
6 Conclusion

When I started approaching the study of this topic, I decided to develop my theoretical framework - built on paradigms drawn from the fields of psychology of religion and sociology of religion - by enclosing within it the two dimensions that I could analyse through the sources: the history of the social groups that inhabited Tongbai Palace and the history of the symbolism, personages, cults and beliefs linked to it. The former aspect was instrumental in providing historical evidence about the temple's occupants, their possible aims and the way in which Tongbai Palace became part of the broader social, political and economic history of the empire. The latter aspect is what I have summarised through the expression 'strata of meaning'. These include the religious and cultural products of those communities that dealt with Tongbai Palace in one way or another. I hope to have adequately shown that these products did not exist in a vacuum, but were influenced by previous knowledge and existing artefacts (such as stelae, buildings, books, etc.) and in turn resulted in the creation of new lore, new artefacts and buildings, in a word: in text. They acted like sedimentary rock layers, accumulating as strata in Tongbai Palace and in the surrounding territory, as new layers gradually covered more ancient ones. The latter, however, sometimes resurfaced and regained prominence. The historical forces that brought older strata back to life - or that created new ones - took various shapes. One way in which they did so was through the reinterpreting

and recovering of past traditions that had become obsolete, as specific historical circumstances allowed such traditions to regain significance. One example is provided by the disciples of Sima Chengzhen's lineage, who tried to restore the temple by recovering its glorious past under their patriarch.

Other times, we have found one layer being superimposed upon another, as in the case of Yongzheng's patronage of the temple. As we have seen, the emperor did not want to restore Tongbai Palace as such, but specifically sought to highlight Zhang Boduan's alleged relationship with the temple. Similarly, under the Longmen control of the temple, its most ancient past was seldom employed as a means to build up the prestige of the temple itself or of its community. One example that might correspond to both the resurfacing model and the superimposition one is represented by Zhang Lianyuan's struggle to return Tongbai Palace land to the Qingsheng Shrine. Although it is undeniable that the official supported the shrine's claims by referring to specific elements in the temple's past (the statues of Bo Yi and Shu Qi and, to a lesser extent, Sima Chengzhen), he also reinterpreted the temple as a place of worship devoted to the two Confucian sages and Daoist deities Bo Yi and Shu Qi, choosing to give prominence to what had hitherto been regarded as secondary features of Tongbai Palace.

This book has adopted a largely chronological approach to the study of Tongbai Palace. I started from the oldest pieces of evidence about Tiantai, stored in philosophical-religious, geographical, historiographical and fictional texts, highlighting the fundamental knowledge that shaped how people saw Tongbai Palace in later times. This knowledge was taken for granted, in a way: it was a kind of mark left on the temple and the surrounding area, available for all attentive viewers to see. As I have argued in the first chapter, such knowledge about the Tiantai region served to gradually improve its religious importance and to build that religious substratum that led to the later increase in Mt. Tongbai's importance. The characteristics of the Tiantai Mountains and their local religious significance tied in with their gradual rise in importance in the regional religious landscape and with the progressive accumulation of new religious institutions and features, leading to the mountains' inclusion in Daoist sacred geography, systematised by Sima Chengzhen and Du Guangting and to the concurrent development of mythical lore and fictional narrative about the place. It is easy to see, then, why Tiantai was such an important area for the Shangqing revelations and for the following religious traditions interested in that area, in a continuous accumulation and reworking of adjacent religious layers from the 4th century at least to the 10th.

After studying the earliest evidence related to Tiantai, I decided to focus on the Tang dynasty. This was justified by the importance that this period had in the history of Tongbai Palace. Although some

sources mention a previous temple that existed before the construction of 'Tongbai Abbey', very little is known about it and in fact most of the information we have is related to the activities carried out there by Ge Xuan, himself a semi-mythical figure. Therefore, for all intents and purposes it was the Tongbai Abbey built in 711 that can be taken to mark the historical beginning of this institution. All the various successive incarnations of the temple (Tongbai Abbey, Chongdao Abbey, Tongbai Palace) maintained a sort of identification with the temple built by Emperor Ruizong: this kind of awareness is what allows us today to speak of Tongbai Palace as a thousand-year-old temple, although it went through successive periods of decline, restoration and even experienced displacement. The first construction of the temple during the Tang dynasty was an act of imperial sponsorship, and Sima Chengzhen himself, for whom the temple was built, was the most renowned court Daoist of his time. My study has highlighted how the strata of meaning built up during the previous eras - and more specifically those related to the Shangqing revelations - remained highly influential during Sima Chengzhen's stay at Tongbai Palace. They determined the position of the temple in Daoist geography and history more broadly and provided the temple and the surrounding area with potency and identity. Sima Chengzhen himself recognised these links in his *Shangqing shi dichen tongbai Zhenren zhen tuzan*, which recounted Wangzi Qiao's apotheosis on Mt. Tongbai.

It appears that after Sima Chengzhen left Tongbai Palace to move closer to the capital, the temple may have been abandoned. A few decades later, though, a lineage that recognised Sima Chengzhen as its patriarch regained possession of Tongbai Palace. This Daoist lineage was very adamant in asserting its link with its patriarch also by establishing itself at Tongbai Palace, which represented a sort of ancestral hall. This lineage remained active in the temple until the end of the Tang dynasty, when the upheaval of the political system resulted in the collapse of Daoist traditions historically linked to the court. The obstinate retention of a foothold in the temple shows to what extent the recent past was significant to this community. Tongbai Palace's relationship with Sima Chengzhen's Shangqing tradition endured until the time of Du Guangting, himself a resident of the temple. As demonstrated in the second chapter, only momentous events such as the fall of the Tang dynasty could sever such bonds.

The dislocation of the Shangqing lineage from the seat of power did not mean that Tongbai Palace became completely cut off from court Daoism. During the Song dynasty the temple continued to be an important place of worship linked to the court, but it began to separate itself from earlier traditions. One significant aspect is the use of the texts stored in Tongbai Palace for the compilation of a Daoist canon in the 11th century. This demonstrates how the continuous accumulation of strata of meaning in the temple resulted in the production of artefacts,

in this case a rich library, that further augmented the institution's prestige. In 1008 the temple's name was changed to Chongdao Abbey. It is in this period that interventions by private sponsors in the history of Tongbai Palace start to be recorded by the sources. This is also the period in which the statues of Bo Yi and Shu Qi were reportedly brought to the temple: as we have seen, their importance for the history of Tongbai Palace grew during the early Qing dynasty.

After the end of the Song dynasty, information on the temple becomes less clear. We know that the temple somehow continued to operate, possibly with ups and downs. It was certainly restored at the beginning of the Ming dynasty after having been destroyed during the dynastic change, which suggests that it was active at the end of the previous dynasty. By the end of the Ming dynasty, the separation between the court and Tongbai Palace was complete and the temple lay in ruins. In this period, the only notable stratum of meaning connected to the temple, according to various testimonies by literati and officials, was the one related to the presence of Bo Yi and Shu Qi and to their double role as Confucian saints and Daoist deities ruling the mountain. This story conveniently fell at the crossroads between Daoism and Confucianism, an ambiguity skilfully exploited by literati who often took the ruins of Tongbai Palace as a Confucian rather than Daoist landmark. I have interpreted the sages' two identities as being not mutually exclusive, but mutually reinforcing, as the example of the *Qingsheng Ci zhi* demonstrates.

With the Qing dynasty, a new period in the history of Tongbai Palace began. Between the end of the Ming dynasty and the Kangxi era the land of the temple was occupied by the local elite, and its institutions faced severe decline. Zhang Lianyuan's gazetteer detailing his efforts in support of the legal case for the restitution of the temple land to the Qingsheng Shrine, part of Tongbai Palace, is an extraordinary document. The focus of this text is not Tongbai Palace as a whole, but a small part of it, the Qingsheng Shrine. The latter's attractiveness - we learn from the gazetteer - chiefly lies in the fact that it is dedicated to the two figures of Bo Yi and Shu Qi. According to some sources, the shrine was built during the Southern Song dynasty by the county magistrate of Tiantai. Therefore, the presence of Bo Yi and Shu Qi at Tongbai Palace was a later development compared to its initial Shangqing character. Regarding the latter, Zhang Lianyuan also expressed the desire to enshrine Sima Chengzhen together with Bo Yi and Shu Qi: this suggests that the origins of the temple still affected its development in the 17th century. In a way, Zhang Lianyuan's depiction of Tongbai Palace does not differ much from that of earlier periods: during the Song dynasty the temple continued to be a famous site associated with Ge Xuan and Sima Chengzhen. It should be noted, though, that Sima Chengzhen was not the main subject of interest for Zhang Lianyuan, but only an addition to the main deities of the shrine. This tells us that, despite the

continuing importance of the Daoist patriarch, the significance of his lineage at the Palace had already declined.

The first half of the 18th century saw a critical event in the history of Tongbai Palace, namely its imperially sponsored restoration during the Yongzheng era. The secret exchanges between the emperor and his official Li Wei inform us that the former was not at all interested in Sima Chengzhen, in Wangzi Qiao, or in the past of the temple linked to the Shangqing lineage of the Tang dynasty. Instead, he focused his attention on two other Daoists: Ge Xuan and Zhang Boduan. As we have seen, the former had already been associated with the general area of Tongbai Palace many centuries before and the presence of his altar for self-cultivation was a well-known fact among the local population, so much so that we find it mentioned in local gazetteers. The most striking aspect of the Yongzheng Emperor's patronage of Tongbai Palace is precisely his idea that Zhang Boduan was in some way related to the temple. No historical evidence confirms this belief, yet it is precisely what justified the imperially sponsored restoration of the temple. As we know, Zhang Boduan was a practitioner of inner alchemy (*neidan*), a method of self-cultivation developed under the late Tang and Song dynasties, and is most famous as the author of the *Wuzhen pian*, a treatise on self-cultivation. Thus, thanks to his enormous economic resources, as well as political and religious authority, the emperor was able to superimpose a totally new stratum of meaning upon Tongbai Palace, turning it into the setting for Zhang Boduan's practice of self-cultivation. From this time on, the emphasis on Sima Chengzhen's and the Shangqing Daoists' dwelling at the temple was superseded by a new narrative centred on Song-dynasty practitioners and Buddho-Daoist dialogue exemplified by the figure of Zhang Boduan and his 'External Collection'. I could even argue that, with his patronage, the Yongzheng Emperor reflected the de facto coexistence of Buddhist and Daoist institutions in the Tiantai Mountains and that he was able to express it by uniting the two religions in the person of Zhang Boduan.

Finally, this last act of imperial patronage benefited the expanding Longmen lineages of southeast China, in ways that are not yet entirely clear. Right after the imperially sponsored restoration of Tongbai Palace, a new lineage established itself at the temple, a lineage formed by Longmen Daoists from the Jingu Grotto of Hangzhou. This Longmen community apparently thrived at the temple for at least fifty to seventy years, during which time the abbot Gao Dongli and his three main disciples, Shen Yibing, Min Yide and Fang Yiding, spread the Longmen doctrine across an area that extended as far north as Lake Tai and as far south as Linhai and Huangyan, and which also included the important centres of Huzhou, Hangzhou and Yuhang. In this period, then, Tongbai Palace became a node in the expanding network of Longmen communities of southeast China. It preserved its significance at least up until the first part of the 19th century,

when a number of Longmen Daoists associated with Mt. Weiyu visited Tongbai Palace and received training there. During the Qing dynasty, therefore, the religious significance of the temple took a new turn. Instead of being remembered as a site connected to the Shangqing lineage, Sima Chengzhen, Du Guangting and Wangzi Qiao, it most commonly came to be described as a Longmen temple associated with relatively recent figures and with Zhang Boduan. In this we can see a clear superimposition of a new depiction derived from the Qing-dynasty events upon whatever other representation of the temple may have existed before. In general, the documents from this period often seem to have forgotten or at least to disregard some of the more ancient strata of meaning while adding new ones instead.

In order to understand what traces this process of superimposition may have left on the temple today, we must refer to the new Tongbai Palace, built on the shore of an artificial water basin on Mt. Tongbai at the beginning of the 21st century. This is a large complex that in addition to the main halls includes a parking lot, a series of pavilions and platforms, a canteen, a dormitory, a hall dedicated to Taiyi Jiuku Tianzun 太乙救苦天尊, an altar for the worship of the Dipper (*chaodou tan* 朝斗壇), a hall for Caishen 財神殿, various meditation halls and the buildings of the Daoist College (*daoxue yuan* 道學院) [fig. 16]. Additionally, we also find a Wenchang Hall 文昌殿 and a Yuelao Shrine 月老祠.

The Lingguan Hall 靈官殿 marks the entrance to the temple, and within it is enshrined the most renowned guardian deity of all Daoist temples, Wang Lingguan 王靈官 (Numinous Officer Wang).¹ This hall is flanked by the bell and drum towers. Within the walled area, we find the three core halls of the complex. The first and main hall is called Ziyang Hall 紫陽殿 and is dedicated to Zhang Boduan. The second and third halls are dedicated to the Jade Emperor (Yuhuang Dijun 玉皇帝君) and to the Three Pure Ones (Sanqing 三清), the highest deities in the contemporary Daoist pantheon [fig. 17]. This layout stresses the importance of Zhang Boduan over any other Daoist who was ever linked to Tongbai Palace: in this way, the Daoists who designed the temple have given a clear indication of what defines their tradition. The prominence of Zhang Boduan for the contemporary Tongbai Palace is remarked by the epithet of the temple, ‘ancestral hall of the Southern Lineage’ (*Nanzong zuting* 南宗祖庭), which is a direct reference to Zhang Boduan’s Southern School of *neidan*, which is traditionally opposed to the Quanzhen (Northern) one.

This does not mean that the Daoists at Tongbai Palace are not aware of the complex history of the temple. Despite the very telling plan of the main halls, we can still find some minor references to other traditions in the buildings: for example, at the back of the Lingguan

1 Katz, “Wang Lingguang”; Meulenbeld, *Demonic Warfare*, 162-5.

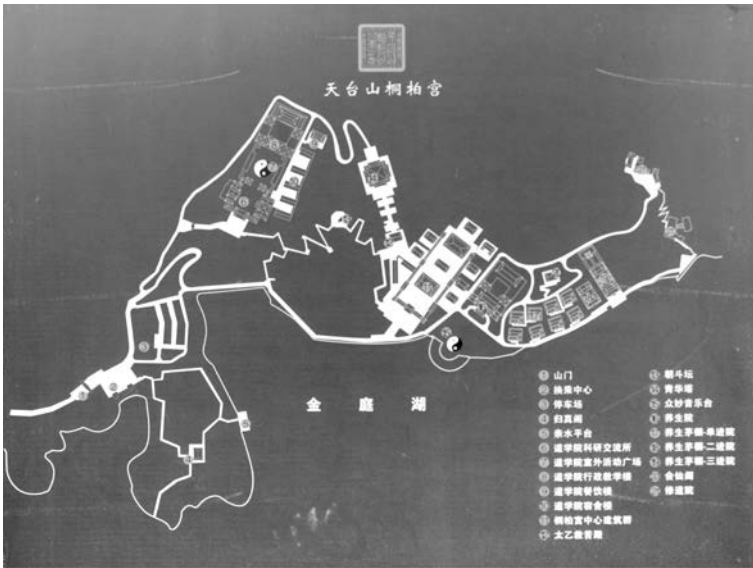


Figure 16 Map of the new Tongbai Palace.
Photo by the Author, 2014

Hall a statue of Wangzi Qiao has been enshrined, reminding us of the more ancient religious traditions of the area. The discourse on the temple goes in both directions, marking its special position for the Southern School, while also retaining traces of its complex history. The proceedings of a conference held at the temple in 2012, with the telling title of “Shoujie Tiantai shan Zhongguo Daojiao Nanzong wenhua zhou” 首届天台山中國道教南宗文化周 (The First Cultural Week [Dedicated to] the Southern School of Chinese Daoism on the Tiantai mountains) contains much information about the self-appraisal of the Daoist community dwelling at the temple. The summary of the temple’s history states that in 239 Ge Xuan built a retreat for self-cultivation there. Then, it lists the most important Daoists who were reportedly active in Tongbai Palace: Tao Hongjing, Sima Chengzhen, Xu Lingfu, Ye Cangzhi, Du Guangting, Zhang Boduan and Fan Qingyun.² This list clearly demonstrates that all the strata of meaning accumulated during the thousand-year history of the temple are still known and recognised as a fundamental part of the identity of Tongbai Palace. Yet, the immediate image that the Daoists at Tongbai Palace wish to promote does not depend on its past as the seat of the Shangqing lineage, or as a place of worship associated with Wangzi Qiao; rather,

² Shoujie Tiantai shan Zhongguo Daojiao Nanzong wenhua zhou choubei weiyuanhui, *Shoujie Tiantai Shan Zhongguo Daojiao Nanzong zuting wenhua zhou*, 20.



Figure 17 Ziyang Hall in the new Tongbai Palace.
Photo by the Author, 2013

it fully embraces the later depiction of Tongbai Palace as a seat of southern inner alchemical teachings and as a Quanzhen institution.

Today, Tongbai Palace is no longer an imperially sponsored institution, so it is free to create its own identity. The fact that the Daoists have decided to lend prominence to relatively recent lore and to the latest traditions established in the area indicates that the events which took place during the Qing dynasty and in particular from the Yongzheng reign onwards left a profound mark on the temple, that has continued to shape the way in which it is portrayed today.

This study has some limitations. First, I should note that it mainly deals with the Daoist history of the Tiantai area, leaving unexplored some potentially fruitful research paths. It is true that my focus of research has been Tongbai Palace, but future studies might want to reconstruct a more complete religious history of Tiantai by including the study of the Buddhist and even the Confucian institutions of that place. More work should also be done on the period that goes from the Song dynasty to the early Ming: there might exist primary sources that could cast light on a relatively unknown period in the history of the temple. I regret the most not having been able to collect more data on the clans of Tiantai, especially on the Zhangs. I am reasonably confident that family genealogies (*jiapu* 家譜) and other documents exist and that they would help us clarify even more the events of the early Qing period and perhaps even provide information on many other aspects of the relation between the local elite and Tongbai Palace. My wish is that, despite these limitations, this book has proven a useful addition to the latest series of studies on late imperial Daoism.