reconstruct the whole process of land reclamation from the author’s point of view. The second part of this gazetteer collects a variety of texts on the shrine, including land registries, records, and poems about it. The anonymous *Tiantai Shan zhi* is found in the *Daozang* and can probably be dated to the year 1367, during the reign of the Yuan emperor Huizong (1333-1370). It represents an important source for our understanding of the history of Tongbai Palace in a period that is under-represented in the sources in our possession.<sup>27</sup> The *Tiantai Shan fangwai zhi* bears a preface by the author dated to the Wanli *xinchou* 萬曆辛丑 year (1601). The name of the author is Shi Chuandeng 釋傳燈 (1554-1628), who was clearly a Buddhist monk based in Tiantai. He wrote the preface in the Youxi Lecture Hall 幽溪講堂 of the Gaoming (Buddhist) Monastery 高明寺.<sup>28</sup> His Buddhist affiliation certainly explains why his gazetteer is heavily focused on the influence of that religion in Tiantai County; nonetheless, this work remains an important source of data on Tiantai Daoism from the late Ming dynasty. Finally, the *Tiantai Shan quanzhi* was also compiled by Zhang Lianyuan during the Kangxi 康熙 era (1662-1722) and it provides useful insights into the status of the Palace during the early Qing period.

In the fourth chapter I rely heavily on the *Jingai xinding* 金蓋心燈 (Mind-Lamp of Mount Jingai; 1821, blocks recarved in 1876) by Min Yide 閔一得 (1748/58-1836), a hagiographical account of the transmission of the Longmen doctrine and precepts throughout the centuries. Even though this text has been proven to be partially unreliable from a historiographical perspective, it remains useful for two reasons. First, while its reliability can be contested for the oldest hagiographies in it, the most recent ones are more reliable. Not only was Min Yide a direct witness to many of these accounts, but this

<sup>27</sup> This gazetteer states: “From the year 1168 [...] until the incident in the present *dingwei* [year], 199 years have passed” 自乾道戊子……至今丁未變故又一百九十九年。 *Tiantai Shan zhi* 8b.

<sup>28</sup> *Tiantai Shan quanzhi* 7:17b; *Youxi biezhi*, in particular “xu”: 3a-5a.

is also the only source for some of them. In other cases, we have external sources that either partially or fully confirm what is recorded in the *Jingai xindeng*. I have tried to quote these alternative sources whenever possible. The second reason why this text is extremely useful to the scholar of late imperial Daoism is because it casts light on the self-depiction of Min Yide's Longmen lineage and of its history. This lineage is very significant for the development of Tongbai Palace during the 17th and 18th centuries, since it managed the temple starting in the Qianlong 乾隆 era (1735-1796). I have therefore studied the relationship between the two in detail.

## 1.2 Structure of the Book

This book comprises four chapters that can be divided into two parts. The first includes Chapters 1 and 2, which focus on the pre-Qing history of Tongbai Palace. They do not aim to record each and every mention of Tongbai Palace or Mt. Tongbai in the sources, or to analyse each occurrence. Instead, they provide an overview of what I consider to be the main elements that, over the centuries, contributed to building the cultural and religious image of Tiantai, making it a significant location for Daoist practitioners. Chapter 1 focuses on the earliest mentions of the Tiantai area and on the main early myths associated with the Tiantai Mountains. Here I have striven to provide an overview of some features that contributed to the attractiveness of the area, including its significance for self-cultivation, deities related to mountains, and the presence of virtuous men.

Chapter 2 summarises the history of the temple from its construction under the Tang dynasty to its demise during the Ming. The periods on which the chapter focuses the most are the Tang and Song dynasties, since they are those for which we have most data. They are also the years most investigated by scholars. Unlike in the first chapter, in this one I do not discuss the mythological and symbolic capital accumulated by the region in the period in question, but focus instead on the people and on the religious lineages found in the area. This is justified by the fact that, after the construction of Tongbai Palace in 711, we find information on individuals that lived in the temple and on traditions that were linked to it. This chapter has two purposes. First, by analysing who dwelled at Tongbai Palace we can better understand what its function was and what position it occupied within the broader religious environment. Second, the study of the individuals inhabiting and supporting the temple proves useful to understand its development across the centuries and to contextualize the way in which Tongbai Palace was subsequently conceptualized.

The second part of the book is made up of Chapters 3 and 4, both focusing on the history of the temple during the late Ming and Qing

dynasties. Chapter 3 discusses a case of encroachment on the temple land that affected the Qingsheng Shrine, the aforementioned shrine annexed to Tongbai Palace. Even though this legal case specifically concerned the shrine, the arguments made by the official supporting the temple and its resident Daoist refer more generally to the original endowments of Tongbai Palace. Moreover, from the late Ming dynasty onwards the Qingsheng Shrine appears to have been the only part of the Palace that remained in use, so a study of this topic allows us to fill a gap in the history of the temple, corresponding to the period of disrepair between the end of the Ming dynasty and the end of the Yongzheng era (1722-1735).

Chapter 4 discusses the restoration of Tongbai Palace sponsored by the Yongzheng Emperor along with the Longmen lineage that subsequently established itself in the temple. This chapter ends with the 1850s, which I consider to mark the end of an era through the Taiping Rebellion. Even though Tongbai Palace continued to remain part of the Daoist world and discourse during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the religious landscape of the region was radically changed by the rebellion and therefore, in my opinion, this constitutes a separate stage in the history of this temple that must be studied in its own right. In this final chapter I discuss the temple network created by Longmen Daoists and try to locate the position of Tongbai Palace within it. Because the latter was but one node in this network, my analysis necessarily relies on a broader perspective, encompassing the evolution of regional Daoism in the Jiangnan area, a term that I here take to indicate specifically southern Jiangsu and Zhejiang.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of the different meanings of the term Jiangnan, see Wu, *Jiangnan Quanzhen Daojiao*, 8-18.

