Women, Religion, and Space in China

Islamic Mosques & Daoist Temples, Catholic Convents & Chinese Virgins

Maria Jaschok and Shui Jingjun

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In Memory of Hildegard Jaschok and Shui Zhitang 水之堂

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List of Acronyms

ACWF	All-China Women's Federation
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
GMD	Guomindang (Nationalist Party)
HSD	Henansheng Danganguan (Henan Provincial Archive)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PLA	People's Liberation Army
SP	Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana
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most critical gaze, immeasurably improving its readability and coherence with their many thoughtful comments. Although our readers spared us many blushes, all errors and misinterpretations which remain are our responsibility.

Introduction[1]

The voices and life-worlds of Chinese women of faith constitute the core of this book. They appear all too rarely in the otherwise broadly conceived canon of China-centred scholarship, including its feminist historiography. As members of the various main organized religions, which in the case of Islam also entails ethnic membership, these women have been rendered *deficient* in important respects by the official classificatory system that demarcates mainstream and marginal status, secular and religious and/or ethnic identity. Their religious faith has been practised under conditions of State-sponsored secularist ideology which, since Communist rule was established in 1949, predicated enlightenment and progress on the rejection of 'religion' and the application of thought reform, by whatever means, to those adhering to religious beliefs and practices.

Women's faith might have complicated the more simplistic rendering of what the historian Mechthild Leutner calls a certain preponderance of 'victim narratives' in much of feminist writing, especially in the darkest years of political repression. However, the recent changes that have occurred as global transfers of capital and ideas are undermining national borders, and thus state control over domestic capital and ideas, allow us to bring to the fore the voices, convictions and lives of believing women. They are beginning to engage as active and audible participants in the social transformations of a rapidly modernizing China.

MOMENTS FROM OUR FIELD DIARIES

Shui Jingjun: At Home in Zhengzhou Beida Women's Mosque

The first time I visited the Beida Women's Mosque in Zhengzhou was probably in the late 1980s. Although I have forgotten the exact day and time, I still remember the cleanliness and tranquillity of the Mosque courtyard, as well as the friendliness and joy shining on the face of Du *Lao ahong*. As a researcher and a Muslim, I have visited the Beida Women's Mosque many times since then. I sometimes join in the activities with Du *Lao ahong* and

with the *Shetou* (members of the Mosque administrative committee) and other Muslim women attached to the Mosque. I am concerned, as a Muslim and a researcher, to understand the history and culture of the Mosque. Over the many years of our long relationship, a sense of trust has been built up between me and the women at the Mosque who are also aware that I am a researcher at the Academy of Social Sciences in Henan. In this identity I have sought to learn from those for whom the Mosque is the centre of their religious and social life. The women have shared their life histories with us with honesty and pride, and I have developed a genuine respect for their courage, perseverance and piety.

In turn, these women are responding to me in my dual identity as an academic and researcher and as a fellow member of the Hui Muslim group to which we all belong. In this balance between observation and analysis as a researcher and my feelings and experiences as a Hui Muslim woman, I am finding—together with the women around me, in our historical space—my reality, my home.

Maria Jaschok: In Search of a Female Space in a Catholic Church

I saw the middle-aged woman when I stayed behind after Sunday Mass, held weekly in the Catholic Cathedral of Zhengzhou. It was March 2004, and the watery Spring sun lit up the normally drab, even shabby interior of the Church. After a while I noticed a woman in her 50s who appeared to be oblivious to the noisy women surrounding us. She was looking carefully at a newly printed Christian calendar. The frontispiece of this monthly pictorial calendar showed a young, blond-haired Virgin Mary, in her arms a chubby infant Jesus.

I moved closer to the attentive reader to ask about her interest in the calendar. She did not look up, which was unusual given my foreign accent, but continued to gaze upon the picture, enthralled, her cheeks flushed red with emotion. Her heart was so full that she was happy to verbally continue with me what had obviously been an emotional internal monologue addressed to the Holy Virgin Mother.

The calendar, she explained, served to help her observe the feast days, particularly those relating to Mary, the Holy Mother of Jesus. She was still at the beginning of her introduction to the Catholic faith, she told me, and needed proper preparation to become the full believer she so desperately wanted to be. Knowledge of the Catholic calendar, of the Saints' days and of her Catholic duties—such as proper attendance of Mass and knowledge of the Scriptures—was very much dependent on guidance. She confided in me that she believed she could attain proper knowledge because God and the Holy Mother had literally granted her life, and the prospect of salvation. It all happened when she was very ill and could barely walk, when only medication eased her intolerable pain. It was then that the voice of the Catholic God reached her.

This woman used to go to a Protestant Church because it was near her home, whereas the Catholic Church is a long bus-ride away. Why then did she leave the Protestant Church where she had found warmth, vibrancy and vitality? She came to respect the dedication of the Protestant women who ran classes in Scriptural knowledge, organized many social activities and gave joy to all who attended the crowded events; these activists had spread hope and optimism. She came back to this point again and again. She considered the preaching of the Protestant pastors relevant to life, to women's lives. Participants could express their feelings openly, could weep and cry. There was such release to be found. One could talk 'about matters of the heart', making her feel afterwards 'happy in spirit.' She remarked with a smile that in the Protestant Churches mostly women do the talking. This is very good, she said, as these women know how to say things, how to move the congregation. They know about life. Audiences are spellbound by them, and no one feels tired, hungry or ill. By comparison, in the Catholic Church the priests are all men. They talk at the audience and do not generally pay attention to the congregation. The older priests in particular mumble and no one understands them. She does not feel the emotions she would like to feel at a Catholic religious event. These priests, she lamented, really feel nothing. The kind of service provided at the Church where the two of us were sitting left her mostly unmoved. 'Ah yes, Catholic nuns do make a difference. They can help, console, they really concern themselves about women. It is the Holy Mother', she said, pointing at the picture of the Virgin Mary to explain that is the mother of Jesus, whose holiness Protestants 'don't care about', who draws her into the Catholic Church. This contemporary story of a woman's faith, her choice and conflicts over identifying a belief that supports her through life, revolves around gender: the gender of the Holy Mother, the affinity all women have for suffering and the challenges to suffering, the solidarity of women with one another, and the tensions over the patriarchal culture of Catholic Church organization. The attraction felt by this woman to the Catholic Virgin Mother is to the powerful symbolism of anguish endured and consolation granted. In her own life history, as she told me in the course of our conversation, she experienced too often the pain of abandonment. Most recently, at the age of 50, her husband abandoned her for another woman. She fell ill with grief and loneliness. For her, only a Church with the Holy Mother as its centre can heal her pain. If it were not for the Holy Mother, where could she find strength and comfort? There is, however, a problem. Do male priests have the knowledge, she said, to help women in need to make a new life for themselves? She is waiting for the Catholic Church to understand this.

Shui Jingjun: Reconnecting with the Past in a Daoist Temple

The *Jiuku miao* (Salvation Temple) is located in a nameless lane adjoining the Ximen dajie (Westgate Street) and the Beirenyi hutong (North Righteousness

Lane) in Kaifeng City proper. A two-minute walk along the narrow lane brought me to a small courtyard of mud walls. The humble wood gate was low, opening just at the entrance of the lane. The shabby buildings were no different from the houses of the poor, except for a slip of scarlet paper stuck on the gate showing three Chinese characters: *Jiuku miao*, or the Salvation Temple. Without that piece of paper, I would not have known that I had arrived at my destination. Inside the Temple compound, I discovered three humble halls of worship, not differing in any way from the ordinary private dwellings in this poor neighbourhood. Yet I was shocked at the contrast between the shabby, even seedy appearance of this Temple and the splendour of the beautifully ornamented Precious Pearl Temple, the home of Buddhist nuns nearby, which I had visited a couple of days before.

The two senior nuns, Liu and Yang, were present when I paid my visit. Having read the necessary letter of recommendation[2] and learned about the purpose of my visit, Liu *Daozhang* began to give me a brief introduction to the *Jiuku miao*. Occasionally, Yang *Daozhang* would come in with a comment or explanation, her hands continually binding joss sticks into pagoda-shaped bundles which could bring a modest but badly needed income when sold to visiting pilgrims. During our conversation, the door of the shrine was wide open, the two nuns looking pale in the chilly wind and swirling snow. While we were talking a woman in her late 50s arrived on a tricycle, hurriedly getting off it to join us. Excitedly, she told the nuns that she had collected a substantial amount of leftovers from the vegetable market and some traders had contributed fresh vegetables free of charge. My heart felt heavy upon hearing that these nuns were living on food rejected by others. I found it hard to imagine a female-led religious institution existing in such conditions of dire poverty in Kaifeng, in the early twenty-first century! Yet I was touched, feeling deep respect and admiration for the nuns and the ordinary women believers who persevered with them.

We, Maria Jaschok and I, have visited the *Jiuku miao* many times since. We have talked with the nuns and the believers praying at the Temple. We have observed the recent construction of a beautiful temple gate and other changes taking place over time. In the eyes of this small community, I am just a researcher from a provincial research academy. They have never asked me about my religious identity and hence they never expected to receive any help from me. But what we two writers can and wish to do is to give them the assurance that our research and writing might help to win more people's understanding of, and support for, their beloved *Jiuku miao*.

ON AUTHORSHIP AND WORKING TOGETHER

In pursuing a theme of longstanding preoccupation, we have written ourselves into the book, separately and more often jointly, continuing what we started in the early 1990s when we embarked on the study of the history,

significance and culture of women's mosques in China. Collaborating now for so many years, we are persisting in our partnership, listening to each other's insights but also querying each other over the nature of the evidence and interpretations offered. We have arrived at a shared conceptualization of the book through a continuous challenge of each other's writing, inviting the other to enter into the script and thicken the language of interpretation. How we have written ourselves into the other's text reflects the way we talked together during the entire process of our collaboration: moving forward through dialogue, through long exchanges and through a growing agreement on what we wanted our joint work to become. Respecting each other's point of origin, thematic preoccupations and home audiences, we joined in a common purpose to bring believing women into mainstream historical narratives.

As we move forward in our quest to uncover knowledge of women's lives lived in faith and religious aspiration, we are finding our own lives mirrored in the preoccupations of women who sought to transcend normative time for an 'alternative temporality.' Living in different times and places and in different circumstances from the women we studied, we have come to be bound to them in ties (however tenuous) of affinity, respect and faith. Our book is dedicated to the women who suffered, endured and rejoiced in their ideals and whose strength and determination not infrequently transcended the unimaginative and stifling repression practiced upon them by political regimes and their acquiescent societies.

Shui Jingjun, a Muslim of Hui nationality, comes from an influential lineage of practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine, educators and scholars—foremost among them Shui Zili—whose contributions to intellectual, scientific and educational life, locally and nationally, have ensured their place in China's Islamic and Hui history. A sociologist of religion, Shui Jingjun's passion and talents are dedicated to becoming the chronicler of her people, in particular of the women in her local community. It was that determination to share the story of Hui Muslim women—her kin, friends, neighbours, religious leaders—that brought Shui into collaboration with Maria Jaschok, a German social historian and anthropologist. A bilingual publication of *The History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam*[3] turned Shui and Jaschok into the joint storytellers—first in English, then in Chinese—of the 300-year-old history of the evolution of women's own sites of worship, leadership and traditions.

In our many years' experience of joint writing, we both reflect on ourselves and on each other, in what is an ongoing and sometimes not painless attempt at a continuous working against *a priori* essentialist assumptions—on both sides. This has been a commitment that has involved, for us, unprecedented, extensive conversations to learn about the project partner's motivations, background and engagement in the joint work.

The methodological framework that we developed over the years to arrive at a more critical understanding of the process of 'transnational cultural

transfer' (Mechthild Leutner, 2004)[4] has been influenced by the approach formulated by Isabelle Gunning (1992) in her seminal article 'Arrogant Perception, World-Travelling and Multicultural Feminism'. Its ideal of imaginative, sensitive and process-based feminist collaboration is also our ideal. The traveller is for Gunning a metaphor for the transformation entailed in changing 'arrogant perception' in order to shift the imaginary and to transgress the cultural boundaries of our identities as academics and as activists. The researcher intent on engaging in cross-cultural collaboration must travel outside familiar certainties and be ready for an engagement of a most personal, existential and intellectual nature. The collaborating researcher makes the choice to learn of another society through a pathway of mediated knowledge, that is, through a process by which the reflective voice and life experience of her collaborator (the anthropologist of her home culture) come to shape the acquisition of knowledge. It is what Kirsten Hastrup (1992) theorizes as inter-subjectively constituted dynamics of fieldwork through which ongoing conversations and dialogues variously entail autobiography, history and the ethnographic present.

This state of 'betweenness' (Hastrup, 1992) is also the site of 'borderlands' where travellers must pass through volatile frontiers of transition and liminality, ever at risk, ever uncertain over what may lie ahead. Liz Stanley develops Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of a geo-cultural borderland of '"crossing over" between two states of being' (Stanley, 1997: 2) in order to conceive of 'epistemological borderlands, as sites of interface between different knowledges, different knowledge-claims, in which difference is spoken through the conjunction *knowledge*/power' (Stanley, 1997: 2, original italics). Gunning's travelling feminist and Stanley's critical interrogation of the frontiers crossed in travelling, their material and political organisations and institutions, are pertinent to the experience of our own research collaboration, to our attempt to understand the conditions in which people 'cross over, pass over, go through the confines of the normal' (*Ibid*.: 2), and also to what such understanding might tell us about the constitution and construction of 'difference' and 'sameness' and our capacity for transgression.

Back in 1998, in a first joint public presentation of our ethnographic conversation at Monash University in Melbourne,[5] we said the following:

> We feel that through our collaboration, we have started to respond to [Kamala] Visweswaran's challenge to (western) feminist ethnography to rethink its one-directional epistemological and methodological traditions. We related to the other as a source of stimulation and testing of theory, facilitating more "experimental" conversations during field visits. In the course of our conversations, disagreements and differing emphases expanded our field of observation in response to each other's personal narratives, and sensitized us to the multiplicity of factors which inscribe personal, but also family and collective, histories. Both collaborators were forced to confront each other's precariously,

> sometimes painfully, fragmented and contradictory natures (Jaschok and Shui, 2000a: 36).

We further believe that a genuine collaboration, if constructed as a dialogic partnership, widens and enriches the scope of anthropological enquiry and interpretation. We have thus found that conversation allows a more critical appraisal of mainstream discourses in each of our home communities and also encourages continuous self-examination. In this approach we agree with Nancy Naples who argues that a dialogic approach to ethnographic relations addresses issues of inequalities and the insider/outsider divide, bringing a more processual understanding of the 'interactive' forces which constitute fieldwork (Naples, 1997).

As we have moved to the study of female religiosity, agency and organizing in diverse, local female religious traditions, our research has gained from the fluidity of boundaries across which we are 'travelling' in conversation, interrogation and interpretation. Moving between Islam, Daoism and Catholicism with their dynamic interplay of local and universal narratives, particularly pronounced in Islam and Catholicism, subtle sub-texts have been added to our own relationship. Conversations over the use of sources that inform language and interpretation (for example, in the study of the role of Catholic expansionist project in the late Qing/Republican era) brought unbidden dissonances to the fore which imperceptibly also entered into our conversations over interpretation. Sometimes, no more than a fleeting dissonance was at play. It has been, on the whole, sufficient for us to acknowledge the subtle, but no less persistent ties we each have with national projects, past and present, and hence the care we should take in reflecting on the impact of our respective positionalities on the process of interpretation. However, such lingering 'discomfort' always benefited our ongoing interpretation. It gave us a crucial awareness of how even as we create new knowledge and move closer 'across' and 'in-between' spaces of uncertainty, we bring with us partiality and deeply held sentiments that tie us both to origins and to destinations, to home communities of interpretation and to the audiences of our publications.

In our past work, we discussed the complex undertaking involved in knowledge production in a collaborative project such as ours, given our different positions within our respective academic and political environments, and the impact of such situated (if fluid) positionalities on methodologies and interpretations (in relation to the work by, among others, Ahmed, 2000; Bondi *et al*., 2002; Strathern, 1995; Visweswaran, 1994, 1997). In sometimes surprising, but always illuminating ways, treatment of 'Islam', 'Daoism' and 'Catholicism' engendered issues of 'identity', 'historical baggage', 'colonial project' and 'transformation towards independence', which may have complicated but also served to deepen the process of (mutual) learning.

Engagement with each other demands ongoing reflexivity on both sides. In the process of long years of joint fieldwork visits, of interaction with

studied communities, authorities and readerships, both of us have been challenged and have changed in our shared experiences. There is also, however, a poignant awareness in us of differences that play out in our respective access to resources, our respective relationships with readerships or our different positioning within political systems of power and surveillance—and how these realities, over time, are moulding identifications and engendering tensions. Awareness of the other's vulnerability is both tribute to, and a price exacted from, our efforts to realize an ideal of imaginative, sensitive and process-based collaboration (Gunning, 1992). Unsurprisingly, an appraisal of our joint work will show up ambiguities (although never ambivalence) in the sense that despite real progress and accomplishments, apprehension will always linger about a potential divide that might emerge when faced with powerful ideas of difference, dissolving or intensifying as we move within tensions of 'inside' and 'outside' borderlands. Yet, it is in the ongoing process of collaboration, in the practice of 'personal anthropology' whether as co-researchers, co-interpreters or co-authors (and friends), that dedicated fellow travellers may discover how much (challenging) knowledge and how many (unfamiliar) insights are gained when 'crossing over' is negotiated in partnership.

1 Women, Religion and Space During Times of China's Political Transformation

Female religious sites have a long tradition in Chinese social history. Whilst patriarchal Chinese society was defined by a spatial segregation which anchored ancestral worship in a patrilineal and patrilocal social structure, leaving women relatively few alternatives to wife and motherhood in the familial sphere, organized religion offered both escape and a degree of choice. If women, in Julia Kristeva's classic interpretation, are more commonly associated with space, 'generating and forming the human species' whereas 'father's time' is 'time, becoming or history' (in Moi, 1986: 190), it has also been the case that throughout history women have chosen to disrupt the spatial connection with 'the hearth' of womb-centred identity for life in 'the temple' of religious women's communities. Women's insistence on their rights of survival, their courage in the face of overpowering odds, and their capacity to adapt themselves to the changes in their environments are evident in the documents that have survived and the stories we were told. Their persistent, intrepid bravery has challenged us to understand the meaning of *Funü jiefang* (women's liberation) from alternative points of view and from too often marginalized spaces in which their religious life evolved over the centuries. These provided opportunities for women to transcend—sometimes even transgress—the status quo in which social and gender relations had appeared unchanging and outside the time-lines of master narratives of history.

THE ORIGIN OF OUR BOOK

The histories of women in this study emerged from local impulses and developments. We have followed newly assertive voices, reconnecting believing women to past years of revolution, oppression and reforms, but also to lived religiosity in spaces into which have been inscribed, over generations of believers, imprints of their expressive culture of faith. Since the early 1990s, we have engaged in research and fieldwork; most importantly, we studied Muslim women's sites of worship (*The History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam*) in the Hui communities of central China. Now, building on that

work, we have enlarged the canvas to ask how contemporary predicaments and opportunities connect with historical and contemporary key moments of state intervention in women's religious spaces. We use as case studies two women's mosques situated at the intersections of revolutionary time and vulnerable spaces: the oldest documented women's mosque, the Wangjia Hutong *Nüsi* (Women's Mosque), in Kaifeng, the cultural hub of ancient dynasties, and the Beida *Nüsi,* arguably the most influential women's mosque in contemporary Chinese Muslim society.[1] Beida Women's Mosque is located in the old Muslim quarter of Zhengzhou, which in 1954 succeeded Kaifeng as provincial capital of Henan Province. By situating women's organizing for religious and social identity at key moments of political change as well as in relation to other female traditions within their vicinity, we are able to explore an array of tensions and commonalities.

Bringing together the stories of Muslim women with those of Daoist, Islamic and Catholic female sites has allowed us to observe the local effects of state mechanisms to promote national modernization and development projects, as well as the responses elicited by female religious traditions. We have explored the tension between State or local government drives for change and women's sites through education, specifically, female education. It is in education that hearts, minds and bodies are fought over, that rival claims for allegiance and loyalty are inscribed and coded into values and conduct. Educators transmit universal values and translate these into familiar ideals. For religious organizations, education is an essential lifeline, facilitating conversion to the faith but also connection with the surrounding community. Religious education offers legitimacy, a practical function through service to the community but also a source of vital income for religious institutions. At times complemented by secular teaching, it has been central to the identity of religious sites. Women's mosques defined their twin-purposes as prayer and education and as intrinsic to the self-definition of a 'good' Muslim woman. Daoist nuns transmitted ritual knowledge through the central relationship between a learned master and disciple. Catholicism, as did Protestantism, gained much of its legitimacy through educational service. It was by means of education that religious doctrines and practices were disseminated among the wider population, with direct impacts on family organization, gender relations and societal development that were too strong to be ignored by governments wanting to place education more firmly at the service of mainstream ideological and political consolidations.

The impact of official policies and campaigns was by no means uniform, posing different challenges and creating different disciplines for believers. Shared social and cultural environments as well as the disparate 'fit' of their respective religious norms and practices and the lifestyles demanded of their female members as they adjusted to 'new' times, led us to ask questions as to the transformative impact of religious membership on women's choices and opportunities. The different relationship of each religious tradition

with mainstream secularist modernity and their changing relations give us contrasting symbolic relationships and tensions within which to explore women's changing lives. Each of the religious traditions has represented different challenges, constraints and opportunities to their respective female adherents. Islam was tempered in centuries of conflict and accommodation between local Muslim communities, the nation State and the *Umma* (the entire Muslim world); Daoism was seen as both the most indigenous and also, in the context of early twentieth-century modernizing society, as the most 'backward' religion; and Catholicism was associated inextricably with China's national humiliation and degradation because of unequal treaty relations with the 'West.' The three religions, classified as belonging to the five legitimate religions in China, have nation-wide following and impact. Extensive scholarship has covered State treatment of religion through institutional and legal mechanisms of control and regimentation of registered religious sites which are subject to comprehensive rules and regulations. Our interest is, however, in the most local and indigenized religious practices where beliefs, norms, material practices and habits particularize and localize universal truths. Here identities are constructed from multiple allegiances and changing contexts. Believers are, on the one hand, caught in the wider historical relationship between their religion and the fate of modern China during eras of reform, revolution and modernization; on the other hand, they are bringing to local entanglements of belonging—religious, familial and communal—both familiar and new solutions (see Chapters 10, 11 and 12).

We locate local practices of these three religions in Kaifeng, in central China, within the years of the late Qing dynasty (at the turn of the twentieth century), in the Republican era (1912–1949) under the Nationalist Government and during the 1950s and again the years after 1978 under the rule of a Communist Party/State. Archival documents, official and unofficial reports, correspondence and private memoirs are supplemented by oral accounts which tell of women's experiences and of the experiences of previous generations of believing women from their proud, but often barely visible, genealogies of female ancestors.

We consider how diverse religious female organizations shared in the local habitus of codified gender norms and practices yet challenged prevalent notions of legitimacy, in consequence at times competing with each other in their quest for status and followers. Members of Muslim mosques, Christian churches, Buddhist and Daoist temples located in close proximity to each other, were often in peaceful co-existence, but sometimes in competition for disciples and resources (see Chapter 11). Catholic nuns defined themselves in relation to Buddhist nuns, Daoist nuns would acknowledge many similarities with Buddhist worship but also sought to define the difference in order to survive as a distinct, separate tradition. Western missionaries commented on the educational work done in mosques, and Catholic celibate women, *Shouzhen guniang*, would comment on the state

of Catholicism by making reference to Protestant congregations across town. At different times, in different political climates, women religious would define their own belief system *with, against,* or *in competition with* other religions. Changes were instigated, traditions hardened and reforms initiated within the pluralism of the religious culture of Henan. The nature of these relationships was subject to state control and policies, creating rivalry as happened during the Republican era for the label of modernity, or creating 'the postdenominational' era of coexistence under the Communist Party regime, where all religious sites[2] were equally compelled to adhere to mandatory systems of surveillance and administration (see specifically, Chapter 10).

The different fates of women's organizations within the three traditions allow us to explore the volatile relationship between state and religion during times of modernization of the nation and the impact of newly scripted state categories by which criteria were decreed for religious institutions which brought them either 'inside modern times' or would stigmatize them as 'behind the times,' thus effectively forcing them into a legal and social limbo. Sharing political, cultural and economic environments as well as challenges by local government to engage in internal reform of their institutions, the female Muslim Mosque, the Daoist temple and the Catholic female religious in Kaifeng were related to each other in a mesh of complex and dynamic relationships.

LOCATING OUR STUDY IN SCHOLARLY DISCOURSES

Although feminist scholarship in Chinese studies, in all eras and from within all disciplines, may be said to form an important, at times even defining, role in the shaping of knowledge of 'China', an exception, until recently, has been feminist research into the lives of religious women in modern China, both of the Republican and Communist eras. Neglected are the ever more flourishing religious cultures of China, which continued their hold on people during the most repressive campaigns of religious persecution (from the mid-1950s to the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s). Even though there is ample literature in Western languages on Chinese religions,[3] women are scarcely visible, even though they form the majority of members in all religions, and only little attention has been paid to the impact of religious belief on personal and communal life.

In contrast, scholars have shown growing and needed interest in Chinese women's organizing activities, in the main focusing within the sanctioned traditions structured by the binary of the history of the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) and its variously positioned Others. The changing relations of the ACWF with an expanding culture of women's groups and initiatives, affiliated or self-supporting popular organizations, have been examined from within diverse disciplines for impact on women's

legal, material and political entitlements at national and transnational levels (Frick *et al*., 1995; Hsiung *et al*., 2001; Li Xiaojiang, 1999; Li, Zhu and Dong, 1999; Perry and Schenck, 2001; Wesoky, 2001; Yang, 1999; Zhang and Xu, 1995; among others). The close relationship between Western feminist scholarship and the Chinese state-steered ACWF, as well as feminists' inherent bias in favour of a secular-socialist paradigm of women's pathway to emancipation (Harding, 1991), account for a predominance of studies of women's organizations and of NGOs after the 1995 World Women's Congress in Beijing.[4] It could be argued that this has led until recently to the marginalization, even disregard, of scholarly studies of the historical presence of religious organizations and institutions at local levels and of their place in women's lives. Most scholarship in women's and gender studies has tended to treat the ACWF, a mass organization linked to the Party/State, and its assigned field of responsibility, 'woman-work' (Davin, 1976) as the authentic expression of women-centred developments in China.[5] Such a bias has carried over into recent work, whether it probes the varied and multiple sites of an 'indigenous Chinese feminism' (Schaffer and Song, 2007) or offers local translations of transnational feminist discourse in terms of re/emergences of women's sites and traditions (Ko and Wang, 2007). The diverse and changing map of women's local translations of ideals, aspirations and transnational influences still fails the long history of believing women and thus some of the most enduring remapping of gendered ground rules. Scholarly attention to women's religious histories is thus overdue.

Central to feminist scholarship studying the history of Chinese women has been the gendered nature of inner and outer spheres of society as illuminating the particular nature of Chinese women's status, division of labour, consanguinal and affinal relations, social distance and moral standards. It has created particular interpretations of women's predicaments in 'traditional' society as victimised, passive, and vulnerable to abuse outside her allocated sphere of respectable female place and conduct (entrenched in the Confucian core concepts of obedience owed to father, brother and husband, and conduct expressive of feminine virtues).[6] It led to what Mechthild Leutner (2005) characterized as victim narratives, both as object of the Chinese Communist 'liberation myth' (Jabri, 1996) and of Western feminist discourses on women's oppression under successive phases of socio-political systems (Andors, 1983; Stacey, 1983; Wolf, 1985). Historians such as Ko (1994), Hsiung Pingchen (2005), Mann (1997), among many others, have forcefully questioned the appropriateness of Western feminist concepts of public/private to the study of Chinese women's history.[7]

In the 1990s, criticism of an Anglo-European orientation as in need of a more nuanced and multi-voice interpretation gave rise to a revision which sought to challenge long-held assumptions that the history of Chinese women is one of confinement and passivity, in which they are held in place by Confucian precepts and norms and by rigid patrilineal decrees and

conventions. Historians of women's lives in different dynastic reigns, social classes and local cultures in China—among many others, Ebrey (1993), Gilmartin *et al.* (1994), Honig and Hershatter (1988), Ko (1994), Li Xiaojiang (1999), Mann (1997) and Wang Zheng (1999)—have uncovered beyond binaries of private/public and domestic/societal, the fluidity of social life and creative strategies by which individual women could, under given circumstances, alter and even qualitatively improve upon conditions of their lives, even if the very longevity of patriarchal norms and institutions also pointed to the ultimate limitation of such challenges. For us, tantalizing areas of interrogation remain where both the nature of women's challenges as well as responses from the gender system create opportunities for further study and interpretation. We are interested in the life trajectories of women whose religious devotions and choices were all too often perceived as a threat to patriarchal interests as destabilizing the proper balance between 'hearth' and 'temple'. Our use of language here builds on Zhou Yiqun's terminology, understanding 'the hearth' as 'a symbol for the domestic realm that was perpetually consecrated by the concepts and rituals of ancestor worship' and 'the temple' as 'the repository of a distinct set of beliefs and practices.' The physical and normative shift of allegiance seen as entailed in the journey by women religious from patrilineal and patrilocally inscribed femininity to a 'substitute family' elsewhere was derided by Confucian critics as destabilizing to society's most sacred institutions (Goossaert, 2008; Zhou, 2003: 114).

Historically, as Menegon (2004) and Zhou Yiqun (2003), among others, have pointed out, religious vocations might be considered a spatial counterpoint in a dominant patriarchal discourse centred on women's reproductive duties and ties to family and 'hearth.'[8] Late-Imperial discourse by Confucian social observers was dominated by 'spatial concerns' (Zhou, 2003), the perceived threat posed to ancestral rites and filial piety by women's attraction to religious activities in popular Daoist and Buddhist sites. Fear was expressed that the popularity of lay Buddhist and Daoist temple communities (see Goossaert, 2008; Grant, 2009; Furth, 1990; Naquin and Yü, 1992; Overmyer, 1976, 2003) would create an overpowering religious piety rupturing women's place of identification with the families of father, husband and son, *Sancong*. The appeal of the temple to women, who seem in any era to have been perceived as particularly gullible and vulnerable to the seductions of heterodox cults, so observers worried, might make them forego allegiance to the 'hearth' for the appeal of an 'alternative home' and 'substitute family'(Zhou, 2003: 114).[9] Drawing on a vast range of literature, from epitaphs, biographies, didactic texts, to fiction in the period of 1550 to 1900, Zhou Yiqun explores perceptions and polemics in Confucian discourses on women between 'hearth' and 'temple'. Whereas the multiple identities of men could incorporate uses of public religious spaces to serve their roles as correct Confucians, filial sons and dutiful descendants, Zhou observes (2003), the spatial constraint on women imposed

by the patriarchal and patrilocal nature of their families rendered temple visits, association with clerics and joining of religious associations a matter that filled officials and members of the literati with suspicion of the moral licentiousness and deprivation of women without moral guardians (also Menegon, 2004).

Confucian polemic over the dire social consequences of violation of the moral imperatives for gender segregation by women heedless of their primary obligations to hearth and the husband's family indicates that this was not an infrequent occurrence. Although the Confucian moralists' consternation was over the scandalous mixing of women and men in public religious places, at issue was not so much the dissolution of gendered lines of demarcation as such but rather their shift to sites outside the highly codified divide of patrilocal public spheres. Fear was of a de-centring of the familial domain at the heart of State control that had been codified by *Jiadao* (family morality) and *Fudao* (the moral code related to women). As Eugenio Menegon shows in his study of the official treatment in late Imperial China of female celibacy among Catholic converts, during what Laamann (2006) calls the long century of religious persecution (1724–1840), frequent imperial edicts and local official interventions were deemed necessary to protect the institution of family-anchored ancestral worship against perceived threats from alternative commitments. An entire genre of Confucian literature of male angst moralized over the inroads into society's control over women brought about by Buddhist and Daoist activities (Menegon, 2004). These tales were preoccupied with rapacious religious clergy and women outside the boundaries of propriety. 'Imperial [Qing] laws also reflected a great deal of suspicion of the clergy in sexual matters and suggested severe punishments for sexual crimes committed by Buddhist monks or Daoist priests. These sexual overtones tainted religious activities outside the home and were in part a symptom of men's concern for the spiritual supremacy of the patriarchal order, symbolically centred upon the family shrine and embodied by ancestral rituals. Yet, prohibitions and suspicions notwithstanding, women continued to test the boundaries of permeability between the inner and outer spheres of their lives, participating in religious activities and pilgrimages outside of their homes' (Menegon, 2004: 210–11).

Our interest in 'the boundaries of permeability between the inner and outer spheres' of women's lives required us to pay attention to religiously informed lives at the most local level. It is here, the historian Merry Wiesner-Hanks (2005) contends that gender reveals its complex and intimate relation with religion. 'Religions provide myths, symbols, and narratives that express desires for transcendence, redemption, salvation, liberation, and wholeness, but that also enforce inequalities, oppression, separation, and hierarchies. The relations between profoundly transformative and deeply conservative aspects of any religion play themselves out at the local level, but often with references to values that are perceived as unchanging and divinely ordained' (9).[10]

CONTRIBUTING TO SCHOLARSHIP: TIME, SPACE AND GENDER IN CHINESE THOUGHT

We contended in our first study of the history of women's mosques that what was missing in feminist scholarship was the incorporation of organized religion into the formation of female identity (Jaschok and Shui, 2000a; Shui and Jaschok, 2002). That is, our interest was not so much in individual worship in the 'private' spaces of the home—private altar or ancestral shrine—but women's participation in public and joint expression of religious faith through ritual and collective worship that inscribe space and mark time in ways specific to the religion, in the process strengthening women's social and cultural mobility. Given the vigour of organized religions in Chinese society and the historical tradition of women's segregated religious lives—whether in women's mosques, convents or temples—we asked what difference was made by the availability of such feminine spaces to women whose life cycles and social mobility were mapped out for them in a seemingly inexorable fated progression of women's destiny. What social place did it develop into, how open or how closed its boundaries?

Whilst gender distinctions were reproduced in the religious sphere no less than in secular places, they also enabled women to forge a separate space and domain of influence that extended far beyond the gate of their temple, mosque or church, thus extending the 'conceptual repertoire' (Menegon, 2004) of legitimate roles and 'safe' spaces for women. In turning our attention to traditional forms of women's associations and to the ubiquity of rural women's organizations, we are turning to the past, and to the richness of traditions of women's local organizing activities. The re-emergence of familiar forms of local association in rural society testifies to their enduring presence during times of rapid social and economic changes (Dong and Arkush, 2000; Rees, 2000). Our purpose in examining women's relationship with sites from three different religions is to ask how much of an alternative mode of life they offered to female believers. Why did these religious sites, situated in close proximity to each other, draw women into their orbit of influence? When examining the space inhabited by women's mosques, Daoist nunneries and Catholic female institutions, central to understanding their role in women's lives is the place occupied by the family institution in Confucian moral order. To engage with notions of women's space and alternative temporality is to engage with the nature of the relationship between the aspirations invested in 'the temple' and the familial ties that bound women to 'the hearth.'

Notions of time and space are central to our interpretation and necessitate their contextualization and location in Chinese ancient and traditional conceptions. Their most lasting imprint evolved out of the thought of the most influential thinkers such as Zhuangzi and Mozi as well as in Daoist writing (Ma Lanmei, 2006; Niu, 2009; Qi, 1998; Wang Wenjuan, 1995; Zhang Hongxuan, 2006; Xu Xiyan, 1998; Zeng and Wei, 2005).

In Confucian thought, the core concept of *Rèn,* disinterested benevolence which is understood as constructed in, and through, relations among human beings, underpins both individual morality and an ethics that holds together collective humanity. It is in this intersection of morality and ethics that time and space are constituted and from which political and social life emerged. The beginning of human activities in this space of freedom, a primordial emptiness, coincided with the beginning of morality (Pan, 2001; Zhao Kuiying, 2000). From *Rèn* as a primordial space of freedom, emerged *Rènxue* (benevolence), and *Réndao ziyou* (freedom of human beings) as freedom to engage in *Rèn* (benevolence) (Ke, 2006). The Confucian concept of *Rèn* (benevolence), which is of central importance in the history of Chinese thought, society and religions (mainly Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Christian and popular religions but which has also entered Islamic practices), allows us to examine the interaction of power politics with different social phenomena out of which arose dominant conceptions of time and space. These in turn circumscribed the social space assigned to women and, conversely, the possibility of transformation, even transgression as such space becomes invested with meanings and traditions.

Confucianism, which in later years came to transform and reproduce itself as the 'Union of the Three Religions'—Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism—continues in this syncretised form to shape Chinese traditional culture until today. The ways that time and space were conceptualized in the polytheism of the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynastic eras over more than fifteen centuries, in the tradition of ancestral worship, and in concepts of *Yin* and *Yang* together with the continuous infusion of different religious beliefs and of contemporary Western thought, all have informed the most enduring characteristics associated with Chinese social and gender arrangements.

Adding to conceptualizations of time and space, *Yin Yang* offered explanations for the origin of all creation, for relations among all things,[11] *Tiandao* (Way of the Heaven), *Didao* (Way of the Earth), *Rendao* (Way of human beings), and propelled in an ever revolving motion by *Qi* (energy) as interaction of *Tian di qian kun* (heaven and earth reversing the course of events) (Chen Yan, 1996). The 'contradiction and harmonious' spirit was characterized by the dualist principle of contrasting opposites to characterize inter-dependence (Liu Yuping, 2004; Shi, 2001; Wang Zhigong, 2008), such as are expressed in the interaction of male and female, husband and wife, ruler and subject, father and son, superior and inferior, high and low, strength and grace, and action and inaction (Liu Changlin, 2006; Du, 1995; Min, 1995).

However, although the foregoing schools of thought emphasized mutuality and interdependence, *Yin* and *Yang* contain within themselves also differentials of power and authority (Wu, 2006) in which relationships are structured in terms of dominant and subordinate statuses with the principal force of *Yang* subordinating *Yin* in a hierarchical order of things which governs both nature and human society. *Bang* (an ancient term for nation)

and *Jia* (family), ruler and subject, father and son, constitute the central binaries of power that define the ethical order of society. The hierarchy implicit in the philosophy of the *Yin* concept found favour with the highest ruler. Therefore, from the Han dynasty onwards, it was recognized formally as the dominant philosophical, ethical and social order to underpin all social relationships (Zhang Qiang, 2001).

From observations and thoughts on the changing of nature and objects, ancient Chinese gradually formed concepts of time and space. Seasonal changes of weather or the waxing and waning of the moon all led the ancient Chinese to come to the question of being and the relationship of humanity to nature, forming the basis of multiple and sophisticated meanings attached to *Shijian zhou* (the temporal dimension) and *Kongjian yu* (the spatial dimension).

The implication of stratification and order in the *Yin Yang* and time-space philosophy influenced both by Daoist and Confucian thought (Niu, 2009) became the foundation of an order characteristic of an enduring Chinese autocracy. Awareness of the time ordered by Heaven, opportunities granted on Earth and proper arrangement of relationships among human beings reflected the order of time, space and society, and thus the necessary unity of Heaven and humans (Zhang Hongxuan, 2006). At the sacred centre of Heaven and Earth is the Son of Heaven, radiating virtue and power, the more distant from this source of divine spirit, the weaker the benefit to be derived. 'There is an absolute source of beginning, there is a centre that rules all, possessing the highest absolute power; it is abstruse, it is part of, but also itself unique; there is order but also an absence of order (*Biranxing queru*)' (Li Xiangtang, 2001). Such a conceptualization of a pivotal and Heaven-mandated authority entailed a structure of differentiation between upper and lower, close and distant, as well as central and marginal dimensions.

Among competing Chinese belief systems, the most profoundly persistent has been the conception of absolute power held by the Son of Heaven, making on Earth, in the realm of political space, all else, including religious belief and social life, subservient to the Imperial power. Space for the emergence and existence of alternative belief systems and cultural traditions could by definition only arise from the margins and survive as long as it posed no threat to the Imperial order. This is the most important and fundamental premise of Chinese traditional, philosophical-political mapping of social space. The allocation of social space to a diverse spectrum of religions was thus circumscribed by their relationship to the mainstream social order and a belief system centred on ancestral worship and sacrifice. Such *Zongfaxing* ('religious')-type organizations allowed for myriad beliefs in deities that could never, however, challenge the centrality of the Son of Heaven, i.e., the Emperor. In such a conception of celestial and social order, a relative tolerance and accommodation of other religions could be allowed which would see support by Emperors for Buddhist or Daoist institutions, but it also subordinated religions into positions of political acquiescence and lingering

cultural and intellectual suspicion, most evidently on the part of Confucian literati (Mou and Zhang, 2003, 1: 78–83; Zhou Yiqun, 2003).

It is in these diverse domains of religious life that co-existing faiths allowed for female deities, clergy and worshippers to emerge into influential and enduring institutions, providing women with choices and, collectively, with the possibility of exercising influence that could reverberate into the heart of Imperial power itself. A number of past emperors were converts to Buddhism or Daoism, supporting and establishing many religious institutions, including female religious institutions. During the Western Jin dynasty (313–317), the building of the first Buddhist nunnery, the *Zhulin si* in the city of Luoyang, marked the historical beginning of the establishment of places of worship for female congregations (see Chapter 2). Buddhist, Daoist and Muslim religious traditions all established places of worship for their female congregations. As Chinese society evolved, its gendered spatial order incorporated domains of religious institutionalized activity that granted women, besides their duties to 'the hearth' (Zhou, 2003), an outlet for increased legitimate mobility (Goossaert, 2008). Against a background of an enduring intellectual and normative system to codify the proper order of Heaven and Earth and its centralized rule by the emperor as Son of Heaven, a political and social rule was underpinned by an apparently immovable gender regime. Yet, women were neither entirely immobilized inside patriarchal institutions nor altogether marginalized in public life.

RETHINKING WOMEN'S SPACES AND TIMES

The central argument of our book is that the spaces occupied by religious traditions, whilst often liminal and vulnerable to accusations of moral disorder, gave women entry into public spaces which would otherwise have been possible only under exceptional circumstances, defined their status as morally ambiguous or been barred to them altogether.[12] We have not only wanted to ask if there is such a thing as 'women's time,' indeed it is a question much revisited and debated in all spheres of feminist scholarship. The historian Cathy Yandell (2000) has persuasively argued that 'Given that women were addressed and treated as a category distinct from men, whether in moral, philosophical, medical discourse, would women have conceived of time the same way as their male counterparts? Although age, class, status, and marital status, all had an impact, gender expressed in the over-arching life-cycle which shaped women's fate also infused a women's temporality across class and status' (Yandell, 2000: 46). Gendered temporality has thus a spatial dimension in which mainstream gender identity is moulded through the gender aspect of 'the hearth' or in which alterity can evolve as in aspects of 'the temple.' If, as Kristeva says, women are classically associated with space, leaving temporality—the 'becoming' of historical

projects—to men, our interest is in the nature of women's space, in the Chinese context, as it is transformed, subverted even, to enter mainstream narratives of history. How do these transformations occur in the context of autocratic societies—might they be neo-Confucian or Communist—in which segregated spheres order society and gender relations? What do the spaces of female institutions say about women and their assigned place in the patriarchal architecture? How does gender inscribe women's space and what degree of autonomy are women able to acquire when political and patriarchal power enclose their psychological and physical mobility?

Traditionally, concepts of time and space in Chinese were considered un-gendered. In the tradition of Daoist conceptions, the organizing principle of time is akin to *Xunhuan,* a cyclical motion (as of the seasons) but also to *Keni* (reversible time) such as in *Fanlao huantong* (getting old and returning to childhood). There is the passing of time, indicative of the transitoriness of all creation and the fleetingness of time. All these conceptions contrast with modern secular concepts which made their appearance in the last century as a result of Western inroads into conceptions and practices long dominant in Chinese society. These developments politicized time by opposing *Xianjin* (progress) and *Luohou,* falling behind the times, as either side of the State's demarcation of progress or backwardness.

Historically, the relationship of communities of believing Chinese women has been that of vital contributions to the wider transformations of China's public space and institutions. Important to this relationship is the concept of *Yin Yang hubu* (mutual nourishing of *Yin* and *Yang*), *Zhongyong* the golden Mean as a happy medium, and *Zhonghe,* a state of existential equilibrium. Whilst political regimes can be brutal in their exercise of power, mainstream concepts and values emphasize mutuality, and pluralistic religious culture, all of which encourages multi-cultural society. There are no simple opposites or binaries to encompass the more fluid ideas which are dominant in Chinese thought. The same observation applied to space. The concept of *Duikang* (as oppositional) does not adequately encompass the fluid nature of *Xingbie hezuo* (gender cooperation) to be found in secular or religious space shared by women and men. It is the notion of *Duiying kongjian* (a spatially defined inter-dependence) that comes closest to women's values, principles and aspired conduct as they enter religious life, whatever the degree and length of their engagement with a given religious institution.

The enduring Confucian gender morality and religious gender systems enclosed women in two distinct, apparently complicit but, we maintain, also conflicting, institutions. Both, the institutions of 'hearth' and 'temple', using Zhou's terminology, were governed by hierarchies of reified, and deified, patriarchal authority and reproduced themselves through internalized discipline of mind and of body, represented in discrete spatial and temporal regimes. On the one hand, the enclosed institution of the Chinese major tradition of patrilocal marriage served as a template for a 'secure' female religious space, whether a Daoist nunnery, a Catholic convent or an

Islamic mosque. On the other hand, so the historian Cathy Yandell (2000) maintains, physical and psychological elements shape temporal perceptions of space. In the face of a daily routine of domestic life, the discipline of a cloistered life, ordered in accordance with a strict communal schedule of devotion, prayer and practical duty, could be perceived as a liberating alternative. Cathy Yandell has maintained in her study that within the limited choices which sixteenth-century France offered to women's life trajectories, the institution of marriage 'enclosed' women within a time domesticated by a womb-centred life cycle. Religious women 'displaced' time through the act of entering a community of religious women which allowed the creation of an 'alternative temporality.' Dedication to a spiritual, if cloistered life, thus allowed women to 'rise above the temporal framework' of marriage in a society which provided legitimacy solely through marriage and motherhood (Yandell, 2000: 16–7). Spatially and temporally, the cloistered life had an order and a rhythm which were subject no less than domestic spheres to discipline and order. But where women were in the position of replacing dutiful acquiescence to familial expectations with choices inspired by personal aspiration and hope, a willing submission, so Kang *Daozhang,* the abbess in charge of a temple which practices *Kundao* (the Female Way) in the *Quanzhen* Tradition, says of her own decision, may turn the discipline of a religious life into an enactment of *Ziyou* (independence). This is not the voice of a sixteenth-century French female religious but that of a Chinese Daoist senior nun of the name of Kang when she explained her decision in the course of many interviews as to why she chose to become the disciple of an elderly nun in Kaifeng, in the 1970s, foregoing the prospect of marriage and motherhood (Interviews between 2004 to 2009).

Women's virtues in Confucian cultural norms were tied to time: the virtues of not being idle, not wasting time gossiping, not frittering away the hours on social intercourse with neighbours and the community (*Side).* Most interestingly, Yandell argues there is persuasive evidence from her study of sixteenth-century European society for a strongly gendered attitude to time. Although careful not to homogenize, Yandell describes a distinct preoccupation on the part of men with immortality, unilinearity, with over-arching projects transcendent of time which, indeed, set out to challenge the tyranny of time and mortality. In contrast, a kind of 'counter-time' involves women in the present, less fearful of the impact of transitory life on the Self and the community. 'Counter-time' expresses itself in practical and psychological ways as women enter a chosen life. We are treating in our study the institutions of convents, temples, or mosques as invested with women's ideals and spiritual yearning. These religious locations are intimately connected to socio-political currents which shape the possibilities of communities belonging to religious sites. However, in turn, they can be found at the intersection of social change, a source of dissent and difference to women in their local society, even perceived as a 'subversive space' (Lefebvre, 1991) during times of nation making and social engineering.

Yet the thematic thread for our study of female religious traditions in their specific local environments has come to be that of *Duiying kongjian* (social space as inter-dependent or complementary), a concept which suggests to us the importance of context, or of historical specificities of political and ideological power structures in their impact on women's available choices and alternative female roles. On the one hand, the use of such an indigenous Chinese concept came out of our study of women's capacity for creative circumvention of moral strictures, where religious conviction and faith led to rejection of marriage in preference for a life of religious devotion. On the other hand, this concept signifies neither subversion of, nor subservience to, the body politic. Instead, emphasis is on the relational nature of space, its fluidity and its inter-dependencies with contingencies of times and place, yet always subject to expression of the individual agency of many women who dared to go against the grain when family and community would look askance at their chosen path.

Moreover, the notion of 'social complementarity' refers to the changing, complex relationship between *female* religious institution and Chinese State power and the impact on the internal culture of women's institutions as a result of historical strategies of accommodation. In fluid negotiations with the political powers of the day at local and national level, skilful uses of 'soft' and 'hard' approaches to political bargaining—what women refer to as the *Yin* and *Yang* of their political negotiation—women's religious institutions have ensured their survival and constructed their place in the local and wider societies. Under such conditions, the temporal framework of religious women's communities could become a most personal liberation from the tyranny of domestic routine. Thus, for Kang *Daozhang* of the Daoist *Jiuku miao* (*Jiuku* Temple), a highly disciplined schedule of prayer and chanting was to her a most intensely felt experience of *Ziyou zhuyi* (a liberation, she explained, of both body and mind). The possibilities afforded by religious spaces might be said to have been in inverse proportion to State control over religious life. We are illustrating in our study the close link between the State's liberal treatment of religion and the creative use of all manners of social and political resources through which women would contribute to the growth of their institutions. Such access to multiple identities open to women, whether as religious believer, as members of an assigned ethnic minority group or as Chinese citizens, would in turn shape the possible beneficial nature of interaction of such institutions with mainstream society.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Our book follows the histories of women's sites within Daoism, Islam and Catholicism in Kaifeng, capital of Henan Province during the final years of Qing dynasty rule and during the Republican era when the Guomindang or

Nationalist Party was in government, and in Zhengzhou which succeeded Kaifeng as provincial capital under the Communist Party. Whilst the political narrative moves from Late Imperial to Republican times and from Communist to contemporary times, the calendars which structured the rhythm of women's religious lives and institutions do not fit easily within the dates and milestones of a linear chronology. Within each of the three main parts of the book, the official times of the Late Imperial, Republican and early Communist eras intersect with narratives propelled by a collective religious purpose. Their more complex and fluid temporal patterns express the dynamics of domination, acquiescence and assertiveness characteristic of relations of successive governments with generations of female religious in local mosques, temples and Catholic institutions.

Chapter 1 has introduced the main themes and conceptual and scholarly references for our interpretation of the often empowering role which religion could play in the lives of women in widening and diversifying the space available to them, but therefore also rendering women vulnerable to patriarchal backlash. The subsequent chapters take up women's actual stories. Based on historical reconstruction, ethnographic description and oral histories, the first part of the book, which contains four chapters, explores the historical significance of age-old local traditions of religious pluralism to women's lives. The case studies of female-led traditions in Kaifeng during the Late Imperial and Republican eras come from Daoist and Islamic religions, raising as well as complicating in their contrastive fates issues concerning nation making, gender and spatial autonomy. Although part of a 'native' religious tradition, the Daoist community of the *Jiuku* Temple had no immunity from political destruction. In contrast, although from a religion which marked its believers as distinct other and for many centuries was vulnerable to discrimination and persecution, the Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque preserved its continuity. Providing a religio-cultural context, Chapter 2 explores two contrasting case studies in Kaifeng showing how the chronicle of Kaifeng intertwines with the history of religious women. It tells of an enduring legacy of a flourishing religious culture which is still visible today. The twentieth century brought a tightening of State control and, we argue, the creation of 'objective enemies' (Hannah Arendt, cited in Chu, 1997) as obstructive of a modernization which emphasized progress as rationalized public life and adherence to modern precepts in private conduct. Religious organizations, unable to prove their worth in the task of modernization, fell foul of the regime. Education as a national panacea for China's external weaknesses entailed a new prominence for female education and educators in public life but also undermined education traditionally taught in women's religious institutions. Their relevance to modernity became a matter of survival. Chapter 3 describes the growing mutual awareness of local religious organizations as they faced the common challenge of surviving in the volatile political culture of Kaifeng which brought some into the fold of sanctioned organizations whilst others found

themselves excluded. This description sets the context for the dramatic history of the *Jiuku* Temple in Chapter 4 which, in the official documents of government archives and in the private memories of local believers, has come to exemplify the fate of all those who do not easily fit into mainstream political narratives.

The diverse sources we used for the telling of the origin and history of the Daoist Temple set up different perspectives in which gender, class, modernity and memory of recent religious persecution allow for an insight into the complexity of local society and its relations with the past. The memoir of an educated male doctor views the Temple's history through a very personal lens. With barely concealed distaste and considerable rancor, he describes the impact of the charismatic Guan *Shanren*, a legendary Daoist abbess, on the doctor's family and on local society in general, and on women in particular. From his perspective, the closure of such institutions by a modern-minded government could not come soon enough. In contrast, the collective narrative of pride and suffering which is based on the oral history told by nuns and lay persons close to the *Jiuku miao* points to a very different, much more positive role played by the Temple in the lives of local women. A third version was written by local scholars and commissioned by the government in the 1920s; this history was only printed however in the 1980s, under the Communist Government, thus being given an official stamp of approval. As a government-sanctioned narrative, it omits the perspectives of the women in order to provide the voice of modern reason as a justification of the demise of the *Jiuku miao* against the background of modernizing Kaifeng society.

Chapter 5 retells the era of a modernizing Republican China through the experience of female Muslim intellectuals and Muslim women in the cultural milieu of women's mosques. The vigorous discourses led by means of more or less widely circulated broadsheets testify to the strong intellectual input into wider national debates over the future of the nation on the part of a small number of Muslim women. These intellectuals' articulation of an alternative modernity did, however, remain aloof from the active engagement of mosque-based Muslim female congregations, led by women *Ahong*[13], in the reforming of female education and thus in widening their sphere of legitimacy in a growing secularizing society. Based on the history of Muslim society in Kaifeng, we show how a thriving oral tradition of *Jingge* (religious chants) came alive to serve pedagogical as well as religious needs. Some of these *Jingge* have survived and give us a direct link to the collective and individual subjectivities of pious women who derived modernizing impulses from religious as much as from secular sources.

Staying in the Republican era, the second part, including Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9, adds further nuances to the complex constellations of State, gender and identity politics. The case study of American Providence Sisters and of 'Chinese Virgins' in Kaifeng and Jingang is a microcosm of wider tensions over Chinese national sovereignty, the use value of Western

missionary services and the playing out of ideas of tradition and modernity in the gender practices of female religious organizations. In Chapter 6, the nature of the impact of female missionary presence is first considered in relation to the history of the *Shouzhen guniang* tradition of celibate women in China, referred to as *Virgines* or 'Chinese Virgins' in missionary literature, and then more specifically to the Kaifeng tradition of celibate women (Chapter 7) and to a rural variation of the *Shouzhen guniang* tradition in Jingang, south of Kaifeng (Chapter 8). The Providence Sisters established influential religious, educational and welfare institutions in Kaifeng. Their role in what contemporary missionaries referred to as the 'nativization' of local Catholic institutions, treated in detail in Chapter 6, entailed for the Providence Sisters the setting up of a second, separate community. The creation of two co-existing communities of foreign and native religious was designed to keep Chinese religious in their accustomed ways of life and allow foreign Sisters to continue theirs. This approach was less easily applied to the locally evolved institution of celibate women, the *Shouzhen guniang,* some of them fiercely independent. But this same coverage was to lead to charges of 'untamed' conduct when, in the late nineteenth century, the missionaries returned to China. We explore in these chapters the dynamic interplay of officially proclaimed modernity as a nation through the education of its women and the services to modern education which such institutions as the Providence Sisters' missionary schools were able to render to the Government. The increased bureaucratization served the purposes of Catholic (and other Christian) women's organizations for a widening expansion of their presence in China by conceding a firmer administrative and legal foothold, and by diminishing the role of indigenous 'Virgins' in Church affairs. Two case studies demonstrate the diverse local traditions of *Shouzhen guniang* and their very different relationships with family and public society, and thus the different challenges their choices implied. In the case of Kaifeng's urban, educated celibate women from fairly well-off family backgrounds, they are shown to continue a tradition of non-marrying Catholic women providing education and ritual guidance which goes back to the earliest beginnings of Catholic missionizing. These women were most reluctant to join convent life which they regarded as of lower spiritual and also moral and intellectual quality. In the case of Jingang, celibate women were excluded from admission into religious congregations, leaving them no choice but to remain in their natal families. Convents in Jingang insisted on literacy and formal education which very few local women enjoyed.

Chapter 9 concludes the second part and foreshadows the issues to be taken up in the final, third part, making use of local archival sources to tell of the most direct and radical intervention by any government in the history of China to dismantle the spatial taboos on women's ideological and social mobility. The ultimate failure of a coalition of Communist Party/

State officials, women intellectuals and activists to change the ground rules of the dominant gender map, presaged the challenges which all women, but most particularly religious women, were to face in the years that followed.

The third part, made up of Chapters 10, 11 and 12, brings our narrations into contemporary times, telling of the strategies and means adopted by Muslim, Daoist and Catholic women's organizations to ensure their continuity. Based largely on women's own testimonies and wide-ranging interviews with believers and Government officials, we tell of religious women's groups, led by often charismatic leaders, who bargain for survival, legitimacy and identity. Such bargaining is played out at local level in the interplay of ideological marginality and cultural rejuvenation, and at national level in the contexts of State projects of multi-cultural harmony and State policies of safeguarding control of religious sites. The ever-present imperative for believing women is to prove the relevance of their values, practices and organizations to the needs of a modernizing society. Finally, the Conclusion reflects on the contributions of religious women to the history of all Chinese women. In particular it considers the multiple contemporary resonances of what we argue are long-standing and symbiotic linkages between richly diverse strands of religious and secular traditions.

Part I

Late Imperial and Republican China

History, Religion and Space—Daoist and Muslim Women in Kaifeng

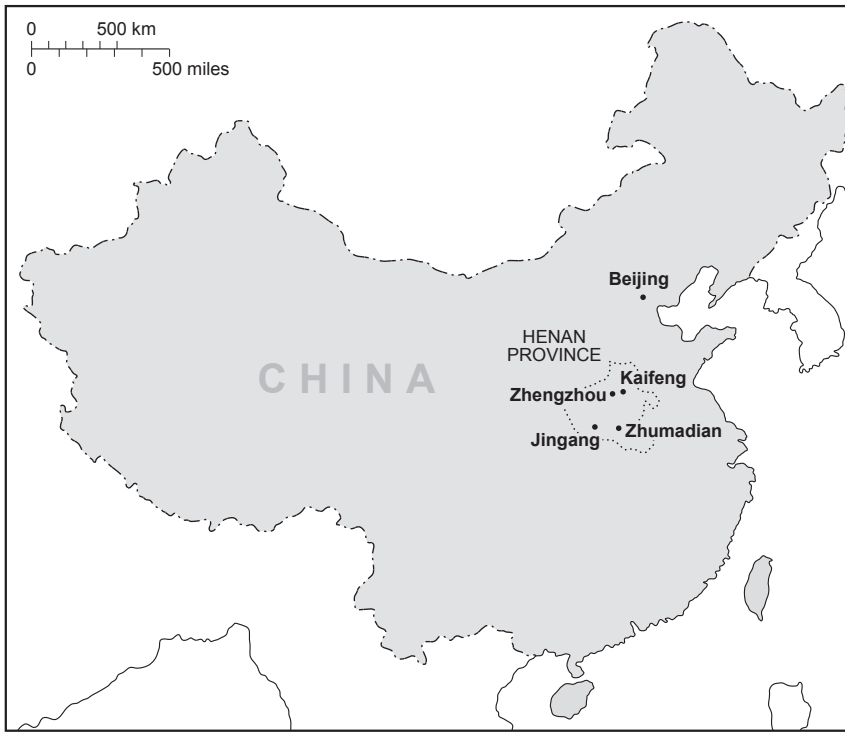
2 Religious Pluralism and the Place of Kaifeng in Women's History

The religious culture of women has had a long and continuous history in central China, well illustrated in the urban milieu of Kaifeng. Though archival documents and the memories of religious believers tell only a fragmented story, the diversity of Kaifeng's religious landscape, the plurality of its religious cultures and the prominence of co-existing female religious organizations tell us something about the fluidity of society that opened up a space for the benefit of women. Of particular importance, especially since the twentieth century, have been the links between political ideologies and attitudes towards education for women, for it is in that arena that religious organizations were able to offer women important, potentially empowering resources. In this chapter, we will explore those linkages. First, however, we will review the background on the diverse religious groups in Kaifeng during the preceding dynastic periods.

During seven imperial dynasties, local religious organizations and diverse cults in Kaifeng came into close contact with foreign ideas and philosophies. Over time, the interplay of their ideas engendered a broad spectrum of religions in which an active culture of female religious life and organization could flourish. The open environment created conditions under which women's religious sites acquired significant positions in the local communities, exercising a lasting influence.

The religious cultures of women in central China can be traced back to the first Buddhist temple for female disciples, the *Zhulin si* (Bamboo Temple), built west of Luoyang City in Henan Province by Jing Jian, a nun who lived in the reign of Emperor Jianxing (313–317) in the West Jin Dynasty.[1] Contributing to a flourishing Daoist female tradition was the particular value placed on *Yin*, the female principle prominent in local teachings of the Daoist doctrine. Women were attracted to join the numerous Daoist organizations and temples presided over by female spiritual leaders. [2]

Over time, Kaifeng became home to diverse ethnic groups living in compact communities, each practicing its own faith. In the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) Dynasties, Muslim merchants or envoys came to pay tribute to the Chinese Imperial court and chose to make Kaifeng their permanent residence, thus becoming the ancestors of what became known as



Map 2.1 Henan and Research Site Locations [cartographer: Dave Samson].

the Kaifeng Hui people. In the Song Dynasty, Jewish merchants came thousands of miles to trade, with some of them eventually settling with their families in Dongjing (the East Capital) as Kaifeng was then also known, attracted to the busy and prosperous capital of the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1125). During the subsequent Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368), the small group of Muslims was swelled by the arrival of Muslim officers, soldiers and artisans from Central Asia. These newcomers built mosques and private residences for themselves, forming an influential religious and ethnic minority group in the local Kaifeng society. In the Qing Dynasty, when the Manchurian and Mongolian Eight-Banner, a military-administrative unit of soldiers, was stationed in Kaifeng, they constructed a Manchu garrison city, commencing the story of the Manchu and Mongolian communities in the annals of Kaifeng.

Diverse religious cultures have thus co-existed in Kaifeng for over a thousand years. Of all the religions, Daoism was the earliest to be introduced, during the years of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.), followed by Buddhism. During the Western Jin Dynasty (265–316), Buddhist temples appeared in Kaifeng. When Jewish settlers arrived in Kaifeng, they brought

their faith *Yiceleye,* also called *Tiaojinjiao* to Kaifeng locals. In the late Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), the Christian faith was introduced by Catholic missionaries who built a church in the city proper. In spite of the fact that Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity were introduced into Kaifeng, and into Henan, at different times, they co-existed from all accounts in relative harmony. Each religion was allowed its own space to grow. However, the situation did not go without challenge. In 1715, during the Emperor Kangxi's reign, the Qing Imperial Court banned Catholicism in China, severely circumscribing missionary activities. The Jewish presence strongly diminished in the late years of the Qing Dynasty, and when the Kaifeng synagogue was damaged by heavy flooding in 1860, it remained deserted and quickly became derelict. Subsequent generations of Jews never reconstructed the site where their ancestors had worshipped. It appears that when the synagogue was gone, so was the will of believers to retain the outward expressions of their faith. In contrast, Christians (of both Catholic and Protestant denominations) poured into Kaifeng again in the late Qing Dynasty, supported by Western treaties and the military presence of the Allied powers, with assertive missionaries quickly taking advantage of China's political and military weaknesses.

Until the late Qing Dynasty, Buddhism and Daoism remained the dominant religions in Kaifeng. Their temples could be found in every corner of the city. According to the Amended Xiangfu County Chronicles, religious sites were important landmark buildings of Kaifeng in the Qing Dynasty, with many of its street names derived from local temples and shrines (*Xinxiu xiangfuxian zhi*, 1898). Based on the census of street names recorded in the Chronicle, of the total 287 main streets in Kaifeng, one-fourth were named after religious sites containing references to *Si*, *Miao*, *Gong*, *Guan* and *Tang* (mosque, shrine, temple).[3] Only two are named for Muslim religious sites, *Qingzhensi dongxi* (East and West Mosque Street) and *Wenshusi jie* (Wenshu Mosque Street). The Jewish faith was commemorated in the name of *Tiaojinjiao hutong* (Jewish Synagogue Lane). The remaining streets took their names from either Buddhist or Daoist religious sites, indicating their significant position in ordinary people's daily life.

EARLY URBAN RELIGIOUS SITES FOR WOMEN

As early as the Song Dynasty (960–1279), female-led Buddhist and Daoist religious sites were established in Kaifeng City proper, often in close proximity to each other. The earliest document recording women's religious activities, *Dongjing menghua luzhu* (Notes on Resplendent Dreams in the Eastern Capital), stems from this period (Meng Yuanlao, 1982). It refers to four Buddhist and three Daoist temples for exclusive use by nuns and depicts in detail how Buddhist nuns participated in the social and economic life of the local communities. According to its description, *Xiangguo si*, a most

prestigious Buddhist temple in Kaifeng, 'opens to the public five times per month, and thousands of people will come in to trade' (*Ibid*.: 102). Apart from ordinary people, Buddhist and Daoist monks and nuns also took part in trading. As Meng (*Ibid*.: 102, 105, 106, 175, 176) reports, 'Wang Daoren from the Mengjia Daoist Shrine near the Temple sells honey-fried cookies, Zhao Wenxiu sells Chinese writing brushes, and Pan Gu has a fixed stall for the sale of ink sticks. Nuns from the various temples and shrines are selling embroideries, collar attachments, flowers, pearls and jades, decorative headpieces, gold-plated head ornaments, caps, hair ornaments, hats, silk ribbons, and more, [with their stalls situated] alongside the terraces of the two wings [of the Temple].' The description indicates that Buddhist and Daoist religious were engaged in production and involved in trade as early as the Northern Song Dynasty. Naturally, in this way their religious sites became part of the busy social and commercial public space in which ordinary people pursued their everyday life.

Beginning with the Southern Song Dynasty, Kaifeng, as the rest of central China, was thrown into the chaos of war. Yet the tradition of building temples and shrines for Buddhist and Daoist nuns continued unabated. A document from the turn of the seventeenth century depicts the cultural and religious life of Kaifeng society at a variety of religious sites, including three Muslim mosques, one Catholic church, one Jewish synagogue and a number of other religious sites, in the main belonging to the Buddhist and Daoist traditions (Kong, 1984). Of these sites, three temples, two Buddhist and one Daoist, were occupied by nuns; the temples were open for the use of ordinary women where they could perform their prayers and burn ritual joss sticks. In addition, a women's school was founded during the Ming Dynasty for the use by female members of imperial and aristocratic families. It was located in the compound of the Buddhist nunnery, carefully shielded from the general public. 'Heading north from the Caomen Gate, we can find the Xitingfu College . . . going further north, there is a Guanyin Temple, where members of the aristocratic Zhou family go to burn incense . . . [the Temple houses] about a hundred nuns, and inside, a women's school is set up, where the young maidens of the family learn to read and write. Guarded by an old soldier, it allows only family members to enter the compound' (*Ibid*.: 43).

The historical record *Ru meng lu* cited above (Kong, 1984) makes no reference to a women's Islamic school (*Qingzhen nüxue)* in Kaifeng, either because no such school was yet established, or because the early institution did not have a fixed venue, so that its existence may not have been known to a non-Muslim scholar. Oral history however, transmits the belief that a women's mosque in Kaifeng has a history of over three hundred years, suggesting that is was founded in the late Ming or early Qing dynasties. In the reign of the Qing Emperor Jiaqing (1796–1820), the Wangjia Hutong *Nüxue* changed its status from that of an educational establishment for girls and women to that of a mosque (Jaschok and Shui, 2000a). Then,

during the reign of Emperor Guangxu (1875–1908), the Kaifeng Muslim community set up five additional women's mosques.[4]

The tradition of building Buddhist and Daoist temples for female believers carried on right throughout the Qing Dynasty. A number of such religious sites included facilities for the training and instruction of both Buddhist and Daoist women. One such religious place was the White Robe Pavilion, a well-known Buddhist temple for women to perform rites of worship. It had been set up as early as the period of the Five Dynasties (907–960) and it became known as Guanyin Meditation Hall. Having survived long periods of wars and disasters, the temple was rebuilt in the early Qing Dynasty and its name was changed to *Baiyi ge*. The name derives from the worship of Guanyin (Goddess of Mercy), depicted in a white robe. In the reign of Emperor Guangxu, nuns collected donations to refurbish the main hall of their temple, and the care taken ensured that the temple was maintained in a good condition right up to the early Republican era (Zhao Jiazhen, 2000: 166–67). The 1898 map of Kaifeng City proper shows two Guanyin shrines (one standing by the Yanguang Temple in the east of the city, the other located nearby the Ximen dajie, and also known as *Jiuku miao*), one Guanyin Temple (to the south of the Guanyin Shrine in the east and to the northeast of Wangjia Lane), one Tieniangniang Miao (Temple for the Iron Lady), and two minor shrines (one in the south near the cross-road of the Chenghuangmiao Street, the other is in the north, just opposite the north entrance of Qingyun Street). It is quite likely that the five temples or shrines were presided over by either Buddhist or Daoist nuns (*Xinxiu xiangfuxian zhi*, 1898).

MAKING KAIFENG 'MODERN'

The political regimes which emerged in the twentieth century were characteristically 'movement regimes' (Hannah Arendt, cited in Chu, 1997: 74) which consolidated their claim to legitimacy through frequent demonstrations of state power, whether by means of official decrees, movements, campaigns or punitive sanctions. Although in terms of ideological origin and political agenda apparently far apart, the Nationalists who succeeded the Qing Dynasty in 1912 and the Communist Party, which established its government in 1949, exhibited certain similarities in their treatment of religious women and their institutions. In the new 'temporal order' which became a potent political symbolism for either political era, the 'possibilities of measurement' (Kristeva, in Moi, 1986: 153) brought public space under political control through imposed state categories. Under both the Republican and the early Communist eras, women's religious spaces were assigned markers of identity which placed them at a critical temporal distance from the State project of modernity, or in the words of Kristeva, placed them in relation to 'a before, a now and an after' (in Moi, 1986: 152–53). Different religious women's sites came to be judged by their relationship with

time—being either 'in tune with time' or 'outside time' (*Luohou*), with lasting implications for their subsequent fates.

Women who entered secular and religious movements or organizations took advantage of emerging opportunities but, under the Nationalist Government, and again later under the Community Party/State, also found themselves marked, to varying degrees, as 'objective enemy' (Arend, cited in Chu, 1997: 74) of the State and thus of State-defined historical progress. The *Daozhang* (Daoist senior-grade nun), the Muslim female *Ahong,* and the Catholic *Xiunü* (nun) and *Shouzhen guniang* (celibate women) of Henan Province who lived through the twentieth century when volatile public environments co-existed with seemingly enduring domestic continuities were in many ways subject to the same forces which shaped their contemporaries who, unlike themselves, followed in the footsteps of the majority of women: to become wives, mothers and mothers-in-law. They lived through the major events which characterized the nation's history in the Republican and Communist eras and they experienced within their personal contexts of family and religious community the playing out of national ramifications into local politics.

At the political level, the Qing Empire had given way in 1911 to a Republic with the emperor Pu Yi replaced by the president of the Republic, Yuan Shikai. The Republican era was characterized by the changing fortunes of the two important rival parties, the Guomindang, or Nationalist, and the Communist, their internal dissensions and external alliances. Whatever took place over this period in Peking, in Nanking, in Chungking, and elsewhere, however, filtered through only selectively, sometimes not at all, to women who grew up in the outlying provinces and whose access to information on the outside world was contingent on the local grapevine and on travelers from beyond the provincial and county borders. Locally, national upheavals produced their own aftershocks, sometimes reverberating long after the national centre was pacified. Inhabitants of townships and villages in more remote areas made sense of whatever news came to them through the lens of their beliefs and the interpretations of culture brokers (Antoun, 1989). Even the changing appearance of townscapes, the growing commercialization of township life and the spread of modern public media would be interpreted in a certain light, mediated through some form of authority, and understood by women as fate or as other-directed events and developments. A multitude of factors such as class, wealth, education, ethnicity, geography and central to this study, the factors of gender and religion all shaped women's responses.

In her study of the 'public' sphere in early Republican China, Eugenia Lean (2004) presents the 'public' as a 'shifting realm', and as 'a fluid interaction of regime with social groups, sometimes 'adversarial' and sometimes 'overlapping.' Lean rejects a more teleological understanding of the 'public sphere' as given by Jürgen Habermas. Instead, the 'historically specific configurations of Chinese "publics" in late imperial and twentieth-century

China' created an 'imagined authority' (quoting Keith Baker, in Lean, 2004: 39) which sought to overcome the weakness of late Qing imperial rule with reason and rationality. Subsequently succeeded by a different kind of public authority, in a context of growing civic institutions, changing state-society relations and the political dynamics of the time, varied and diverse publics took advantage of both institutional and normative possibilities. Much criticized by Leftist reformers at that time, Lean says, as a return to an unenlightened society, such developments were held to be dragging down progress with weak sentiment and irrationality. It was a public culture associated with the feminine, shaped through the conduit of mass media and popular culture all featuring prominently participation of women (Lean, 2004: 40).

Although Lean does not incorporate the religious groups into her analysis, the flourishing of discursive and political life during the Republican era created opportunities for female leaders of religious institutions, members of religious minorities and ordinary believers to express views and positions on issues of their time. As we discuss in our next chapter, for a few years, newssheets, broadsheets, journals, and publicly and privately printed brochures all provided a forum for increased diversity of public discourse. Women scholars played an important part in formulating what they felt to be Muslim, Buddhist or Catholic viewpoints on the 'women's question' and its relevance to the salvation of the nation. Institutional and cultural life flourished; for women's mosques the era up to Communist ideological consolidation in the early 1950s has inscribed itself in collective memory as a Golden Age.

The Republican era has recently received critical attention from gender and women's studies scholars in the Chinese studies leading to a call for dismantling the conventional periodization of Chinese history. Instead, Mechthild Leutner considers that, 'parallels between the period of the Republic and the current phase of reform have become increasingly apparent, with both periods now being understood as times of transformation' (Leutner and Spakowski, 2005: 7). Leutner and Spakowski point to the richness of sources available for the Republican era, particularly in the 1930s and 40s, for women in both urban and rural areas, which allow for a close examination of the specific contexts in which women lived, beyond received approaches to gender study, and the beginnings of either national or local initiatives for change that resonate into the contemporary times. In our research we have been interested to investigate times of change through the perspectives of women as believers identifying themselves with particular sites, whether as mosques, temples or convent, as sources of identity, solace, engagement, change and continuity.

In times of social change, when political campaigns and movements locked questions of national liberation, sovereignty and dignity into questions of women's liberation, women's progress from *Nei* (inner) to *Wai* (extra-domestic) spheres of activity acquired both symbolic and political significance. We argue that the shift from home to religious life, *Chujiā,* not

only preceded *repeated* secular interventions to move women outside their home, but that from the point of view of the women themselves, this was an exercise of choice. We do not maintain that *all* women who entered religious institutions did so voluntarily, or did so fully informed of the range of options otherwise available. Such evidence will never be fully available, although some of our informants did address the issue being sensitive to popular prejudice. They were adamant that it is their faith which motivated them to become religious rather than the urge to escape from the 'messiness', as one of our informants put it, of family life (see Chapter 11). Our study suggests that on the whole, given societal misgivings over celibacy, or outright rejection, only genuine religious commitment could bring women to make such a contentious decision. In the 1920s, Daoist nuns *chose* to enter religious life, and they were expelled, 'corrected' or re-educated for their primary roles as mother and wife. In the 1950s, again, the State intervened to override women's choices, applying ever more strident propaganda and an overwhelmingly powerful Communist Party apparatus to re-draw the social ground rules of women's mobility. In the wake of these campaigns, traditional, popular female sites of religious congregation would be closed off, with many never to reopen.

GENDER POLITICS: WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN HENAN IN THE LATE DYNASTIC PERIOD

In the final years of the late Qing Dynasty, the Chinese Imperial Government sought to reverse its weakening political legitimacy by introducing political and institutional reforms which incorporated, importantly, measures to further the educational and economic advancement of women. A Government department was set up in 1901 to take charge of a wide range of reforms covering all aspects of Government, including military, political, educational, administrative and financial affairs. Within a relatively short time, the impacts, if uneven, could be felt at provincial and county levels. Thus in Henan, as early as 1902, the Government-run Henan College was founded in Kaifeng (then the provincial capital). In 1904, the first group of six students from Henan was sent abroad and by 1911, a total of 214 students from Henan were studying in foreign countries (Liu Yongzhi and Geng Ruiling, 1990: 574). In 1905, the Qing Imperial Court ordered the abolition of the imperial examination and encouraged its replacement by the newly reformed school system. The Educational Inspector of Henan urged the local governments in his *Advice on Running New Schools* to found more colleges and schools. In consequence, these new schools grew quickly both in numbers and in variety at all levels of education; among them were thirteen girls' schools.[5]

Of great relevance is the fact that overseas students and the students who benefited from these reforms were among the most socially active

intellectuals. In 1906, overseas students from Henan initiated the *Yubao* (Henan News) in Japan and in 1907, periodicals such as the *Zhongguo xin nüxing zazhi* (The Journal for New Chinese Women) came out in quick succession (Wang Weizhen, 2002; Hu Zhanjun, 2003; Gu, 2003). These newspapers and journals did not survive long, and differed in their purposes, but they exercised influence nevertheless. Of the three, The Journal for New Chinese Women was especially noticeable for advocating women's liberation and publicizing the idea of women's rights. It was mainly funded by Liu Qingxia, a prominent woman activist from Henan, who also acted as its editor-in-chief and as the senior publisher. Altogether six issues, sold locally in Henan, presented to the readers current ideas concerning women's equality with men, encouraging women to move forward and liberate themselves by their own effort (Hu, 2003; Gu, 2003).

Many of the students returning from overseas joined local governments and became important initiators of local educational reforms. Two initiatives of the late Qing Dynasty were of the most lasting impact: the institutionalization of female education at all levels and the prohibition of foot-binding energetically pushed by the Association for Natural Feet, and by the Association For Keeping Women Schools. Both initiatives, however careful or tentative they may at times have been, encouraged the intellectual and physical mobility of women.

In 1906, the first modern elementary school for girls was founded in Henan, in Lanyi County (present-day Lankao County). Three more girls' government schools followed in 1907 and in 1908, the Huaying Girls' School in Weishi County was set up by Liu Qingxia, as famous for her political activism (she was an early member of Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Alliance) as for her achievements as a publisher and as an active member of numerous educational and government committees in Beijing and in Henan (Volz, 2007). It was the first such school founded by a woman. By 1909, local girls could attend eleven government girls' schools and six private schools. Although short lived, closing in 1910, their history tells of the degree to which reforms had from the earliest beginnings brought in women both as targets of education and, in small numbers, as begetters of initiatives.

The campaigns against foot-binding and for development of girls' schools had as much resonance in the county townships in Henan Province as in the provincial capital of Kaifeng. Started by men and involving men's participation, the first anti-foot-binding society in Henan was established in Xincai County in 1904. Such initiatives were quickly replicated in other counties. With sizable memberships, the code of practice enforced by the societies brought reforms into the most intimate spheres of the family. Whilst of course, as some social historians of foot-binding have pointed out, such zealous campaigning could also bring in its wake more suffering for the girls and women who were the targets of these initiatives[6], they also delivered a strong message that change had arrived for women, and that society itself was changing (*Henanshengzhi. qingnian yundongzhi. funü*

yundongzhi, hereafter referred to as *Funü yundongzhi*, 1993). Women intellectuals quickly joined these movements, as for example in 1911, when in Kaifeng the Bureau for Natural Feet was run by Lu Banzhu, one of the leading local women campaigners. In Luoyang, such a women-led initiative was joined by over 1,000 supporters, both women and men (*Funü yundongzhi*, 1993).

It is important not to overestimate the number of reformers who were then active, but the evidence cited here reveals an important development: women's voices were heard in public and they were making together with men a case for women's liberation as an indispensable part of the progressive times that Kaifeng was entering, together with the nation. In an environment of Government-driven reforms, a new kind of 'public' was created, one that brought together reformers in educational and official circles who had been abroad to study, who had taken advantage of opportunities for familiarization with intellectual and social changes elsewhere, and had thought and read widely for their application to China's situation. To this 'public' women contributed individually and collectively. In turn, these activities enabled the widening of a social space in which a language of reform that incorporated the necessity of 'women's liberation' to the strengthening of the nation could be brought into the wider discourses of urban and township residents.

WOMEN'S WIDENING SOCIAL SPACE IN KAIFENG DURING THE REPUBLICAN PERIOD (1912–1949)

Modernity in Kaifeng during the years of the outgoing Qing Dynasty must have presented a dizzying array of campaigning groups and associations, new public institutions and women's organizations, all entailing new decrees, guidelines, and directives, and all making themselves heard against a noisy background of a rapidly modernizing Kaifeng society with its railways, electric light, postal service, brightly lit advertisements, and more. Following the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the early years of the Republic brought, besides modernization and a quickening pace of life, political instability and warlordism to Henan. Many of the earlier reforms were stunted or altogether eradicated. Not until the 1920s did provincial leaders use political powers to push reforms that directly affected women's lives and public involvement.

The 'Christian General' Feng Yuxiang who took control of Henan Province twice, enforced political and social reforms under the slogan of 'The Three Principles of the People [i.e. Nationalism, Democracy and the People's Livelihood as put forward by Sun Yat-sen] can save China' (Li Chaoyang, 2004; Yuan, 2000).[7] As the military governor and chairman of the Provincial Government in the 1920s, Feng had at his disposal the political and military might to act on his convictions, namely that science

and schooling, eradication of superstition and bad habits, encouragement of equality between women and men and advocacy of women's liberation were the only means to save China.

Feng's approach to changing what he saw as a moribund local society was to destroy the old and establish the new. Upon commencing his governorship in 1922, he relocated Manchu residents away from their old settlements to force them to take on new occupations. He closed brothels in Kaifeng and Zhengzhou, ordering prostitutes to marry and start a new life. He confiscated properties of corrupt officials and transferred the proceeds into special funds for education (Su, 2003). In April 1925, officials from the Henan Police Bureau, under the order of Feng, promulgated the first Statute against foot-binding, prescribing that all women under the age of 30 must take off their bandages, and that no foot-binding of young girls under the age of 15 would be permitted.

Upon his return to Kaifeng in 1927 for a second term of office, this time as Chairman of the Henan Provincial Government, Feng Yuxiang resumed his political agenda with renewed vigor. Naming campaigns became an important tool of change as well as a potent symbol of the political power wielded: streets and squares, counties and county seats were renamed and given terms that spoke of a new spirit, such as 'liberty' and 'equality.'[8] Women's bodies were reconfigured with equal determination and efficient enforcement. They were ordered to cut their hair and free their feet from confining bandages. Feng and his wife Li Dequan went among the local people in Luoyang to give due publicity, and this personal involvement added to the intensity of the campaign (Liu Lin, 1995). By 1932, it was rare in most of the cities and townships and county seats in Henan to see girls and women with bound feet (*Funü yungdongzhi*, 1992). Political and administrative measures, statutes and by-laws, threatening sanctions and punishments in case of non-compliance had brought about wide-spread compliance among urban populations.[9] The other campaign to bring women into modern times concerned access to education and vocational training. Provincial measures for establishing institutions for female education and training were rigorously enforced, with the result that by 1919 all counties in Henan reported compliance with the 'Program for Expanding Female Schooling' (*Funü yundongzhi*, 1993).[10]

The spread of female education exposed many more girls and women to the influence of ideas which sought to give legitimacy to female voice and presence in the public sphere, unbinding their spirit as well as their feet in collective actions. In the Republican period, four types of women's organizations were set up in Henan in quick succession: the popular women's groups initiated by women themselves, women's organizations set up and run by the Nationalist government, women's groups under the leadership or influence of the (underground) Communist Party of China (CCP) and women's organizations in the Revolutionary Bases under the leadership of the CCP. From 1913 to 1927, a total of 23 women's organizations were set

up in Henan (*Funü yundongzhi*, 1993). They operated in the provincial capital Kaifeng as well as in other cities and counties with women intellectuals making up the majority of their participants. Though they differed in their political and ideological agendas and in their social background, their public association with 'women's liberation' and with causes to strengthen women's equal rights widened the discursive space in which women could participate and their voices be heard. Even given the well-known criticism by scholars of the Republican-era women's movement as to their relatively limited audience (Leutner and Spakowski, 2005), the coming together of government political will, the flourishing of women's organizations, a trend strengthened in the 1930s, and the publicity given in the press to their activities, made, what in the late years of the Empire had been exotic and foreign ideas on the advancement of women beyond traditional roles, a much more familiar part of Henan urban mainstream discourse even at the household level.

FEMALE EDUCATION

Female education received attention both from local governments and from private and philanthropic sources. At all levels of primary and middle schools and within vocational and higher education, schools opened their doors to girls (Wang Shaoming, 1992).[11] Statistics cannot convey what happened in classrooms, who attended schooling and who did not, or what the lasting impact of education was on the early generations of girls, but they do tell us of a considerable social, institutional space that opened up to girls that created officially sanctioned mobility of a kind previously unknown. Thus we are told that by 1934, the 23rd year of the Republic, girls made up an almost 40 per cent of the 6,122 pupils at 13 provincial co-educational primary schools. Of five provincial middle schools, two were girls' schools. Of 18 private middle schools, three were co-educational, and four were for girls only. Of the total student population of all middle schools in Henan, girls made up almost 25 per cent of the 7,232 students (*Minguo shiqi henansheng tongjizilizao*, 1987: 761,765). Altogether, 4,209 female students attended middle or primary schools, accounting for nearly 2 per cent of the total residents of Kaifeng, or about 4 per cent of the total Kaifeng female population in 1934. It was said of two of the most prestigious schools for girls, founded in 1921, that they became known for their emphasis on cultivating the independence and varied capabilities of their girl students (Chen and Ma, 1992).[12]

THE ROLE OF WOMEN INTELLECTUALS IN ADVANCING MODERN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Changes, so the historical sources tell us, took place both on the individual and collective level. Indeed, the courage of individual women could open

the path for other women to act, in turn creating and widening political space for changing prevalent moral and family codes that bound women. Well-known Henan female intellectuals such as Yan Bin, Liu Qingxia, and Lu Banzhu (Hu Zhanjun, 2003; Wang Weizhen, 2002) demanded change and gave voice to their convictions that the time for women to act collectively had come, whether to promote gender equality, the abolition of feudal ethics in general or right to freedom of marriage in particular.

An illustration of the difference an individual could make during these volatile times is an event which took place in October 1912, when Lu Yongzhen, a woman from Kaifeng, wrote a letter to her husband, asking for a divorce. The marriage, following convention, had been arranged by the families. Her case became a *cause célèbre* in Kaifeng, and the local newspaper described it as representing an 'unprecedented case for freedom of divorce in Henan' (*Zhongguo funü yundongzhi*, 1993: 40). Although we know few details, it appears that this case gave encouragement to other women and that subsequently the number of those breaking with the parental prerogative of deciding the fate of their daughters (and sons) was noted to have risen considerably. No statistics are available for the years immediately after Lu Yongzhen's case, but some local historians suggest that available statistics for the years between 1930 and 1934 could be evidence of the lingering impact of her courage. During those five years a total of 48 people in Kaifeng petitioned for divorce, of which five were men, the remainder women. Their average age was 22 and the grounds given were spousal abuse, compulsory prostitution, desertion, compromised female virtues, bigamy, and mutually agreed decision to divorce. Spousal abuse was cited in 71 per cent of all cases, followed by desertion (10 per cent) and compulsory prostitution (6 per cent) (*Minguo shiqi henansheng tongjiziliao,* 1987, (2): 361–62). Not only is it significant that a rising number of Kaifeng women were prepared to bring their marital plight to public attention, in itself a traditional cause of shame, but that their commonly cited grounds for divorcing a husband indicated a decline of a woman's passivity in the face of fate, whatever the cause of her suffering.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES: WOMEN'S POLITICAL ORGANIZING AND MOBILIZATION

The number of women's groups set up and collective initiatives undertaken in Kaifeng, mainly, but not exclusively, by women of the educated and elite classes, indicates a growing consciousness at that time that individual action was not sufficient. The argument was made that a modernizing society required greater assertiveness by women to contribute their ideas and experience on matters of reform, on the nature of progress, and on the role of science and of education as well as how access to these could be ensured for all members of society. Their demands stated explicitly that women who suffered

injustices were entitled to have the wrongs inflicted on them redressed, that society owed women equal rights and opportunities but that women must also stake their claim through proper political representation.

Between 1913 and 1927, 23 women's organizations were set up in Henan, nine of these founded in Kaifeng (*Zhongguo funü yundongzhi,* 1993: 12–23). Their names suggest the political aspirations of their founders. The Henan Branch of the Association for Women's Political Participation, set up in March 1913 and ordered to close the following November, the Society of Women Comrades set up by the Jiangsu Provincial Guild in Kaifeng in 1920, the Kaifeng Association for Promoting Women's Virtues and the Henan Women's Industrial Union (also known as Kaifeng Women's Union), both established in 1924, the Henan Women's Association for the National Conference set up in early 1925 and the Henan Provincial Association for Women's Movements, which was reorganized in 1926 into an official women's organization known as Henan Women's Society (Ding, 1988: 76–81). Two more women's groups were set up in 1926 and another in 1927. One of these was under the influence of the Communist Party; the other two women's organizations were initiatives of the Nationalist Government.

These women's organizations had different political allegiances and their agendas pointed to contrasting, sometimes antagonistic, understandings of the meaning of 'women's liberation' and of the role women were to play in this modernizing era. From within their differences, however, these organizations contributed to a growing presence in provincial politics that shifted issues of women's liberation and policy implications of gender equality into the public limelight. The Society of Women Comrades, a group set up by students in the Provincial Kaifeng Number One Women's Normal School, proclaimed its mission for 'reform of the feudal family and promotion of social civilization.' This group initiated a semi-monthly journal called *Women's Rights*. The Henan Women's League, in contrast, set out its targets in its statute to 'unite with women groups of the whole [Henan] province, to encourage women's education, to promote their abilities, and to better their lives while working hard to obtain all women's social rights, contributing to the national revolution and seeking happiness for all human beings' (Ding, 1988: 15). The Henan Provincial Association of Women's Movements identified its goals as equality between men and women, marital freedom and monogamy. This Association had a membership of more than four hundred, and it offered under the name of the Women's Bureau for Consultation such services as mediation in family and conjugal conflicts, and support to women active in social causes as well as for the abolition of prostitution (Ding, 1988).

Not all these organizations had equal impact or a long enough life span to make a difference. Historical sources, however, tell of women who followed their words with action when their demands for political representation were not met. Thus in June 1923, the Henan Administrative Office drew up 'Statutes for Self-Rule in Cities and Townships', providing for the

right of women to vote but not for their right to stand for election. Angry at these provisions, students of the Provincial Number One Girls' Middle School sent representatives to petition for modification of the Statutes. With support from other girls' schools and women's organizations, public pressure led the Provincial Parliament to revise the offending Statutes.

Importantly, women's organizations publicly demonstrated their organizational acumen. When they pushed for full political representation, they joined in highly visible patriotic and anti-imperialist activities that were taking place around Kaifeng. Female students were the first to respond to the May 4th movement in 1919. On May 9th, the 'Meeting in Memory of Our National Shame'[13] was held in Kaifeng with over one thousand participants, with the Provincial Kaifeng Girls' Normal School providing the venue (Callahan, 2006). Like their male counterparts, female pupils went into the streets to demonstrate against China's crisis under the double affliction of external aggression and internal corruption. After the May 30th massacre in 1925, school girls again demonstrated, made public speeches and engaged in collective action. Women's organizations supported the Shanghai Workers' strikes by sending telegraphic messages to organizations and trade unions elsewhere in the country.[14] In consequence of these many public (and often popular) activities, female intellectuals became important public figureheads (*Funü yundongzhi,* 1993).

Intellectuals were not always the initiators. In August 1926, before Feng Yuxiang's return and when Kaifeng was under the rule of warlords, the value of copper coins and of old bank notes dropped drastically, thus greatly increasing the value of the silver dollar. This devaluation had direct impact on the daily living costs of the ordinary Kaifeng inhabitant. Led by underground Communist Party members, over a thousand elderly women held a demonstration in Kaifeng on the 1st September 1926 to voice their frustration and anger over the authority's callous neglect of the poor and unashamed support of the wealthy elite. Having prepared plentiful sticks and stones, the demonstrators did not confine themselves to shouting slogans. They damaged whatever banks and financial service agencies they saw on their march and made use of their 'ammunition' with a vengeance. Two days later, the Provincial Governor's office was forced to issue a directive guaranteeing that copper coins and old bank notes in circulation would be equal in value to the silver dollars (*Funü yundongzhi*, 1993).

Women's organizations were active right to the end of the Republican era. Out of the seven women's groups that flourished in Kaifeng in the 1930s, three had been newly set up in 1931. They joined with three other women's organizations active in Kaifeng, established in 1933, 1934, 1937 and a fourth whose date of establishment is not known (Hu Shaofang, 1988: 20–25).

All these women's organizations suspended their work in 1938 when the Japanese Army occupied Kaifeng, but the majority of them resumed work after the defeat of Japan in 1945. Only with the arrival of the Communist

Army in Kaifeng in 1948 did this phase of women's participation in public life and the diversity of women's organizations in the political culture of Kaifeng come to an end.

DIVERSITY AND ITS CHALLENGES

In this chapter, we have described the early and evolving nature of religious diversity in Kaifeng, indicating that, over the centuries, adherents of Daoism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity settled and coexisted there. Women made their own religious spaces in temples and took up roles as nuns and religious teachers. The reformist impulses of intellectual discourses and sociopolitical movements during the early twentieth century appeared initially to create an environment in which such a tradition of a richly diverse female culture of aspiration and vocation could gain social and institutional support, if not public legitimacy. Yet, whilst mainstream women intellectuals and activists gave political backing to general and often abstract, idealized notions advocating women's emergence from patriarchal and ideological confinement as a condition of modernization of Chinese society, the political agendas of successive Republican and Communist governments severely diminished the capacity of religious women to assert their voices against the power of the State to impose, and enforce, newly emerging categories of a dominant secular modernity. Progress in the national project of modernization and strengthening through education and industrialization became symbiotically linked with women deficient in progress, moreover perceived as having dragged down the nation because of their ignorance, gullibility and superstition. What then could be the roles of the various religious cultures and institutions in such times of change and, specifically of women within the various religious traditions? It is to these questions that we turn in the next chapters.

3 Women-Led Religious Spaces and Modern Times

***Nǚjie lianhehui* (Henan Women's League), 1926**
[Our mission is to] unite with women's groups of the whole [Henan] province, to encourage women's education, to promote their abilities, and to better their lives while working hard to obtain all women's social rights, contributing to the national revolution and seeking happiness for all human beings.

***Muslim Women's Magazine*, First Issue, 1936**
We do not shrink with fear, do not turn back, we go forward enthusiastically and courageously to start with taking action, we want to stand at the frontline of this age, pushing the gigantic wheel of history, sustained by our spirit, strength, we shall pursue our struggle ceaselessly. We will act for ourselves, and more so, we will engage ourselves for the masses. Act! Act! Act!

(He Ru, 1936: 15).

From the early years of the twentieth century towards the end of the Qing Dynasty and the Republican period, 'modernization' became a key project of the state, and with it, changing the roles of women was seen as vital. Education became a cornerstone of modernization designed to propel the nation into the century of science and rational progress. Vital to this project was the education of girls and women with the aim of producing informed wives and mothers whose beneficial influence as educators in the domestic sphere would somehow permeate into the wider public sphere. Religious women were the most ambivalent and uncertain about these initiatives. In this chapter, we explore how certain religious organizations came to offer educational service to the nation, and thus survived while others were stigmatized with enduring features of backward superstition, that is, everything which female education was assumed to challenge and leave behind.

'NEW' OR 'OLD' AS CRITERIA OF INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

The process of political, social and economic change during the late Qing Dynasty and early Republican years was dominated by concepts such as *Kexue* (science), *Jiaoyu* (education), *Minzhu* (democracy), *Ziyou* (liberty) and *Nannü pingdeng* (gender equality), among others, through which were filtered new ideas of the modern and of their antitheses. Distinctions such as that of *Gaoshang zongjiao* (noble religions) and *Yumei mixin* (benighted

superstitions) created political binaries and conflicted identities; they also marked new zones of exclusion. While modernizers, influenced by intellectual debates distant from local society, made liberal use of these terms in their writing and speeches, the course of modernization for people outside the privileged sites of education and wealth (and to a certain extent, gender) was sluggish and often painful. Old and new ideas continued to co-exist to an often bewildering extent, though during the years of instability brought on by the transition from Imperial to Republican government, the traditional and well-tried sources of spiritual consolation continued to be sought by people from most classes of society. Prayer and worship at temples, church altars, street shrines and in the prayer halls of mosques[1] would have provided the much needed, rare glimpses of certainty and hope in times of national and local political convulsions and of increased economic hardship.

The most salient religious and political transformations were effected in the 1920s when reformers were able to draw on political power holders to drive their reforms into religious institutions themselves. During this time, not only did new opportunities arise for hitherto disadvantaged groups but, through the discursive and social spaces opened up by educational and social reforms, a set of criteria emerged which gave equally significant legitimacy to support for everything *Xin* (New). These attributes came to be associated with and imbued in time as lived under the current political regime. This *new* time was by definition progressive, scientific and future orientated. In contra-distinction to *Xin,* everything associated with *Jiu* (the Old) came to be held as backward, unscientific and past orientated. In this emerging binary classification, being *with* or *in tune* with the time, meant deserving of a *place* in the modernizing society. By contrast, being held to belong *outside time,* because *behind the times* (*Luohou),* created the ground map for a classificatory system within which judgments were made and policy measures justified concerning not only the survival or extinction of social life but also of members of society. Backed up by political force, the drive for modernization entered the religious sphere in the campaign to eradicate all obstacles to progress. This classification drive would only be survived by those able to demonstrate the necessary facility to adapt and develop, thus signifying the modern spirit. All those religious sites and organizations deemed to be 'deficient' were faced with the threat of marginalization, or worse. Women's religious sites were part of this struggle for survival. Whereas Islam and Catholicism emerged strengthened, because allied with progress, the place of the Daoist temple, *Jiuku miao*, among the local Daoist and Buddhist temples, was most severely, and lastingly, diminished. In this chapter, we describe the growing mutual awareness of local religious organizations as they faced the challenge of survival in the volatile political culture of Kaifeng in order to set the context for a discussion of the dramatic history of the *Jiuku miao*. In the official documents of government archives and in the private memories of local believers, the

Jiuku miao has come to exemplify the fate of all those who do not easily fit into mainstream political narratives (see Chapter 4).

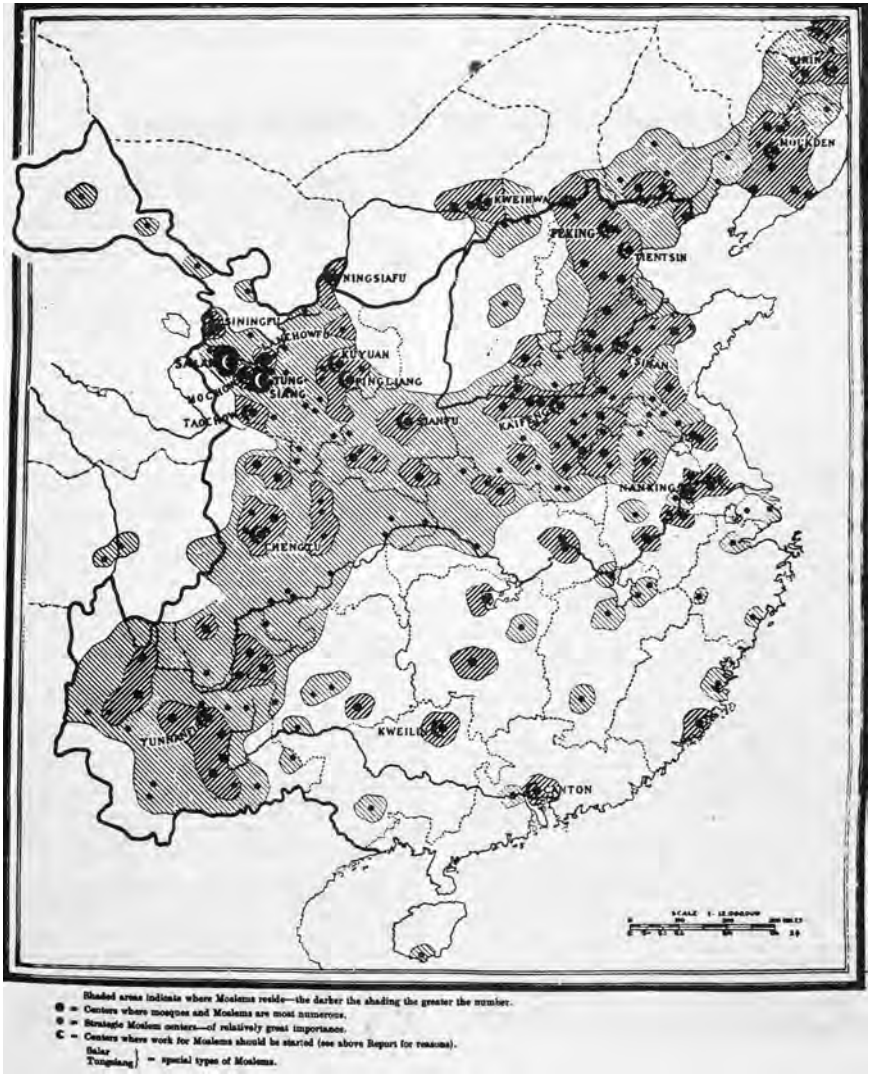
RELIGIOUS COMPETITION AND AN ENLARGED SPACE FOR FEMALE-LED RELIGIOSITY

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the rapid growth of Christian (both Catholic and Protestant) missionary societies, backed by the power of military might, and by resources of wealth, modern science and technology, gradually unsettled the balance that had prevailed in the traditionally pluralistic religious culture of Kaifeng. With the increased and highly visible presence of Christian missionaries and with the rising number of Christian converts, the religious landscape began to alter, bringing with it changes for all other religious institutions.

Henan Province had always been an exception to the inroads made into Chinese society elsewhere by Christian missionaries; it took even longer to enter urban Henan society (Zhou Mingyi, 1983; *The Christian Occupation of China*, 1987). Although Christian missionaries had built churches in Kaifeng in the late Ming Dynasty, their real impact did not begin until the early years of the twentieth century.

In the late Qing Dynasty, Christian missionaries had tried many times to enter Kaifeng but failed owing to the strong feelings opposed to foreign religions among the populace. With the support of the British Vice-Consul to China, several missionaries signed a letter to the Qing Imperial Court describing the difficulties they experienced in their quest to gain admission into Kaifeng. Under pressure, the Qing Government issued an order demanding that officials 'treat [the foreign missionaries] as distinguished guests but with caution.' In 1901, Kaifeng witnessed the official entrance of the missionaries (Zhao Jiazhen, 2000) initiating a history of competition among different Christian churches. It is in this local context of tense competition between rival religious denominations that the issue of 'the woman question' became important because access to the soul and religious allegiance of women ensured access to family and society. Given the close link missionaries made between the 'betterment' of women, and the 'betterment' of the nation, female education was seen as a strategy for addressing many urgent social problems afflicting Chinese society.[2]

A Special Committee was set up to conduct a survey dedicated to understanding the conditions for the conversion of the Chinese to Christianity, giving special attention to the rival religions most popular among local people (*The Christian Occupation of China*, 1987). The locally well-known Jesuit missionary Li Jiabai invited members of different religions to attend a meeting he organized in Kaifeng (Li and Feng, 1985). His objective was to bring together leaders of local religious institutions. The highly erudite Henan-born *Ahong* Ma Zicheng from Shanxi was among those



Map 3.1 Mapping Muslim China (*The Christian Occupation of China*, originally published in Shanghai, 1922: 357). Original caption reads: 'Shaded areas indicate where Moslems reside—the darker the shading the greater the number. ● = Centers where mosques and Moslems are most numerous. • = Strategic Moslem centers—of relatively great importance. (= Centers where work for Moslems should be started (see above Report for reasons). Salar/Tungsiang [Dongxiang] = special types of Moslems.' Reprinted 1979. Chinese Materials Center, Inc. San Francisco. Copyright © The British Library Board X205/1111.

who accepted his invitation. Such was Ma *Ahong*'s impressive performance that it became clear to all participants that Islam was a force to be reckoned with (*Ibid*.: 644).

The *Henan xin zhi* (New Chronicles of Henan) reported how quickly Catholic, Protestant, Episcopal and Baptist churches appeared in the centre of Kaifeng. Hospitals, schools for the poor and societies for the young also sprang up to cater to the educational, health and welfare needs of the local population. According to the New Chronicles of Henan, all this was done only 'for the purpose of spreading the Christian religion' (*Henan xin zhi*, 1988: 176–77).

Of strategic importance for the success of missionaries was the conversion of women. Ways of reaching them included workshops to provide employment opportunities and the creation of schools to compete with girls' schools set up both by the government and by rival religions. The Catholic diocese of Kaifeng was established in 1915, its place in Kaifeng society symbolized by the construction in 1919 of an imposing cathedral in the centre of the old city. In the following year, the American Sisters of Providence (SP) arrived to run schools and help with the missionary work in Kaifeng (see Chapter 5) and a Catholic girls' school, *Huamei nüxuexiao*, was also founded (Zhao Jiazhen, 2000). In 1932, the Providence Sisters-Catechist Society, which had been set up to enable admission of local women into convent life, received authorization from the *Propaganda Fide* in Rome (Ann C. Wolf, 1990). The Sisters also opened the doors to Catholic female education in 1932 with the Jingyi Girls' Lower Middle School (Zhao Jiazhen, 2000). In the 1930s, buoyed by the success of the Providence mission, the Bishop of Kaifeng invited more religious orders from Italy and the Benedictine Sisters from Minnesota in order to intensify missionary work among women and girls. Most prominently, such activities focused on education, healthcare and provision for orphans (*Ibid*.).

Earlier in the century, the Protestant churches had taken initiatives to spread Christianity among women by offering distribution of free medicine and access to free medical care, though they too set up girls' schools and provided both bible study and vocational classes for women thus combining the spreading of Christianity with practical benefits. As early as 1902, the Hinterland Missionary had set up an office in Kaifeng, paying special attention to proselytizing among women. The Protestant China Inland Mission had also begun to develop women-targeted work as early as 1903 (*Ibid*.), while in 1907 the *Fuyin* Hospital was built, followed in 1929 by the Fuyin Senior Nursing School for women (*Ibid*.).

Other Protestant missionaries, including Baptists, Methodists and the Hong Kong-based Bible Book and Tract Depot Society similarly devoted their efforts to educational work with women. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, education in general knowledge and religious instruction in Christian scriptures and conduct as well as vocational courses to facilitate employment opportunities provided unprecedented opportunities for

Table 3.1 Protestant Missionary Work with Women, 1905–1920

1905	Baptists: Girls Primary School
1912	Hong Kong Bible Society: *Peiling* Girls Primary School
1913	Hong Kong Bible Society: St Mary's Girls School
1915	Hong Kong Bible Society: Kindergarten and Yude Girls School
➔	Baptists: *Shiyu* Girls Middle School
➔	Baptists: Women's Embroidery Factory
1916	Hong Kong Bible Society Mingxin Girls School
1918	Baptists: *Peide* Girls Middle School
➔	American Free Methodist Mission: Panshi Primary School
➔	American Free Methodist Mission: Panshi High School
1920	Hong Kong Bible Society: Women's Literacy Class
➔	Baptists: Women's Bible Class

Source: Zhao Jiazhen, 2000: 277, 279–80, 283–85

women and girls of poorer backgrounds. The pace of missionary work was hectic, and the atmosphere competitive among the rival Christian missionary societies. Not surprisingly, the mushrooming of Christian churches, convents, schools, orphanages, and more, produced a galvanizing effect on other religious organizations which feared for their survival.

In the early days of the Republic, eminent, reform-minded Buddhist and Daoist scholars began to implement changes in their organizations and education to meet the demands for reform (Birnbaum, 2003). Thus the leadership of the Chinese National Buddhist Association proposed a slogan for doctrinal, organizational and property reform to propel Buddhism into a period of renewal, *Fojiao fuxing yundong*.[3] In 1925, the monk Shi Jingyan and others, initiated the Henan Buddhist Society and established the Henan Buddhist College in the local Tieta Temple. In keeping with the general interest in women's education, and in view of a large female congregation, the *Nüzhonglin* Temple, still continuing today, was built. Not only a site of religious activity, it was also a source of employment for women in the textile industry (*Henan foxueshe yuanqi fu jianzhang*, privately printed).

The quickening of changes in society at large also prompted leading Daoists to strengthen conditions for internal reform by setting up, in 1912, its first national institution—the *Zhonghua minguo daojiaohui* (China National Daoist Federation). This religious tradition suffered greatly in the

Republican period, however. In 1928, the Nationalist (or Guomindang) Government promulgated the *Criteria for Temples and Shrine*s which included banning such activities as the worship of the Sun, Moon, Fire, the five Sacred Mountains, the Dragon King, the Town God, the Wenchang God and the Goddess of Fertility (Mou and Zhang, 2003: 1069–71). In 1927, the Henan Provincial Government followed the ban with an order that all temples be turned into schools. The destruction of temple icons, confiscation of temple properties and the large-scale dismissal of Buddhist and Daoist monks dealt a heavy blow to both religions. A number of Buddhist monks in Henan urgently petitioned the Nationalist government in Nanjing, asking for permission to keep some of the most prestigious temples (*Henanshengzhi* 9, 1994). With neither an efficient modern organization nor the leadership to fight for its survival, Daoism suffered greatly. Not until the 1930s were branches at county level set up which came to constitute the national Chinese Daoist Association (*Ibid*.).

ISLAM

The growing influence and vitality of Islamic life in Henan, much noticed by scholars of Islam during the Republic, had been helped by the increasing ease of communication, facilitated in large part by the more efficient transport system that had emerged during the late Qing Dynasty. News of important political and religious developments could thus pass quickly among Muslim communities in Kaifeng, Zhengzhou and Beiping (present-day Beijing).[4] It was in this context of a New Islamic Cultural Movement that women-led *Nüsi* (women's mosques) and *Nüxue* (madrassas) could increase in number and develop their educational and cultural traditions

A detailed survey by the Christian China Continuation Committee revealed that in the 1910s, Henan Province had about 300 mosques, with seven mosques for men and eight women's mosques listed in the city of Kaifeng alone. More than thirty *Ahong* and over 120 *Hailifan* preparing to be ordained as *Ahong* were at the service of a community of over 3,500 Muslim households (*Zhonghua guizhu*, 1985: 735, 741; also see Shui and Jaschok, 2002). Women's mosques in Henan were cited as an illustration of the flourishing state of Islam. Because no close investigation of these women's institutions was undertaken, observations were confined to drawing attention to such mosques as indicative of the advancement of Islamic religion. The survey also mentioned women's mosques in the provinces of Gansu, Shanxi, Henan and Shandong.

An influential and charismatic leader in the Muslim community in Henan, Wang Haoran also known as Wang Kuan, was called to Kaifeng in 1913 to lead the important Dongda Mosque as their *Ahong*. In the two years of his tenure at Dongda Mosque, it is said that he did much to revitalize love of Islamic learning among ordinary Muslim people (Jaschok

and Shui, 2005). He was a prominent figure in the New Islamic Cultural Movement which was instrumental in making education accessible to the masses by organizing classes to study core Islamic texts and publishing popular religious songs. Wang Haoran also concerned himself with the caliber of training of young *Ahong* and was instrumental in organizing the Henan Branch of the society dedicated to the advance of Islam). Importantly, he supported the right of women to modern education. It is said that he contributed directly to the growth of women's mosques. In turn, women's participation in the Cultural Movement, particularly by female *Ahong* who made use of the popular religious chants to enrich the educational offering in their mosques, strengthened the claim of *Nüsi* to social relevance in a modernizing city (see Chapter 5). Such educational activities deeply impressed Christian missionaries who had, wrongly as it turned out, assumed that Muslims in China would be the most receptive targets for conversion (*Zhonghua guizhu*, 1985: 735, 741).

In summary, the early Republican period in Kaifeng presents us with a society characterized by an abundant plurality of religious sites for women. These temples, mosques, churches and convents were vital conduits of transformation. Whether we note the Buddhist *Baiyi* Temple, a site for training in accordance with Buddhist doctrines, built in a style of splendor and grandness, or the educational activities of the *Nüzhonglin* Temple (the present-day *Baozhu* Temple) under the auspices of the Henan Buddhist Society, or the *Jiuku miao*, a Daoist temple where nuns welcomed impressive numbers of pilgrims, or indeed the local women's mosques, where women and girls learnt to chant by heart their beloved *Jingge,* or the Catholic convents which widened educational and social spaces of many disadvantaged girls, these temples, mosques, churches and convents were vital conduits of transformation. Together with the organizing activities of secular women and women's groups, they arguably opened up a vibrant and richly diverse space for female participation in modernization discourses and practices.

THE MARGINALIZATION OF CUSTOMARY RELIGIOUS SPACES

The 1920s brought also changes of a different kind. Political and military might were invested in the 'new' and 'modern' with connotations and associations determined and shaped by government decree. Survival meant having to fit into bureaucratic classifications and thus to be assessed, approved and registered. To be labeled 'old' and 'backward' was to face deprivation of the right to exist. Sometimes the difference between survival and loss of the right to exist would lie in the community's ability to manage government bureaucracy and to successfully register itself as a religious site in the official list of approved institutions. To qualify, a religious organization had to match particular criteria for a modern institution, give evidence of a

proper statute and constitution of a clear *raison d'être* for its existence in a modernizing society and of unambiguous membership criteria. Only then could it hope to succeed in getting on to the list of government-approved religious organizations.

Educational initiatives, including schools and classes for girls set up by Christian, Muslim or Buddhist organizations in Kaifeng, were duly registered in accordance with official regulations. The educational activities benefited religious organizations, enabling their acceptance into mainstream society with its strictly prescribed, and monitored, scientific progress. Even Christian schools which had the purpose of disseminating their faith through educational services were classified as contributing to the teaching of essential knowledge of science and liberal arts. Muslim organizations were also deemed 'modern' because mosques under the leadership of progressive *Ahong* emphasized the importance of both religious and cultural education. Under the influence of the New Islamic Cultural Movement, mosques, including women's mosques, had started classes at the elementary level to provide comprehensive education at a young age. During this time of change, the Islamic Cultural Movement and mainstream modernization were in tune over the need for, and approaches to, education. Equally, the Buddhist organizations that had sprung up and the nuns belonging to the *Nüzhonglin* Temple, influenced by respected Buddhist reformers such as the monk Shi Jingyan, were recognized for their modernizing impulse and impact on believers. Those women's religious sites which sought to continue to conduct their internal life and external relations in their habitual ways were, however, assigned the labels of *Luohou* (backwards) and *Mixin* (superstitious). In the prevalent political lexicon of their day, this translated into political and social exclusion as was the fate of Buddhist and Daoist women's religious sites that were perceived to be failing to change with the times. Of all the new policy measures enforced by Feng Yuxiang in 1927, the policy to transform temples into schools affected these religious sites in the most radical manner. The order to destroy or confiscate temple property was directed specifically at the large-scale Buddhist or Daoist temples which, because of their unwieldy and complex organizations, had faced greater challenges than smaller sites to conform to political directives and social trends.

Although the societal impact of Buddhism and Daoism in Kaifeng had been declining during the early decades of the twentieth century, the material and cultural infrastructure had remained. *Xiangguo si,* the well-known Buddhist temple in Kaifeng, possessed much real estate, housing about a hundred monks. *Baiyi ge*, the Buddhist nunnery, had retained its opulent exterior. *Yanqing guan,* a Daoist temple dating from the Yuan dynasty and which adhered to the *Qiandao* (Male Way) of the *Quanzhen* tradition, was built on a grand scale and beautifully maintained after many costly repairs. Additionally, the *Jiuku miao*, a Daoist temple which observed the *Kundao*, the Female Way of the *Quanzhen* Tradition, was at the zenith of its influence, enjoying the support of women from all social classes.

Where religious institutions were classified as superstitious and as not in keeping with the modern times, the consequence was destruction or confiscation. Interior furnishings, ornaments, sculptures and sacred scriptures were either demolished beyond repair or appropriated. Monks and nuns were driven out of their homes. Religious leaders of prominent temples were sometimes provided with some land to make them work for their own subsistence, allowing for their survival in the absence of any other income and simultaneously transforming their status from social 'parasites' into ordinary labourers. Ordinary monks were dismissed, if lucky, with ten silver dollars each as a form of compensation. Most commonly, temple properties were set aside for government use. Kaifeng Public Security officials transformed sites of worship into public buildings or auctioned them off at market price. Temple stone tablets, plaques and statues of Buddhist deities were mostly pulverized or burned. Money collected from donations or alms, account books, utensils, china ware, curios and embroideries were turned over to the Henan Nationality Museum (Zhao Jiazhen, 2000).

Women believers were unable to save their sites of worship and congregation, and nuns no longer had a social outlet to live in accordance with their religious aspiration. The *Baiyi* Temple was closed, its nuns were driven out, and its buildings served to house the Police Patrol of Bicycles (*Ibid*.). The *Jiuku miao* was turned into the Henan Charitable Relief Refuge.[5] Nuns from the *Jiuku* Temple were settled in a building in a remote corner of the former Temple. This sequence of events dealt a heavy blow to Buddhism and Daoism in Kaifeng. Only the newly founded Henan Buddhist Society and the *Nüzhonglin* Temple, set up in 1925 as an educational institute for young women, including non-Buddhist women, were exempt from the ban. They qualified as 'new types' of organization. Religious activities in all other Buddhist and Daoist sites had come to a standstill. What had formed such a critical part in ordinary women's daily life cycles was now declared backward. The Buddhist or Daoist sites that had been invested by generations of women with prayer, worship and memory of their own tradition were struck off the index of relevance. With this disconnection from official time the women who had inhabited these religious sites were uprooted, with 'modern society' professing little interest in, let alone tolerance for, women who clung to their faith and way of life.

The political and cultural reforms enforced by Feng Yuxiang in the 1920s, discussed previously, and the new criteria issued in 1928 by the Guomindang Government made for reappraisal of temple organizations which classified the *Jiuku miao* as a place of superstition. The members of the Temple community and its numerous believers were punished for retaining the traditional forms of their faith. In the period between 1927 and 1950, the *Jiuku miao* was twice suspended and closed. Its social space was ever shrinking and, for a time, such space dissolved entirely. When the Temple was dissolved in 1927 and its buildings handed over to the Henan Charitable Relief Refuge, the precious icons which had filled the numerous

shrines and halls of worship were disfigured or smashed into fragments. The timber and other construction materials which had been set aside in readiness for its expansion were used instead to construct buildings for the use of the local Government.

INSIDE/OUTSIDE AND DIS/ORDER

Particularly damaging to the *Jiuku miao* community in their dealing with political challenges and hostile bureaucrats was the collapse of the traditional management of the Temple. Built on the familiar *Nei* (women inside) and *Wai* (men outside) system of cooperation between women (in charge of religious affairs) and men (in charge of all administration and practical matter as well as external relations), this system had been favourable to the development of the *Jiuku miao* in the early days of the Republic. The system broke down in 1927, however, when, following the dissolution of the Temple, the male administrators fled, carrying with them property contracts and land deeds (see Chapter 4). The senior abbess, nuns and laywomen were left to face the crisis without material evidence of their legal claims to ownership and thus entitlements to compensation.

An intriguing reference to these events comes in a short essay describing how the statues of deities in the *Jiuku miao* were damaged. Entitled *Feng Yuxiang qiaoji po mixin* (Feng Yuxiang Skillfully Breaks Superstitions in *Hunan Wenzhai*, 2003), the story informs us that during the 'Golden Age' of the Temple, wives of local Kaifeng warlords, bureaucrats, commanding generals and governors were wont to worship and pray in the *Jiuku miao*, causing, together with the large congregations of pilgrims to the Temple, an all too frequent standstill of urban Kaifeng traffic. Enraged, Feng Yuxiang sent out a group of soldiers to destroy the Temple deities, but the soldiers were stopped by the pilgrims. When Feng learned of this defiance to his authority, he went to the Temple to inform the pilgrims that a test would be administered to discover the power of the Bodhisattva. Should a divine power intervene, the *Jiuku miao* would be preserved. A woman and a man, both well-known in the local community, were ordered to sit in the Temple, with the man sitting on the left, and the woman on the right. An empty bowl and a pair of chopsticks were laid before each of them, and two soldiers stood guard at the door. For three days and nights, they were left without food and drink, not allowed to leave the room. Finally, they could not withstand their thirst and hunger and were forced to acquiesce to the destruction of the statues as there was no evidence of intervention by divine powers in support of their cause.

The story celebrates the cunning character of General Feng Yuxiang who outwitted gullible women in a dramatic fashion, but it does not tell us of what happened to the nuns or of the methods used by Feng's soldiers to dismantle the religious sites and expel their inhabitants. In the memories of the

nuns who witnessed the events in 1927, what remained with them was how it felt when they were forced to leave their homes, with soldiers at gunpoint. These nuns had entered their chosen vocation in early childhood, trained all their lives in the disciplines of their doctrines in the secluded spaces of their chosen homes. Ignorant of the outside world, many nuns were unable to cope. It is a matter of local oral history that a well-known nun named Ding was so petrified at the sight of armed soldiers forcing them out into the streets that she became mentally unbalanced and never recovered.[6]

Those nuns who had been assigned a building in the side-courtyard of their former home went on with their religious discipline, tilling the small patch of land they had been given to eke out a living. Other Daoist nuns who had previously taken care of the poor and the sick, continued to use their medical knowledge offering diagnoses and medical treatment. As far as the government officials were concerned, the *Jiuku miao* had ceased to exist. Ordinary believers who had been used to going to the Temple to offer their prayers were not so easily dissuaded by government decrees. Even after the dissolution of the Temple, women still arrived to pray. Though no longer able to worship in the Hall of Prayer, they prayed wherever they could and as close as possible to the Prayer Hall; at times they could be observed in the outer courtyards, kneeling and burning joss sticks and disregarding the goings-on around them (*Henan xin zhi*, 1988).

Drastic political interventions might have ruined religious buildings and property but people's religious beliefs were not so easily dissolved. Thus the Buddhist and Daoist religious activities suspended under Feng Yuxiang's rule were resumed in the 1930s, though with a difference that was based on gender. Statistics of relevant government authorities report a total of 35 Buddhist practitioners and 18 Daoist practitioners resided in temples in Kaifeng in 1935, all of them male (*Minguo shiqi henansheng tongjiziliao*, 1986). Neither Buddhist nor Daoist nuns appear in these official records. Invisible in the government statistics of the 1930s, thus invisible to the authorities, women devotees nevertheless continued their religious discipline in the shadow of the former *Jiuku miao*. Even those Buddhist nuns in the *Nüzhonglin who* had been granted permission to keep their Temple open and continue with religious and educational activities were not recorded in the local annals.

Changes came about with the Japanese occupation of Kaifeng. After the invasion by the Japanese army in 1938, the resumption of religious activities was encouraged by the occupiers to solicit support for their presence. The Buddhist *Xiangguo* Temple resumed its activities and its damaged statues were restored. The religious activities in the popular Buddhist nunnery, the White Robe Temple were also resumed. Statistics from 1942 show that Kaifeng boasted again ten Buddhist temples with a total of 63 monks, two Buddhist nunneries with altogether seven nuns, and sixty-nine ancestral halls for the worship of Buddha, with a total of 4,264 believers. There was also a resurgence of Daoist activities, if less strongly so. Four Daoist

temples are listed with thirteen monks, 216 lay-believers of whom 171 were male and 45 female (Zhao Jiazhen, 2000: 185–86).

The *Jiuku miao* had to wait until 1945 for the absconded Huishou (male administrators) to return to Kaifeng. The Temple was refurbished, the damaged statues restored and the number of pilgrims grew. By the late 1940s, Kaifeng again saw the emergence of a familiar religious landscape of diverse female sites within co-existing traditions of Buddhism, Daoism, Islam and Christianity.

FROM *CHUJIÀ* (MARRYING OUT) TO *CHUJIĀ* (ASSUMING A RELIGIOUS VOCATION)

In October 1948, the Communist Party People's Liberation Army (PLA) took control of Kaifeng, making way for the assumption of power by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The *Huishou* who had administered the *Jiuku miao* after the return from their first flight when faced with General Feng Yuxiang's soldiers in 1927, now fled once more. Again, the nuns were left to bargain for survival of their space with a new political regime and an assertive 'modern' ideological stance on religion. Instead of expulsion by soldiers at gunpoint, however, these religious women were given promises of special attention and the prospect of 'women's liberation' under a caring new Communist regime.

Once more, women were exhorted to step out of the home, this time to step into a new era of Communist Party-sanctioned equality between men and women. In June 1949, the newly founded Women's Federation assumed leadership in all questions related to women and work. Among its earliest priorities was the abolition of all feudal customs oppressive to women (*Funü yundongzhi*, 1993). The liberation of these women, in particular women of known religious affiliation, from the fetters of 'feudal customs' was to be effected through their active participation as productive members of society, through joining political movements, undergoing rational education and, if age permitted, through assuming their rightful place as socialist wives and mothers (*Funü yundongzhi,* 1993).

We take up these struggles in Chapter 4, offering contrasting memories and different understandings of one of the most criticized institutions, the *Jiuku miao*, We examine what had been at stake for women whose attachment to the Temple affronted in equal measure the reforming zeal of the leadership of Kaifeng during the Republican era as well as that of the revolutionary ardor of Chinese Communist Party cadres some twenty years later. Both were intent on liberating women from lives as traditionally cherished and understood by them.

4 The *Jiuku Miao* in Kaifeng
Diverse Memories of a Women's Daoist Temple

> A text which uses conventional forms in a conventional way is territorialized; it embodies the majority discourse and reflects the obtaining ideology of the society from which it springs. This is the case with most forms of popular narrative even though they may reflect that ideology from an oppositional standpoint
>
> (Susan Heald, quoting M. Maclean, in 1997:32).

The history of *Jiuku miao* as a female-led religious site started only a little over a hundred years ago, but there is no record of its exact date of foundation nor its early development. Overshadowed at first by more important temples and shrines in Kaifeng, as a women's religious site it would also have seemed too insignificant to be noticed by local contemporary historians. The first record relating to the Temple comes from a street name—*Jiuku miao jie* (Salvation Temple Street)—found in the ninth volume of the *Xinxiu xiangfu xianzhi* (Amended Xiangfu County Chronicles). The book was published in the twenty-fourth year of Emperor Guangxu's reign (1898) and provides rich descriptions of the layout of streets and towns. This reference to the *Jiuku miao* Street remains the sole remaining documented trace of the early beginnings of a rich female religious culture.

To gain insights into its early history, however, we are able to turn to two reminiscences which offer alternative views. The first is a personal account by Wan Yushan, a medical doctor who was distantly related to the founder of the *Jiuku miao*. He used to go to the Temple when he was a child (about 1910 to 1912) and drew on this childhood experience to share its history with future generations. His account is an illuminating, and in many ways an uncharitable, perspective by a member of Kaifeng's educated class on women as religious leaders and followers. Entitled *Kaifeng Jiuku miao* (Wan Yushan, 2001: 185–90), it appeared in an official publication, the *Kaifeng wenshi ziliao* (Kaifeng Historical Source Materials). It reminds us of the complex and fluid nature of society at the time when the Temple was in crisis, when abiding faith, practiced with unwavering loyalty by some, coexisted with criticism by vocal others of the hold of religious institutions in particular over local female society.

The second source brings a perspective from the *Jiuku miao* believers themselves, importantly among them, women. The essay, entitled *Jiuku miao de laiyou yu jiankuang* (The Origin and Situation of *Jiuku miao*)[1] reads like a chronicle of events that has imprinted itself on the memories of

local believers more enduringly than any written record could have done. According to the *Nű daozhang* (a senior nun, or abbess), it was written collectively and is based in part on archival sources and most importantly on interviews with elderly believers. Though never published, the essay was copied and distributed to relevant government bodies, and to those with an interest in the Temple. From these sources, we have a history that is subject to differences and disagreements which can hardly be avoided when narrators are of diverse identities and social positions. Wan Yushan not only faithfully, as he sees it, depicted the *Jiuku miao* of his time, but also targeted the conduct of certain women believers with sharp criticism. His reminiscence helps to reconstruct the history of the *Jiuku miao* in its founding time and in the early Republican era. The writing reveals strong emotions, with the author sharing common prejudices held by members of his class as to the moral character and conduct of nuns.[2] In comparison, the collective account written by Kang *Nű daozhang* together with members of the Temple's community, compiles a factual list of historical events and is written with great self-possession. It covers the period from the founding time to the reopening of the *Jiuku miao* in the early twenty-first century. Both texts are based on recollections and both refer to the early history of the Temple. Their memories of the same period, whilst showing certain similarities, also express poignant differences.

What relationship a narrator has with the *Jiuku miao*, the bias brought to the presentation of history, will be affected by numerous factors: personal experiences, the purpose served by writing, faintness of memory or intentional selectivity, consideration of political realities while constructing history, which contribute to selectivity, preferences and biases of which the writer may not always be conscious. Thus we have to approach the history, or more accurately, histories, of the *Jiuku miao* and of its believers with a view to the inherent limitations of their 'truth' or 'authenticity' and instead seek to examine the conditions of time and place which informed these texts as well as the purpose the narrators set out to accomplish. Together, however, the accounts allow us to explore how the *Jiuku miao*—surviving as a mere trace of historical female religious culture—managed to adapt itself to the new social environments and adjust its relation with mainstream society against a background of radical social and gender changes. They illuminate changes that took place in the internal culture and organization of *Jiuku miao* itself and also in the patterns of solidarity and mutual support of the women and men who attached themselves to the Temple.

These personal testimonies of the *Jiuku miao* at the zenith of its power in the late Qing and early Republican periods, provide varied and new knowledge of the emergence of a female-led religious site in the local context of Kaifeng. They give a counterbalance to the third available document, the official version of the history of the Temple provided in the *Henan xin zhi* (New Henan Chronicles), which is based on a brief and scathing

account put together by local Government officials and literati in 1929 (1988:170–71).

How did the *Jiuku miao*—surviving as a mere trace of historical female religious culture—manage to adapt itself to the new social environments and adjust its relation with mainstream society against a background of radical social and gender changes? What changes took place in the internal culture and organization of *Jiuku miao* itself and also in the patterns of solidarity and mutual support of the women and men who attached themselves to the Temple?

WRITING AND REWRITING THE HISTORY OF THE *JIUKU MIAO*: STANDARD AND COUNTER-VERSIONS

The origin of the *Jiuku miao* dates back to the twenty-fourth year of Emperor Guangxu's reign (1898) when *Jiuku miao* Street was first recorded in the local chronicle. Different historians give different explanations as to exactly when and why the *Jiuku miao* was built. The *Henan xin zhi* only tells us that 'To the north of the Ximendajie in Kaifeng City there used to be a Guanyin Shrine, which is called *Jiuku miao* by ordinary local folk' (*Henan xin zhi,* 1988: 170). Wan Yushan does not mention the exact date when the Temple was erected but describes how the *Jiuku miao* developed from the original shrine. By comparison, Kang *Daozhang* and local Daoist believers (*Jiuku miaode youlai yu jiankuang*, n.d.) give a more definite time and explanation as to why the Temple was built. Yet the last two accounts show similarities. For instance, both refer to the origin of this Temple as an initiative by a pious female believer and suggest she could have been either an aristocrat or a Daoist nun. They also agree on the subsequent role played by four generations of nuns in the early twentieth century whose piety has ensured the Temple continued to thrive. Both sources identify the cooperation between women and men in the local community as having enhanced the impact of the *Jiuku miao* on that community. However, it is the emphatic identification of the nature of the driving force behind the Temple's rise and fall, and of its more recent re-emergence as a significant site of religious devotion, that the narrators reveal different personal and religious positions as well as political allegiances. Nevertheless, there are subtexts of nuances within these texts which allow us to view them as yielding interpretations beyond the '*territorialized*' narrative of majority or minority discourse (Heald, 1997: 32). If we read the highly agnostic and critical narrative by Wan Yushan, his sober and factual writing allows us to read beyond Wan's clearly hostile personal emotions and moral judgments to understanding the success story of a self-made woman, Guan *Shanren,* who managed to set up a female religious site against all social odds. In contrast, the history compiled by the assertive and independent-minded Kang *Daozhang*, the current head of the *Jiuku miao*—and by other

believers—barely makes any reference to the charismatic female founder. Instead we hear of the importance of the collective and of the role played by the male *Huishou* (elected administrators of the temple) in establishing and developing the *Jiuku miao*. Gender is less important here than the cross-gender solidarity of believers at a time when the Temple must assert its place in local society, and where the past serves an important purpose as a narrative shared with local Government officials sceptical of its modern-day relevance. The Government officials' understanding is closely modelled on the official standard version of the *Jiuku miao*, given at the conclusion of this chapter, which gives some intimation of the nature of the challenge for those wishing to return the Temple to its Golden Age.

THE HISTORY OF GUAN *SHANREN* (WELL-DOER): A STORY TOLD BY WAN YUSHAN, A MEDICAL DOCTOR

Reading his essay of reminiscences (Wan, 2001), we can easily see Wan's disapproval of the religious activities organized in the *Jiuku miao*. It is obvious that he has a strong dislike of the founder of the Temple and takes a critical attitude towards the participants and supporters involved in the Temple's continuous development. From the facts provided in his writing, *despite* the story he seeks to tell, we nevertheless learn about a woman of faith and charisma who succeeded in gaining the social resources to enable her to create and develop a space for women's religious worship during a period when society was undergoing changes influenced by nation-wide modernization and urbanization.

In the author's recollection, the founder of *Jiuku miao* was a woman of mystery. Her real name remains unknown, and everybody addressed her as Guan *Shanren* (Well-Doer of the name Guan). In the eyes of the author, this 'Well-doer' was no more than 'an elite woman' who frightened him when he was a little boy. Wan describes her as 'a tall and huge woman with large eyes. Her face was crimson and dotted with pockmarks. She never walked but marched, keeping her back straight like a man with great physical prowess' (*Ibid*.: 185). It is said that Guan *Shanren* was from Shandong. When her husband was arrested and sentenced to death for robbery in the late Qing Dynasty, she fled and took refuge in Kaifeng, where she became involved with Wan's family.

Wan Yushan's great-uncle had died at the age of 23, leaving his 19-year-old young widow Mao Shi to care for their baby daughter. In order to support the young widow and enable her to lead a chaste life, her mother-in-law (Wan's great-great-grandmother) provided her with material comfort, handing over to her four substantial properties. These large properties were located on Kaifeng's main streets, and with income from rent, the young widow could live a comfortable life. Tragically, Mao Shi's infant daughter died two years later. The blow was too heavy for the young widow

who wept day and night and attempted suicide on several occasions. Her whole family was upset, but no one could think of ways to help alleviate her agony. Just at this point in time, a female stranger showed up at her door. Guan *Shanren* was looking for work and so became employed as the maidservant of the young widow. Before long, the widow Mao Shi changed under Guan *Shanren*'s influence, and to the relief of her family, was finally able to live a more happy and serene life.

After initially approving of Guan's influence over the widow, the family later became alarmed and sought to take charge of Mao Shi's life. This was because Guan who adhered to the Doctrine of *Jinxian* (lit., Golden Deity)[3], a doctrine which is practiced by both women and men, was successful in persuading her mistress to dedicate herself and her possessions to the worship of *Jinxian*. Only thus, Guan said, could the widow hope to save her own soul and the souls of her dead husband and daughter. As a disciple, Mao Shi would be able to pray for the release from purgatory of the souls of her beloved husband and daughter and could confidently look forward to a permanent union with them in 'great luminosity and happiness,' so says Wan's account. Secretly, the widow began to take instructions in the mysteries of the Doctrine of the *Jinxian,* treating her maid Guan as a revered mentor.

The Wan family became increasingly uneasy, believing it to be improper for the maidservant to assume a position of superiority over her mistress. Guan *Shanren* was put under pressure to move out and eventually she found accommodation in the shabby Guanyin Temple. All these events happened before the birth of Wan, sometime around the turn of the century, during Emperor Guangxu's reign (1875–1908).

The history of *Jiuku miao* according to Wan's account began only after Guan *Shanren*'s arrival at the Guanyin Temple. At first, the widow Mao Shi secretly supplied all of Guan's daily needs. When her mother-in-law died, Mao Shi began to respect her teacher more openly, supporting Guan *Shanren* in every way. When Guan dropped in for a social visit, Mao Shi would demand that her nieces and nephews call her 'Grandma Guan.' The younger children in the Wan family were required to address her as 'Great Grandma', kowtowing to the former maid as their social superior.

Guan *Shanren* was a woman of 'great ambitions' with an 'unusual ability to get things done', who 'was forever thinking of ways to ensure further development [of her faith]', Wan Yushan writes (2001: 186). She started to offer more religious services to satisfy the diverse needs of the believers. When young married women came to the Temple, they begged Guanyin Bodhisattva for children. So Guan *Shanren* bought clay dolls, carefully scattering these around the statue of Bodhisattva to make it easy for the young women to discreetly take one of the dolls with them. On the altar, Guan placed two holders, one containing slips for fortune telling, the other with slips for the treatment of diseases. Those who came to beg for a son or for fortune telling would always give the Temple some incense money. With an increase in the number of pilgrims, the income of the small Temple

rose steadily. In just a few years, Guan *Shanren* was able to build the main prayer hall in the east of the original Guanyin Temple with the so-called incense money and the donations she had attracted. With this newly built hall and an imposing new gate for the Temple, the *Jiuku miao* as people locally referred to the site, finally came into being.

More income in subsequent years led to ambitious plans for the Temple. Guan *Shanren* ordered that the original buildings be pulled down, and a new building compound was erected on its site. The main rooms facing south constituted the residence of the most senior nuns in charge of the Temple's administration, and the rooms opposite were turned into the ancestral hall of worship where the memorial tablets of a believer's ancestors could be kept, to be taken care of by the nuns in return for incense money. The three rooms facing west comprised the hall in which to worship Guanyin as the Goddess of Fertility as well as the kitchen and the dormitory of the disciples. The conditions were now in place for Guan *Shanren* to start formally accepting disciples and teaching the fundamental tenets of the *Jinxian* Doctrine.[4] The *Jiuku miao* was beginning to flourish.

Judging from Wan's narration, the construction and development of the *Jiuku miao* in its early period was primarily the result of Guan *Shanren*'s individual efforts. Her compassion and consideration shine through in the story told, where it appears she was always ready to give consolation to women in deep personal crisis. It is with such personal authority that she easily won the trust and support of the author Wan's widowed great-aunt, who respected Guan *Shanren* as her lifelong teacher. When Guan *Shanren* moved into the Guanyin Temple, she worked hard to make sure that all the spiritual needs of women supplicants and pilgrims who came to burn joss sticks at the Temple would be satisfied. Her local following grew as did her reputation. It was due to the exceptional capabilities of this woman that the *Jiuku miao* accumulated incense money and donations within a relatively short time. It was Guan *Shanren*'s decision to alter the name of the Temple from Guanyin to *Jiuku* ('quest for salvation') as a poignant expression of the anguish and needs of ordinary people, in particular of women, who sought out the Temple in great numbers.

The expanded *Jiuku miao* indeed became a shelter for suffering women. Wan Yushan tells in his reminiscence that Guan *Shanren*'s first disciple was a maidservant who worked for a silk merchant's family. When her master discovered her illicit pregnancy, she faced certain death. She was helped to escape and introduced to the *Jiuku miao* to be instructed into the faith. A woman of capability, this maidservant became Guan *Shanren*'s closest assistant, winning her appreciation and respect. She was subsequently awarded the great honour of *Dangjia zhuchi* when she was given charge of the Temple, assuming the position of second-generation abbess of the *Jiuku miao*.

Guan *Shanren* and her disciples constantly sought ways to drive the institutional development of *Jiuku miao* and expand its services. When the building of the main complex, the *Siheyuan*, was complete they found

the resources to build, step by step, the *Sanxian gong* (Hall of the Three Deities), the *Luzu gong* (Hall of Lu Dongbin, one of the eight immortals worshipped in Daoism) and the *Pujishan tang* (Hall of Salvation of the Worldly). The *Sanxian gong*, a complex encircled by the main hall and other rooms, allowed for the Buddhisattva *Guanyin* (Avalokitesvara, the Goddess of Mercy, literally meaning 'gazing upon, or hearing the voices of the sufferers'), *Wenshu* (Manjusri, the Bodhisattva personifying supreme wisdom) and *Puxian* (Samantabhadra, the Buddhisattva representing kindness or happiness) to be worshipped in the main hall. On the opposite side, a five-room building first used as a forum for communal gatherings was subsequently turned into an additional hall of worship, the *Luzu gong* (for the worship of Lu Dongbin). In front of the main hall, courtyards had been built on two levels, walled on the eastern and western sides by two rows of houses. Accessible from the Ximen High Street, the complex was known as the *Pujishan tang*. The name of this Hall, meaning 'charity to all', revealed its purpose. At the gate, tablet inscriptions announced the functions of the Hall, such as 'charity school', 'cherishing the written language', 'burying the dead', 'land for charity use', 'free medicines' and 'freeing of captive animals.' The *Pujishan tang* was presided over by men and opened its doors to the public on the second and sixth days in every lunar month. The other parts of the *Jiuku miao* institution were presided over by Guan *Shanren*. The Temple, open to both women and men, was thus headed by a dual leadership where women and men enjoyed equal authority and public standing.

Although Wan Yushan does not give concrete information, the tablet inscriptions clearly indicate the philanthropic and charitable functions of the *Jiuku miao* in the service of the vulnerable members of society. When the *Pujishan tang* was constructed, it might be argued that the *Jiuku miao* came to reflect the dominance of the *Kundao* (the Female Way), embodied in the leadership of Guan over the *Qiandao* (the Male Way). But this hierarchy did not necessarily express itself in the nuns' authority over political and economic resources. Such powers were held by men. The men may have served as administrators, but they were also the guardians of the Temple's gates. They facilitated the inflow of economic wealth into the religious institution of spiritual authority and, as history exemplifies, they also cut off its lifeline when they fled the Temple in terror of religious persecutors (see Chapter 3).

Such was the successful expansion overseen by Guan *Shanren* and her disciples that this grand complex of buildings had front and back gates opening on two different streets. According to Wan, the temple was so well known at its peak that it had more pilgrims than *Xiangguo si,* the most prestigious Buddhist Temple in Kaifeng City.

Wan's chronicle makes frequent reference to the important cooperation of men and women believers which helped to propel the development of *Jiuku miao*. A good case in point is the story told of the male disciple, Yang

Qinxin. According to Wan, Yang was an official in the employ of the local Government and in charge of document distribution. He was a man who thought highly of himself and would only be polite to the rich and those in power. 'When a commoner approached him, he would half close his eyes, showing an unwillingness to give greeting' (*Ibid*.: 189). However, even a man of such arrogance held Guan *Shanren* in the greatest admiration and respect, and he helped her to expand the Temple. For example, Yang used the occasion of the *Pantao* (Peach) Festival held in honour of the Lady Queen Mother, Third March of the Lunar Calendar, as an opportunity for great publicity in order to attract the support of the local elite. On this most important religious holiday, observed by all members of the *Jiuku miao* community, three local opera troupes were invited to stage their performances in competition with each other. Other theatrical performances included balancing on stilts, dragon lantern dances, bamboo horse riding, land boating, lions playing with balls, five ghosts fighting, and more. Naturally, the purpose of most pilgrims and visiting village associations was to burn joss sticks for the blessing of their communities. The Temple would serve the pilgrims plenty of food: meat or fish was served in the front yards while vegetarian dishes were served in the backyards. Yang Qinxin was smart enough, so Wan the chronicler tells us, to take advantage of such events to establish contacts with powerful warlords, bureaucrats, scholars and members of the gentry in order to win support and sponsors from the upper strata of society.

Simultaneously, Guan *Shanren* and her disciples worked hard to set up extensive contacts with women from both the upper and lower classes, offering consolation and support especially to women in distress. In Wan's description, they might be 'women who have had quarrels with their husbands, or out-of-favour concubines, or fading prostitutes, sometimes women bondservants who had absconded from their masters.' All these various women, having received help from the Temple, kept close relations with the *Jiuku miao* and fully supported its development.

Guan *Shanren* made effective use of a system by which believers could measure, and increase, their religious accomplishments. The *Jinxian dadao* (Doctrine of *Jinxian*) supports a classification of four grades of religious accomplishments which allowed the believer to measure the extent of her spiritual progress. Grade One was called *Ci ming* (bestowing a name). Here a believer knelt in front of the altar, burnt incense and begged for a religious name. A name thus granted protected its owner from misfortunes and facilitated a happy and peaceful life. Grade Two was called *Jin men* (entering the religion). Those blessed in the second grade could expect promotion at work, attainment of big fortunes, and look forward to the happy prospect of having numerous offspring. Grade Three was called *Hu dao* (guarding the Way). At this grade, it was a requirement to fast for 27 days in the third, sixth and ninth months of the Lunar Calendar because of the time sequence in which the Guanyin Buddhisattva attained enlightenment. The believer would chant

Sutras as a preparatory step for the final attainment of the *Dao* (Path of enlightenment). Grade Four enabled *Dedao*, the most important step leading towards ultimate enlightenment and immortal status. At this advanced stage, all kinds of abstinence were demanded and life from this point on was devoted to chanting *Sutra* and to exercises in profound meditation.

Figure 4.1 Queen Mother of the West (Wangmu *Niangniang*) altar, in *Jiuku Miao* [photo: Maria Jaschok]. By permission of Kang *Daozhang*.

Demands for the blessings bestowed in the first and second grades were the most popular. The author, Wan, was himself taken to the Temple by his great-aunt to be blessed with a religious name. Whichever grade a believer entered, such a step would bring her or him closer to the *Jiuku miao*. In addition, successful and eminent men took on the honorary positions of *Shoushi* (temple administrators), also called *Huishou* of the *Pujishan tang*,[5] while women of a particular standing became disciples of the *Jiuku miao*.[6]

Wan's extensive and fairly detailed description tells us that altogether four generations of senior abbesses and nuns spanned the history of the Temple, from the first-generation founder Guan *Shanren* to the time of the Temple's closure. Closely modelled on the kinship system of the wider society, a given generation of nuns would share a name signifying the generation (or the 'family') to which they belonged. For example, the nuns of the second generation are identifiable by the character *Zhen* (chastity) that formed a part of their religious names, such as *Zhen* Qing, *Zhen* Yun and the like. Because Wan left Kaifeng as an adult, his personal knowledge does not go beyond the third generation of nuns who lived at the *Jiuku miao*.

In the early years of the Republic (that is, after 1912), the development of the *Jiuku miao* resulted in great part from the ambitions of its abbess and the *Huishou*. In the early 1920s, a grand project for expansion demanded, and successfully received, vast donations from believers. The author Wan's great aunt sold all her properties to support the expansion. Unexpectedly, in the summer of 1927, when Feng Yuxiang took office once more as Chairman of Henan Provincial Government, all plans came to a standstill. All property belonging to the traditional Buddhist and Daoist temples was confiscated and their use was now within the control of Feng's government.

THE NARRATOR

The doctor Wan's narration ends in the year 1927 when the Temple was closed at the order of Feng Yuxiang. All those who had generously contributed were left in a spiritual crisis and also in a considerable state of impoverishment. When the narrator's great-aunt died, only her family's payment to cover her burial and ceremonial expenses averted the indignity of a pauper's fate.

Based on Wan's narration of particular events, it is possible to infer that his year of birth was around 1905, the last years of the Qing Dynasty when many among the weakened country's reformers and intellectuals welcomed science, educational and social progress and modern ideas as an indispensable panacea. Growing up in a wealthy family, Wan became a doctor and—not unlike other intellectuals of his era—his writing suggests that he believed religion represented all that obstructed progress, science and the hoped-for revival of a humiliated nation. Yet keeping in mind his family's experience of the great-aunt who under the sway of a former servant had given away

all her wealth to the Temple and died in poverty, and his own childhood memory of the awe-inspiring founder, Guan *Shanren*, Wan's reminiscences are as much coloured by personal animosity as by the discourse prevalent at the time. His language makes use of derogatory terms and phrases such as *Gua* (extortionist), *Pian* (cheating), *Jianbuderen* (shameful), *Weihai shehui* (detrimental to society) or *Wuyi yu shehui* (bringing no benefit to society) when describing the Temple and women's religious inclinations in general and its female founder in particular. Yet Wan's very tone of disapproval also provides a clue. The women so maligned provoked outrage because they dared to defy Confucian conventions and, in the face of deep local prejudice against women in public roles, they succeeded in building a flourishing religious site for women. Furthermore, they engaged the support of powerful members of Kaifeng society and through these alliances sought to widen the impact of the Temple far beyond its immediate circle of worshippers. Despite his disapproval of the Temple and its founder, Wan's factual report also allows a glimpse of an outstanding woman whose public influence was unmatched by women in the secular sphere. The propensity of an educated narrator to tell the facts 'as they are' gives us an admirably sharp impression of Guan *Shanren* as a charismatic leader of women and men, even if—or maybe because—this had been far from the author's intention.

A COLLECTIVE NARRATION OF THE HISTORY OF A COMMUNITY'S FAITH

A collectively told story about the origins and history of the *Jiuku miao*, this narrative is also the written evidence submitted in 2004 by the *Jiuku miao* leadership to the local Kaifeng City authorities when it was used to argue the case for the future of the Temple in the twenty-first century. In this narrative, Guan is nearly invisible. Instead, emphasis is placed on the community of believers and their contribution to the Temple's past glory. The history of the Temple becomes one of the suffering of the believers and the opportunity to tell the story after many years of silence, that is, to tell it themselves with pride. This matrilineal history of faith provides an alternative narration.

When the *Nǚ daozhang* (a title conferred on an ordained nun of superior learning, who is usually also in charge of the Temple), with the support of local disciples, embarked on gathering historical information and constructing the history of their impoverished *Jiuku miao,* it was in order to request legal recognition of their part in the genealogy of the *Kun* (female) doctrine of the *Quanzhen* Daoist school. This was necessary proof for gaining rights to compensation and the return of confiscated property to which a properly registered Temple would be able to lay claim. Entitled *Jiuku miaode youlai yu jiankuang* (The Origin and A Brief Account of Jiuku Miao), the document is based on interviews with elderly believers and archival research.

The readership of this narrative was ever only going to be limited to officials from the local Kaifeng City authorities and members of the Temple community of believers. By the very fact that the community's own history has been written, and that it records events not recorded elsewhere—what once was a 'hidden transcript' only known among insiders—has opened a crevice in the walls of silence created by official chronicles. Different voices have made themselves heard.

REMEMBERING THE PAST

In the believers' memory, the *Jiuku miao* was founded around 1840, during the reign of the Qing Dynasty's reign of Emperor Daoguang. The Temple was built to commemorate the philanthropy of a generous local donor (referred to as *Jiuku ye*, or Salvation Grandpa). Kaifeng in the Qing Dynasty is remembered as having been plagued by famines caused by natural disasters and continuous wars. There was great need for generous charity. The account tells us that Kaifeng was turned into a city,

> where disaster victims were found in great numbers, begging for food from door to door. The miserable situation was terrible to behold by day, while the night was pierced with the anguished cries of suffering victims. For days without any sustenance, some of the refugees [from war and famine] were found unconscious [in the streets]. At this moment of crisis, an old man came to the starving crowd, laden with a jar and a basket of steamed bread. At the sight of food, everyone rushed to get their share. The old man told people not to panic. Not until everyone had had a share of the food, did people begin to wonder how it was possible to feed so many with so little food. People looked for the old man everywhere, but he had vanished. Someone said, this is *Jiuku ye* (Salvation Grandpa) coming to our rescue! Hence people built a small Temple on a clearing inside the west gate of Kaifeng to give thanks to the mysterious saviour, the *Jiuku ye*. From then on, anyone experiencing difficulties and suffering would burn joss sticks at this Temple which everyone referred to as the *Jiuku miao* (*Jiuku miaode youlai yu jiankuang,* n.d.).

The history of Kaifeng carries many accounts of the suffering of ordinary people brought on by frequent flooding. On 14 September in the fifteenth year of the Ming Dynasty Emperor Chongzhen's reign (1642), the Imperial army deliberately dismantled the Yellow River bank so as to drown the rebel army led by Li Zicheng. Consequently, Kaifeng suffered the main share of the catastrophe, and 'about 90 percent of its population died.' In Chenliu, Kaifeng, 'not a soul was found there for three years.' Historically, the Yellow River brought suffering to the City and in the popular imagination

only an intervention of the highest order could alleviate people's fear of more afflictions or change the fate awaiting them.

During the period relevant to the reminiscences of the *Jiuku miao* believers, the *Kaifeng xianzhi* (Kaifeng County Chronicles) record two natural disasters in the Qing Emperor Daoguang's reign:

> In April of the tenth year of Emperor Daoguang's reign [1830], there was a colossal storm, and an earthquake stirred the land with thunderous explosions. In June, a devastating downpour and a hail storm damaged the crops.
>
> In June of the twenty-first year of Emperor Daoguang's reign [1841], the river flooded and immersed Xiangfo [Kaifeng] under water, damaging the City's defence. Water rushed in from the south city gate, submerging the dwellings of peasants in water as deep as 30 feet. Some people proposed to get the City moved somewhere else (*Kaifeng xianzhi*, 1992: 11).

It was a tradition that officials or the wealthier local families would give relief to refugees in times of calamity. It is therefore highly probable that the legendary figure of Salvation Grandpa would have been an actual person who once brought relief to starving crowds in Kaifeng. Building a temple for, and deifying, such a benefactor of the people, especially someone who gave generously without seeking personal gain has been, and still is, a common practice in central China. This is possibly how the *Jiuku miao* came into being. However, the development of the original, rather tiny Temple was closely related to the appearance of a stranger, an itinerant Daoist preacher. According to the narrators, the Daoist who stayed in the Temple to administer healing treatments as well as to preach the Daoist doctrine 'was wearing a Daoist robe with hair tied up in the Daoist style.' The Daoist preacher's presence ensured that more and more pilgrims were attracted to the Temple to worship and burn joss sticks.

Due to the tradition that Daoist monks and nuns address each other as *Shi xiongdi* (learned brother), regardless of gender, we are thus not told if the itinerant Daoist was a man or woman. According to the abbess of the present-day *Jiuku miao*, Kang *Daozhang*, however, the Daoist was most probably a nun with good medical knowledge. Legend says, according to Kang *Daozhang*, that her family name was Tong. Other details concerning the itinerant Daoist's whereabouts prior to her arrival in Kaifeng, or even the length of her stay at the Temple, are not known.

Medical practice was a common occupation among Daoists. In traditional Chinese society, the majority of those entering the Daoist religion acquired sufficient knowledge of techniques of Daoist medical diagnosis and treatment to be able to apply their skills whenever needed. The itinerant nun, through offering medical assistance to local people, obviously gained their trust and attracted a large group of believers who ended up

supporting the development of the *Jiuku miao*. The most devoted believers from areas adjacent to the Temple formed a *Hui* (an association), something very much in accord with a tradition popular in many parts of rural China. Such an association enabled believers to pool their resources for the expansion of the Temple.

We are told of how donations of property and money, including from donors among the Buddhist community, contributed to the rapid growth of the *Jiuku miao*. Additionally, and equally important, prominent, wealthy and influential men took up positions as administrators of the Temple, the so-called *Huishou*, which ensured smooth relations with the local community and added further to its social and political significance in Kaifeng society. By the early Republican era, the narrators tell us, the *Jiuku miao* owned '5.4 hectares of land, several hundred rooms that were divided into two complexes, the south and the north, making up altogether eight courtyards. An overhead walkway was built across West Xinglong Street to connect the South and North complexes . . . several large halls of worship were constructed such as the *Jiuku dian* (Hall of Salvation), *Guandi dian* (Hall of *Guan Yunchang*), *Luzu dian* (Hall of Lu Dongbin), *Zushi dian* (Hall of worship of the Daoist founder), *Sanxian dian* (Hall of the Three Deities), and many more. The side rooms were separate dwellings for wandering male or female Daoists, as well as for lay Daoists. Rooms were also set aside for charities like the *Sheyaofang* which offered free medicine, the *Sheyi fang* which offered free garments, the *Shefan fang* which provided free meals and the *Sheguan fang* which gave out free coffins for burial. All these charitable activities made it a well-known Temple in Kaifeng, then the East Capital of China.'[7]

The charities organized during the most active days of the *Jiuku miao* helped to relieve the desperate plight of many poor people who had nowhere else to turn. This charitable function once fulfilled by the *Jiuku miao* is still part of local folklore. According to Kang *Daozhang*, among recent pilgrims to the Temple—quite a few pilgrims had travelled from as far away as Heilongjiang or Shaanxi (involving train journeys of one to three days)—there were elderly women and men who told of grandparents who had received free *Wowotou* (local cone-shaped buns) from the nuns during the famine or who had themselves as young children been given free millet congee at the Temple.

It is noticeable that in this collectively written text, men play a decisive role. This is evident in the figure of the deified Salvation Grandpa, in the largesse of devout male believers or in the way that the narrative dwells on the competent administration all staffed by men (competent at least during the early years of the Temple's institutional development). Such a gendered organization of a major public institution shares features with an all-pervasive local popular culture but with its own distinctive meanings derived from Daoist religious beliefs. As the anthropologist Dong Xiaoping (2002: 210–20) points out, self-organizing as spontaneous forms of mutual aid collectives

have ever been popular in the rural cultures of central China. The construction and management of the *Jiuku miao* can be seen as a part of this popular custom of organizing *Hui* (associations) when individual efforts could not accomplish a particular purpose. *Hui* would therefore be organized to cater to a wide spectrum of needs, from joss stick burning for Greeting Deity-contests to covering religious needs, house-construction, weddings and funerals and such like. The construction of a shrine or temple could only be met if a *Hui* was formed to pool needed resources for labour, materials and money. Divisions of labour would then have naturally devolved upon the initiators and main donors of the Temple, who would take over after completion of construction responsibilities as *Huishou* (administrators). These *Huishou* then became in charge of building maintenance and the general development of the Temple but importantly also facilitated relations with members of the local society, particularly with those who could help sustain the Temple institution. The position in society held by many an administrator, due to wealth, family background, political or professional occupation, could therefore be beneficial to the Temple's external relations.

The *Jiuku miao* shared with the rest of society a traditional conception of the division of labour between women and men, with the men as *Huishou* devoting themselves to increasing the position and influence of the Temple in society. All administrators were male, while the women tended to matters internal to the Temple. Female believers would contact the nuns directly. In many ways, such an arrangement reflected a division of labour in tune with societal gender segregation. However, the female/inside and male/outside division differed from the Confucian gender code in certain important respects.

The 'inside' as a realm overseen by the nuns was that of worship, prayer and meditation. Within the given religious context, this realm was a domain that reigned supreme over the sphere of worldly affairs for which men were responsible. Indeed, 'outside' (male) tasks served the goal of maintaining and sustaining the inside sphere of the Temple, the core of the Temple's identity. The current senior nun in charge of *Jiuku miao*, a woman entirely in touch with her personal aspirations, sees the application of a division of labour between women and men not only as a part of the past but also desirable for the present. She also feels it is unlike the hierarchical relations distinguishing Confucian practices. Instead, a life of peace and serenity in the Temple is the outcome of *cooperation* between men and women, between believers and religious professionals. In referring to the traditional administration of *Jiuku miao*, Kang *Daozhang* said admiringly:

> There were a number of nuns at that time, and they did not need to take care of [lay] affairs. Everything in the Temple was handled by the elderly *Huishou*. Ordinary peasants would farm on the Temple land and turn over the grain [after harvest].
>
> *Guoqu chujiaren hen shengxin* (Nuns in the past were saved from lots of worry [about worldly affairs]). They could focus their minds on

> chanting *Sutras*, and on meditation. Construction and development of the Temple was entirely left in the charge of the elderly *Huishou* (Interviews, Kaifeng, 2007).

In this collective narrative, neither Guan Shanren nor any others mentioned in Wan Yushan's reminiscences merit a mention. However, the nuns at the Temple do not entirely deny their existence. It is also acknowledged that given her numerous supporters throughout its history, Guan *Shanren*'s contribution may indeed have been important.

The history of the *Jiuku miao* must be firmly situated in the age-old female organizational tradition and the cultural characteristics of Kaifeng. This tradition is composed of two constituent elements: first, a site is presided over by female religious leaders in order to meet women's needs for religious congregations, and its administration is ensured by institutional arrangements familiar in the local culture. Second, a dedicated space is made available to women to facilitate instruction and training in preparation for their religious vocation, enabling them to choose celibacy as a genuine alternative to marriage.

CHU JIĀ—ENABLING A LIFE OF FEMALE CELIBACY IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

In a cultural context where the overriding moral precept states with unambiguous clarity that *Buxiao yousan,wuhou wei da,* where the absence of posterity is considered the foremost of the three calamitous unfilial deeds, and *Nan da danghun, nü da dangjia*, where marriage is regarded an obligation of both men and women, the only potentially legitimate option of an unmarried life for a woman was the religious vocation. Throughout history, the numbers and conditions of admission into monasteries and nunneries circumscribed such entry into a religious vocation; however, spaces were available in communities of women dedicated to religious life for women seeking a legitimate alternative. These sites were supported by men and the women who believed faith overrode traditional conceptions of women's primary roles in society. Members of mainstream society also took part in religious activities organized by female religious organizations and actively contributed to the support of such female-headed institutions either through financial or practical contributions.

In common with literati elsewhere, members of the intellectual elite of Kaifeng society held fast to the central place in Chinese thought of *Sanjiao heyitu* (the triumvirate of doctrines), comprising Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism,[8] while ordinary people tended to embrace a combination of Buddhist and Daoist practices. Many believers are wont to say, 'Buddhism and Daoism are of the same family.'

The many large and small temples, the numerous shrines which can be found scattered around the streets and lanes of Kaifeng City, give evidence

that Buddhist and Daoist deities are worshipped side by side in the same halls or temples. These deities may have double names, one derived from Buddhism, the other from Daoism. Indeed, both upper class members as well as the general masses turn to deities that may be of either Buddhist or Daoist origin. Such a mixture of religious traditions with its blend of ancestral worship has been characteristic of mainstream culture in Kaifeng. It is in such a syncretic culture that the *Jiuku miao* must be situated, gaining its devotion from Kaifeng's upper class society as well as from ordinary residents in the late years of the Qing Dynasty, a devotion carried over into the early years of the Republic.

THE *JIUKU MIAO* IN KAIFENG—THE OFFICIAL NARRATION AND STANDARD HISTORY OF A WOMEN'S TEMPLE

> [The *Jiuku miao* is] . . . a place central to women's lives where they burn joss sticks (1929, in *Henan xin zhi*, 1988).

This third and last narrative of the *Jiuku miao* has its origin in a commission by the Provincial Henan Government in the 1920s. In the 1980s, the text became the standard source for historical descriptions of the Temple when it was entered into the *Henan xin zhi* (New Henan Chronicles), the official Henan Government publication (*Henan xin zhi*, 1988). The editorial work on the official narrative of the history of local religious practices gained recognition and praise from heads of all local Government bodies. It is thus safe to argue that the 'new spirit' represented in the document and the recommendations put forward by the writers of the *Henan xin zhi* are on the whole representative of approved attitudes to religion. The style and language used in the writing clearly depict the original authors of the narrative as reformers of great zeal who place science and the 'noble religions' above the religious practices of the masses. The syncretic worship of deities from Buddhist, Daoist and local folk traditions, so characteristic of popular religion in rural parts of China, would in time come to provoke even harsher condemnation and, ultimately, culminate in the expulsion from officially sanctioned mainstream religions.

Description of the *Jiuku miao* is given within a new classificatory scheme of religions: religious faiths as *Minjian chuantong zongjiao xinyang* (popular traditional religious beliefs), on the one hand, and the 'noble' traditions of Buddhism, Daoism, the religion of the Hui people (Islam), Judaism and Christianity on the other. Worship and rituals associated with the religious culture of the *Jiuku miao* were classified as 'popular traditional religious beliefs.' A contemporary source has this to say:

> The popular customs of the entire province are pervaded by superstitious beliefs. Temples and shrines can be found everywhere, whether in

Government offices or in villages, in townships or in mountain forests. In other words, wherever there are signs of human habitation, a temple can always be seen there. If none exists, people will burn incense and say prayers to some old trees or at tombs, or to a long banner of red cloth; and does not the forest of steles present an odd sight! But the most startling [sight] of all is a temple located north of the *Ximen dajie* [Ximen High Street], inside the Kaifeng City proper. Originally, it was named *Guanyin tang* [Goddess of Mercy Temple], and now, people call it *Jiuku miao*. With its splendid halls, opulent decoration, and beautifully designed buildings which overwhelm the sky, the Temple has become but an incense-burning place for women, especially for elderly women. The factors that have led to its fortuitous growth can be listed as, first, that the Qing Dynasty government failed to take measures to spread education in science and wipe out superstitions, and thus people's beliefs could not be promoted due to the lack of *Gaoshang zongjiao* [a noble religion]. Secondly, natural and man-made disasters came in such quick succession that the more perplexed and alarmed people became, the stronger became also their desire to pray. Therefore, debased and confused ideas of ghosts and gods penetrated deeply into their minds. Of all the people, women were the most obsessed owing to their shallow understanding. In addition, members of warlord families, of families of bureaucrats, and the wealthy and rich during the Republican era were contributing huge donations to incense burning. Legend has it that when once the son of a provincial governor, Zhao Ti, fell ill, government officers and gentlemen of great wealth went to the Temple to prostrate themselves, praying for the recovery of the boy. Such an action was named *Yishou*, or shifting a few years of one's own life to benefit someone else.[9] This illustrates how people of the lower stratum follow the behaviour of those above them. Upon the occasion of every temple fair, pilgrims coming to burn joss sticks would jostle each other in [big] crowds, blocking the way, and most of them were women. Chanting *Sutras*, worshipping, soothsaying, and mumbling their prayers, any sort of superstitious or religious ceremony was on display. All those in charge of the ceremonies were *Daopo* [nuns], referred to as *Shanren* [Well-doers]. Many of the *Shanren* were from among the poor, with no one to depend on, or those who had been sickly and frail from earliest childhood. Plays and dramas were staged during temple fairs. An invitation would first be delivered to the family whose members frequently burnt incense in the Temple. After the performance, invited guests would be entertained with a vegetarian feast. Attendance at such feasts was referred to as *Zuozhai* [a place at the vegetarian feast]. Donations were made in addition to the regular incense money. For such a gathering, one usually made a donation of a thousand copper coins per one *Zuozhai*. Actually, in every temple that had *Shanren* or nuns staying, *Zuozhai* would be organized, but none was as popular as those held in the *Jiuku miao*' (*Henan xin zhi*, 1988: 170–71).

The core accusation against the *Jiuku miao* appears to be that it attracted the most ignorant, the most gullible and thus the most vulnerable members of society, namely females. Elderly women were especially prone to seek out such a place of superstition, the text asserts, intimating that such women constituted the ready victims of clever manipulators of fearful and helpless believers. The Temple came to stand for everything that negates the spirit of modern Republican Kaifeng. It attracted those with little education, provided a panacea instead of social and political solutions, reinforced the weaknesses of weak-minded women and was complicit with the traditional, feudal elites: the warlords, bureaucrats and families of great wealth. It was seen as a place of superstition where time had come to a standstill.

Despite the evident prejudice of the editors who in the 1920s compiled their report for the Provincial Government, we are also allowed a glimpse of the women who inhabited the Temple: the *Daopo* as the editors called them, who were respectfully addressed by the general population as *Shanren* (Well-doers). These were mostly women who had 'no one to depend on, or they were those sickly and frail in childhood.' We hear of women without a family or income who found a home in this Temple. Whilst the majority of pilgrims were humble, uneducated women, many from the impoverished villages in the surrounding countryside of Kaifeng, who were steadfast supporters of the *Jiuku miao*, female support also came from the families of officials, from the wealthy or from members of the families of warlords or bureaucrats. Finally, we are given to understand that the *Jiuku miao* maintained a far-flung and extensive network of female contacts through the many pilgrims who came to pray and to seek counsel and help. The Temple enjoyed the support of women of wealth and privilege who could place their resources at the disposal of the *Jiuku miao* whenever needed.

The official description in the *Henan xin zhi* conveys a dismal picture of ignorance, backwardness and gullibility that makes women the perfect carriers of society's ills and the *Jiuku miao* the cultural broker of all things feudal in 'the old' society. A critical reading of the text beyond the bias so evident in the writing also suggests that the Temple drew upon the strength and aspirations of women who utilized societal resources to accomplish ambitious public projects. These were women who aspired to spiritual contentment but also sought to support women (and men) in need of a refuge or simply a legitimate place to dwell when such help was not forthcoming from their families. It is possible to see, behind the official contempt for the institution of the *Jiuku miao,* the very real value of the Temple both in providing charitable support and in its undoubted position in the political and cultural life of local society. The underlying message of the text is actually everything but the aura of benighted backwardness that the writers seek to convey in their descriptions.

The texts, narrators, audiences, purpose of writing and the social and ideological agenda in these three narratives of the history of the *Jiuku miao* demonstrate the elusive nature of historical 'truth.' Whilst agreeing on the

least contested aspects of the historical origin of the *Jiuku miao* in the Qing Dynasty, on its importance to women as practitioners and believers and on the four generations of nuns who have faithfully transmitted knowledge of the doctrine, the differences between them are even more telling.

The most salient factors are gender and the notion of 'popular superstition.' In the 1920s, women's education had become a platform for saving the nation, but at the local level, the Temple came to epitomize all that was wrong with society: superstition, weakness, ignorance and gullibility. Apparently all that was needed to address these issues was their excision from a modernizing society, thus hastening the inexorable tide of progress sweeping China. Only the enforced expulsion of recalcitrant religious practitioners could make way for new kinds of women. In this new binary thinking of the 1920s, believing women and popular culture stood for the Other on the back of which reforms, and even revolution, must be carried out. The principle that had inscribed the space occupied by the *Jiuku miao* was the practice of the Female Way of *Kundao*, which had drawn in women (and men), often at the expense of more mainstream notions of gender roles and female life cycles, in order to enter a spiritual world and to do good. Its critics charged that the Temple did no good for women or for society. The collective voices of contemporary Daoists believers, however, emphasize the charitable, even indispensable, contributions of their institutions to all of society. The different perspectives of the writers show the complex social environment in which female religious spaces have operated, and continue to operate, in this volatile trajectory from tradition to modernization.

The following chapter retells this same era of a modernizing Chinese society through the voices of women in the sphere of Islam. Subject to the same twin pressures of unchanging continuity and unsettling modernization that faced Daoist women, Muslim women at national level, in their roles as urban intellectuals, lent their voices to debates over the future of the nation and the status of women in an era of modernization. And at local level, as members of women's mosque congregations in Kaifeng, they became part of the educational reforms through which the Islamic traditions of faith and culture contributed to the greater societal trend of social and gender change.

5 Investing Muslim Women's Traditions with Modern Meaning[1]

> It is only in quiet back lanes and through the cracks of doors that I have caught a glimpse of one or two [women]. And from what I observe, their lives are not natural; they cannot learn, they cannot move. Their lives are as controlled as if they were subject to medieval religious rule. Allah's gift of human potential for learning and work has not been utilized and realized by women
>
> (Wang Zengshan, 1933, in Li and Feng, 1985(2): 1383).

Here we want to examine the spiritual and cultural life of women's spaces which emerged from a cross-fertilization of varied developments: the Republican Government's project of modernizing the nation, including all religious organizations sanctioned by it, local government policies and strategies to bring Kaifeng's 'moribund' society into the twentieth century and the fervent local and national participation on the part of religious thinkers, including Hui Muslim intellectuals, in the search for national solutions. Several forces came together in the early twentieth century to challenge the spiritual and cultural life of Muslim women's spaces. At the national level, the Republican government instituted a project of modernizing the nation, including all sanctioned religious organizations. Similarly, in Kaifeng, the local government implemented policies and strategies to bring what it saw as a 'moribund' society into the twentieth century. Religious thinkers, including Hui Muslim intellectuals engaged fervently in the national and local discourses to search for solutions to these political pressures. In this chapter, we will explore the cross-fertilization of these currents with the discourses of Muslim women. We will contrast the writings of Muslim women intellectuals who were debating the linkages between faith, gender and national identity with the dissenting oral culture of women in the mosques that were flourishing in the townships and villages. Those women too wished to shape a more equal and just modernity, but it might be argued that they ultimately were ignored in the larger scheme of female educational reform.

THE NEW ISLAMIC CULTURAL MOVEMENT AND THE NEW CHINESE MUSLIM WOMAN

According to Ma Songting, an influential scholar, Islamic practice and institutions at the turn of the twentieth century were in a state of unprecedented inertia. Traditional mosque-based education had failed to move

with the times and widened the gap between Muslim Chinese and Han Chinese. The double identity as Muslim and Chinese, so Ma exhorted, must entail fellow Muslims' renewed dedication to the Islamic and to the national cause (1985b, in Li and Feng 1985(2): 1033–54). The deeply held conviction about the imperative of reform of Islam and Muslim culture in order to bring Muslims into line with the rest of the reform movement informed debates and cultural projects that commenced in the final years of the Qing Dynasty and lasted several decades. They swept the entire Muslim population along with it. Scholars went abroad to learn and investigate. They returned to embark on projects of translation, language and educational and curriculum reform. They published journals and magazines for the dissemination of Islamic knowledge and set up schools to teach a scientific Islam outside their old mosque traditions.

Sharing in the general spirit of investigation and reform, Hui scholars also turned their attention to the predicament of women and children, advocating education of girls, the unbinding of feet, the liberation of women and equality between the sexes. In their conception of the liberation of women, they differed in certain respects from other Chinese thinkers whose arguments increasingly bore the hallmark of the secular reasoning of the intense Anti-Christian and *Shouhui jiaoyu quanli* (Restore Educational Rights) movements of the 1920s (Lutz, 1971).

Muslim writers, on the whole, saw no conflict between the attainment of equal rights for both sexes and the liberation of women and religious belief. It can be argued, however, that the reformist agenda of Muslim intellectuals did not receive widespread popular support among Muslim communities because of the irritation aroused by 'the women's question.' Ma Songting *Ahong* noted that 'This is an unprecedented innovation, and not many share these ideals; those who have understanding of Islam are still fewer in numbers and regard this as *Yiduan* (deviation); as for those who possess knowledge, they are filled with outrage, but in the face of so much opposition, seeking subsidies from the government is out of the question' (1985b, in Li and Feng, 1985(2): 1033–54). Muslim reformers had to tread cautiously, confining themselves to general observations on the situation of women and on their contributions to communities in eradicating ignorance and backwardness. Investigative articles presented local case studies; for example, the inferior state of female education in Jiaohe Potou Township, Hebei Province, was blamed on poverty, with parents unable to afford the expense of education, but also on religious traditionalists who opposed female education on the basis of their erroneous reading of the Qurān, although the Prophet Mohammed himself had exhorted that 'it is the duty of both Muslim men and women to advance their knowledge' (Dai Pengliang, in *Ibid*.:1303).

The situation in Xian's Muslim community was also used as an object lesson of male recalcitrance in the face of gender change. It appears that in 1933 such was the violence of Muslim opposition to female education that

local educational reformers had to set rules under which girls over 12 years of age shall not attend school. Older girls were therefore prevented by their families from leaving home (Wang Zengshan in *Ibid*.). The author of the case study, although sympathetic to the women's cause, was constrained by strict codes of gender segregation to remain a distant observer. He noted:

> Women amongst Xian Muslims are confined to attending household tasks and raising children. I have never seen a woman in public. Although this whole issue is of interest to me, the constraints imposed by social boundaries mean that I can only imagine what the scope of women's problems might be. It is only in quiet back lanes and through the cracks of doors that I have caught a glimpse of one or two [women]. And from what I observe, their lives are not natural; they cannot learn, they cannot move. Their lives are as controlled as if they were subject to medieval religious rule. Allah's gift of human potential for learning and work has not been utilized and realized by women. Themselves unaware, the women have wasted their abilities and potential. This is sad and a great pity. There are also a number of old and young women who follow blindly the ways of the West [Arab Muslim countries], and their behaviour is the result of listening to such teachers who unthinkingly and blindly copy the customs of the Muslim West [Arab countries]. That is, these teachers only know how to add to Chinese Muslim women's burden of bound feet a further burden, a length of cloth with which to cover their heads, instead of releasing women's bound feet. They do not know the difference between virtue and evil, instead they turn things upside down. Aren't they the real sinners here? (Wang Zengshan, 1933, in *Ibid*.: 1383–84).

In the perspective of Wang Zengshan, women were the real victims. His disapproval targeted those Islamic teachers who burdened Chinese Muslim women with the strictures derived from an Arab-Muslim blueprint. Clearly, for him, this was not the path to modernity for Chinese women.

Another writer, Zhao Bin, argued in 1926 that observation of religious dress must be subject to rational and enlightened discussion (Zhao Bin, 1926, in *Ibid*.). Muslim scholars clearly sought a balance between Western women's liberation perceived as involving a turning away from faith and causing radical disruption to family life, versus a women's liberation grounded in faith, educated minds, social engagement and mutual respect between men and women. Blind learning from 'the West' was considered as fallacious as rigid adherence to traditionalist conceptions of gender relations. A number of articles appeared in which male scholars praised those women who study the scriptures and engage themselves in society without forsaking their religious belief and Islamic way of life. An interesting contemporary source entitled 'On the good practices among Chinese Muslims' particularly highlights the advantage to society of educated

women. Guan Yu (Guan Yu in *Ibid*.: 1747) refers to women scholars in Guangzhou and Hong Kong, knowledgeable in many languages and adept in comparative textual criticism, who are setting praiseworthy standards of erudition. 'Women from the Pearl River delta, because of their wide knowledge, take a keen interest in public affairs large and small, displaying much interest in national concerns. This demonstrates the virtue of women, something also true of the Boai (Philanthropic) Society of Muslim women in Hong Kong' (*Ibid*.: 1748).

In the Sichuan Muslim community, where universal education of children after four years of age at the mosque ensured a general level of ritual and doctrinal Islamic knowledge including a basic mastery of Arabic and Persian, women played a more active, visible and often exemplary role in the Muslim community as a whole. In Chengdu, Guan Yu observed, Muslim women are known to compete with each other to keep domestic or commercial premises spotlessly clean. The high level of hygiene, the author points out, comes from Chinese tradition rather than from copying foreign standards. As indicative of the quality of religious education of women in Chengdu, the author cites the case of a local well-known Islamic authority, Wang *Lao furen*, an old lady who was regularly consulted by young Muslims of both sexes on the correct understanding of the scriptures (*Ibid*.: 1762).

Women's activities outside the home were viewed with approval by some writers. In regard to the employment of Muslim women in Tianjin, Mu Yigang notes that 'there are also Hui women wanting work in order to attain independence. In this regard it may be said that Tianjin's Hui women excel through their particular strength' (Mu Yigang, 1935, in *Ibid*.: 1346). Scholars were forthright, however, when criticizing what they considered un-Islamic conduct and activities. A female religious instructor from Linqing in Shandong was roundly taken to task by Yi He for allowing women to worship without having performed the necessary ablutions and for permitting young girls to spend excessive time and effort on their appearance, instead of purifying the inner person (Yi He, 1935, in *Ibid*.).

We can also ascertain from these writings that Republican scholars viewed the development of both *Nüsi* (women's mosques) and *Nüxue* (madrassas) as perfectly attuned to the contemporary reformist zeitgeist. It is in this vein that, in 1931, Wang Junpu observed in respect of Heilongjiang that the recent growth of women's mosques, with their regular assembly and worship and readings of the Qurān and debates on family morality, had been an important development. The emergence of Arabic-Chinese girls' schools, *Awen nuxüe*, with their modern curriculum, was also seen as facilitating the emergence of outstanding women (Wang Junpu, 1931, in *Ibid*.: 1366). In 1937, the monthly periodical Tujue carried an article by the writer Qing on women's mosques in Yangzhou in which a male *Ahong* suggested that women's mosques were close to dissolution, unable to maintain their proud

past record. Attempts made to organize women's associations, *Funü xiehui*, to remedy the situation had come to nothing. Interestingly, the article also revealed that ordinary Muslims, on their own initiative and whenever time allowed, had been congregating in the women's mosque in order to increase their religious knowledge and also to debate current affairs (Qing, 1937, in *Ibid*.: 651).

It appears that even Islamic traditionalists among scholars saw the development of women's mosques as fulfilling essential needs. Commenting on the situation of Islam in Beijing, with its mosques and schools set aside for the use of women, Wang Mengyang says in 1936 that whilst 'it is not appropriate for women to congregate' there are however special needs to be taken into consideration, such as ordinary women's requirement for a place for ablution and for an educated *Ahong* to lead them in prayer (Wang Mengyang, 1936, in *Ibid*.: 1344).

Although a number of male scholars paid attention to *Nüsi* and to the *Nüzi awen xiaoxue* (Arabic-language primary school for girls), mention of them in print was brief and limited. For instance, in regard to Kaifeng, Lu Zhenming noted the number of women's mosques and their location, but otherwise confined himself to two sentences on the educational role of the older women in these mosques as mentors and teachers of young girls. No reference was made to the daily life in such mosques and their service to adult women (Lu Zhenming, n.d., in *Ibid*.). The presence of female *Ahong* is equally ignored.

Where we assess cultural reforms initiated, supported and documented by Islamic activists and Hui intellectuals between late Qing and Republican China from a gender perspective, it can be stated that this was a cultural movement initiated and conducted by men, with educated men assuming leadership and authority. This leadership, similar to characteristics of Chinese intellectuals in general, was based on certain important factors: the relative privileged status and educational level of intellectuals and reformers in relation to ordinary Muslims and Muslim women and the location of these initiatives in the more developed urban centres of Beijing and Shanghai. When we speak of new ideas, new educational or social projects, or the foundation of new Muslim organizations in the period between late Qing to Republican China, on the whole these originated first in Beijing and Shanghai and only subsequently spread to the rest of the country.

National debates that linked concepts of women's liberation with that of the salvation of the nation inspired many Muslim scholars to discuss in depth the relative merits of 'modernizing' religious education so as to modernize Muslim family life. What, however, did Muslim women intellectuals add to the debate? What issues did they raise and for whom did they speak when writing in the press and contributing essays to journals? How great was the discursive space created by their writing? Did their advocacy of progressive Muslim modernity make reference to women outside the urban circles in which they moved?

MUSLIM WOMEN INTELLECTUALS: DISCOURSES ON STATUS, IDENTITY AND LIBERATION

From the late Qing onwards, for the first time a number of educated Muslim women, supported by progressive male scholars, came to take their place in the public domain of organized activism, specifically through writing for newsletters and the publication of broadsheets.

The earliest evidence of active religious women intellectuals indicates that they joined organizations founded by men. The first Hui nationality overseas female student Yang Qidong joined the *Liu dong qingzhen jiaoyuhui*, Association of Islamic Education for Overseas Students in Tokyo (Li Xinghua *et al*., 1998: 740). In 1928, seven female members (among 89 men) were members of the *Yisilan xueyouhui* (Islamic Friendship Association) organized by Hui students from various universities in Peking (Zhao Zhenwu, 1936, in Li and Feng, 1985(1): 963). Particularly from the 1920s onwards, against the background of intensive debates on education and nationhood that accompanied the 1924 'Restore Educational Rights' movement, religious women scholars began to publish in their own voice.

Whilst the earliest such women-initiated religious periodical is a Christian monthly, *Nü qingnian yuekan* (Young Women's Monthly, 1927), brought out by the National Editorial Committee of the Chinese Young Women's Christian Association in the mid-1930s, Muslim and Buddhist women scholars also appeared in print. For example, in June 1936, the Shanghai Muslim Women's Association set up the *Yisilan funü zazhi* (Muslim Women's Magazine). On 3 July 1937, Buddhist women in Wuchang printed the first issue of *Fojiao nüzhong* (Buddhist Women). These periodicals were short-lived, lasting only until about the middle of 1937, that is, until the commencement of the Sino-Japanese War. In January 1945, the Chungking-based *Zhongguo huijiao xiehui* (China Islamic Association) brought out the *Huijiao funü zazhi* (Islamic Women's Magazine), but it too did not last long. At this point we have only been able to discover these few religious women's periodicals, but their scarcity makes the insights they afford into women's perspectives, visions and viewpoints, however fragmentary, the more valuable.

From the late Qing era to the early Republican years, the most prominent theme was that Islam had brought benefits to women. Economically, socially, legally and educationally, Islam *Huade yilü pingdeng* (brought equality) and should be seen as *Jiefang funüde bizu* (the originator of women's liberation). This was the case made by Li Rongchang (1932), who added that Chinese Muslim women had *Shoule hanzu fengsude xunran* (been contaminated by Han culture); and, so another writer, Xue Lan, asserted, only the message from the Qurān could really liberate women, far surpassing the benefits and rights which women could obtain in Japan and in Europe (Xue Lan, 1935).

In the course of the 1930s, critical voices grew more audible. The central problem in scholarly debates came to be about the nature of Muslim femininity in modern, non-Muslim Chinese society. Gender definition was a way of probing the fate of Islam as a central, underlying concern. Modernity, equated in these articles with the conduct and fashion of women in Europe and in the United States, was seen as spreading dangerously under the influence of ideas such as those advocated by the Nationalist New Life Movement and the apologists of a reinvigorated neo-Confucian morality. This raised the fearful possibility in scholars' minds that Muslim women would succumb and forsake their religion (Ma Jigao, 1935b: 13). The politicization of 'the women's question' led to preoccupation with Muslim female bodies and feminine conduct. When an article in the *Shanghai yisilan xuesheng zazhi* (Shanghai Islamic Students Magazine) put forward the argument that in the absence of direct Islamic instruction it must be up to women to decide how to dress, and display their hair, the magazine was immediately denounced for promoting heretical ideas.

Many conservative Islamic thinkers complained that the Muslim duties of daily worship and observance of Ramadan were treated with indifference, and even in danger of abandonment. Ma Hongyi felt compelled to elaborate three guidelines to be propagated among Muslim women: concealment of women's *Xiuti* (the part of her body which is subject to Islamic strictures), observation of worship and dedication to learning (Ma Hongyi, 1935). This article sounded a sympathetic chord with other writers. Ma Xiang wrote with particular venom about 'the modern woman' who, influenced by Western Europe, illustrated the destructive consequences of a most troubling trend, that is, 'in particular the way men face demands for liberation from women in general.' Indeed, Ma Xiang considered 'their conduct and ideas to exceed the boundaries of reason.' For him, he added, a true Muslim woman, well instructed in religious knowledge, knew her central duty to be 'a true virtuous wife and good mother' (Ma Xiang, 1935: 9, 13). In turn, women castigated such writing as reactionary, as *Daotui sichao* (backward thought), which, Bi Yun argued, targeted the body of women to undo hard-won achievements. She exhorted women to build on their successful struggle for rights, which had begun with the May Fourth Movement, to fight in solidarity with one another, to view society in a critical manner and to examine their own shortcomings with continuous self-reflection (Bi Yun, 1935, 14(2): 33).[2]

Perusing the extant 18 pages of the First Issue of *Yisilan funü zazhi* (Muslim Women's Magazine), we find passionate testimony to the questions women intellectuals asked of Islam, women's liberation and their identity as Muslim women in a modernizing age. Fewer, if eloquent, articles respond more closely to issues of selfhood, the meaningfulness of existence, gender relations and the rights of women, among other areas of concern expressive of the determination of Muslim women intellectuals to change their lives. Nevertheless, the centrality of women's destiny as *Xianqi liangmu* (chaste

wife, devoted mother) remained intact. Women's contribution to humanity resided importantly in their love as a mother, *Muxingde ai*. It was this which underpinned a woman's role as teacher of religious knowledge and faith (He Shuzhu, 1935). At the same time, women writers stressed the importance of preserving their right to hold an effective dual identity as *Gongmin*, public citizens, and as religious believers.

Mu Changhua addressed women in a fiery piece of writing, urging them to organize their collective strength to eradicate oppressive and unjust conventions so as to liberate women's innate wisdom and capabilities and to become more effective citizens, devout believers as well as conscientious wives and mothers. Whilst incorporating the traditional duties of women into the new construct of Muslim womanhood, women's duties and contributions to nation, society and their religion were stressed as being of equal importance (Mu Changhua, 1936).

Another important insight concerns the way Muslim women intellectuals defined their relationship with men, their fellow believers, against a complex constellation of identities: secular, religious, modern, traditional, Western- or Western/Arab-influenced, Chinese Muslim or universal Muslim. Women's road to progress and liberation is described by He Ru in 1936 as walking in unison with men. Because, as He Ru explained, as Allah's creatures, women and men are as one, materially and spiritually, so they should be as one in the claim to dignity, equality and justice. He Ru emphasized the rights and obligations of both women and men in relation to society, economy and family, their equality expressed in their inter-dependence rather than in autonomy. 'On no account does this imply rivalry with men for power, because [women's obligations towards religion and society] are our responsibility and duty', He Ru wrote in 1936 (1936: 6). That this view did not entail unquestioning acquiescence in their male colleagues' judgment is illustrated in an article by Xun Zhi, where she asks male scholars why it was only now that foot-binding and sexual equality had become such burning issues (Xun Zhi, 1936: 15).

The objective for every woman, He Ru emphasizes in her writing, is to be *Ren* (human):

> We want to be 'human', to be independent, to be whole 'human beings,' we want to become 'human' in every way. We do not shrink with fear, do not turn back, we go forward enthusiastically and courageously to start with taking action, we want to stand at the frontline of this age, pushing the gigantic wheel of history, sustained by our spirit, strength, we shall pursue our struggle ceaselessly. We will act for ourselves, and more so, we will engage ourselves for the masses. Act! Act! Act! (He Ru, 1936: 15)

Other writers like Ma Xiuzhen placed Muslim women at the forefront of the liberation of women, *Jiefangde xianfeng*, internationally, nationally and

locally. In an article for *Yisilan funü zazhi* (Muslim Women's Magazine), written in 1936, she argued that it was up to Muslim women to lead all women to where 'authentic' freedom and equality resided, that is, to the road which leads to Islam (Ma Xiuzhen,1936: 13).

What can we deduce from these writings about male scholars' attitudes to Muslim women's arguments for change and for collective action? No direct commentary on the *Yisilan funü zazhi* (Muslim Women's Magazine), from which we cited the assertive and thoughtful voices of various contributors, exists. But Zhen Wu, who wrote about the Islamic Women's Association in Shanghai, provides an insight into why there was distinct support among certain male scholars for women's call for action. He made it plain that there were important differences between 'this' and 'that' women's movement. He noted approvingly that the Shanghai women activists pursued a two-pronged strategy: recovering the progressive element in early Islamic thought; and using Islamic thought to attain a liberation that was genuine, unlike the liberation movement in the West (Zhen Wu, 1936: 1).

We see from the above that educated Muslim women with the ability to put their convictions in print were a part of the general movement for gender change and yet asserted their right to differ: opposition to 'feudal' constraints and calls for equality were to make the case for women's realization of their 'natural abilities', who thus engaged themselves, together with men, in the affairs of the nation, society, and of their religion. This move would lead to attaining full humanity, for this was independence. There was no contradiction, according to these women writers, between their religious impulses and secular concerns as to change society through their faith was to live in accordance with God's sacred commands.

In a time of intense secular and religious debates, amidst multifarious influences, these few Muslim women intellectuals whose writings we discovered always retained their own eloquent voice, their own position. Together with their like-minded male counterparts, they took part in the general debates of the period over the applicability of Western models of reform and about the means to achieve reform in line with national needs. Yet, however eloquent and persuasive the writing, their audience and influence were nevertheless limited; the majority of their contemporaries were women without education or access to the written word who expressed their histories in other ways. None of the texts we have found so far mentions the historical legacy and institutional life of women's mosques and schools in the Hui Muslim communities in central China, nor the women's voices that rang out in sites of worship and congregation far removed from urban centres of learning.

CHANTS OF FAITH IN WOMEN'S MOSQUES

On a hot and languid afternoon in June 2002, we were joined by three elderly women from the Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque in Kaifeng,

who told us what they remembered from their childhood. All in their late seventies, with one old lady knitting as they talked, they slowly recalled their many hours at the Mosque spent studying the scriptures, learning Persian and chanting *Jingge* (Islamic chants) taught to them by their *Ahong*. They think this took place around 1940, maybe a bit earlier or perhaps just after 1940. From her earliest years, Li Xiangrong remembers emotionally that she loved *Jingge*. Her childhood home, as well as her husband's home, is located close to the Mosque. She has lived in this neighbourhood all her life. Reaching back into her memory of the 1930s, the Mosque was then led by the senior *Ahong* and three subordinate *Ahong*, such was the need for qualified instructors to guide the many believers crowding the Mosque. In that year, when she learnt to chant the *Jingge,* between 20 to 30 girls were instructed together with her, the youngest six or seven years old, the oldest between 16 to 17 years of age. As in other schools, their education was regulated by strict discipline and their days filled with instruction, with the resident *Ahong* making herself responsible for transmitting correct principles of Islam and proper observance of all major duties demanded of a pious Muslim. After the lessons had finished, an *Ahong* would say, 'Girls, now how about a *Jingge*!' And then everyone would join in the chorus of cheerful voices. In those years, women's mosques were crowded with women and girls. It had felt good. Those were happy years.

Figure 5.1 At the Gate of Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque, Kaifeng [photo: Maria Jaschok].

What part was played by women's mosques under their female *Ahong* in the religious and social developments of Kaifeng? How did reforms and innovations enable or hinder the way women organized their religious and social life? What can the remembered *Jingge* tell us about the situation of women's mosques during times in which their close neighbour, the Daoist temple, the *Jiuku miao*, faced expulsion from mainstream society? What do they tell us about the interior life of these mosques and women's participation in the great push towards modernity?

MOVING INTO MODERNITY—VOICES OF CHANGE

Contemporary Christian observers cited women's mosques in Henan as an illustration of the flourishing state of Islam at the turn of the twentieth century. The numbers given in the Christian publication *Zhonghua guizhu,* however, are conservative if compared to those cited in a contemporary Henan source. For the entire province of Henan, *Zhonghua guizhu* gives a figure of about 300 mosques, while for the 1910s, seven mosques for men and eight women's mosques are listed. More than 30 *Ahong* and over 120 *Hailifan* (students of Islam preparing to be ordained as *Ahong*) were at the service of a community of over 3,500 Muslim households (*Zhonghua guizhu* [The Christian Occupation of China], 1985: 735, 741). In contrast, statistics issued by the *Zongjiao bumen* (Religious Affairs Department) of Henan Province suggest that at the turn of the twentieth century about 500 mosques were to be found in Henan. In 1949, the year that the Communist Party came to power, this number increased to 810 mosques (*Henanshengzhi. renkouzhi.minzuzhi. zongjiaozhi*, 1994(9): 77). Whilst it is difficult to establish the veracity of either source, both nevertheless convey the forceful presence of organized Islam as a religious, cultural and educational force in rural and urban Henan society, growing ever more in influence as the reforms of the Republican era were gathering force.

A women's mosque has been, and still is, women's spiritual and social universe, the site of their communal activity. During Republican times, the relationship of women's mosques with Muslim and local society was marked by reforms in the political, intellectual and religious spheres of society. In this sense, the religious culture of these women's communities also aspired to the progress which marked society at large. They benefited from educational initiatives and inspiring leaders to make the years of learning at their mosque the most formative and unforgettable years of their lives, as remembered by the old women.

At a more popular level, between the turn of the twentieth century and the Republic, Islamic tracts and widely known religious songs were published and distributed among Muslim believers. These communities were particularly influenced by the spread of a popular culture of songs and recitals which constituted the staple of worship for Muslim female

congregations. The most effective populariser of Islamic songs during the years of the Republican era is considered to be Wang Chunli. He fell back on popular ballads and tunes in order to attract attention to the message of Islam. Among these, the most influential were the songs called *Qingzhen quanjiao ge*, known in short as *Quanjiao ge* (Islamic Songs for Religious Instruction). In the 1920s, a flurry of publication of all these popular Islamic songs accelerated their nationwide dissemination among China's Muslim population.[3]

EDUCATION OF ILLITERATE WOMEN, EDUCATION FOR PROGRESS

Based on an analysis of the content and characteristics of the songs, and judging also from the scope of transmission of the work of the renowned Qing scholar, Liu Zhi (ca. 1655–1745), we suggest that the songs' origins lie in the emergence of Islamic female education in the early Qing era, when popular tunes must have appeared to be the most appropriate means of spreading rudimentary religious knowledge among women with little or no education. With the development of female madrassas and, subsequently, of mosques, the influence of *Jingge* would also have spread (Jaschok and Shui, 2000a). Such a beginning might explain why *Jingge* have always been considered inferior to sacred hymns, which are part of worship in men's mosques. As 'rudimentary' tools of learning, and given perceptions of women's spiritual and educational deficiencies, *Jingge* were tainted by the gender of those who utilized them.

Muslim women's own knowledge of the origin and history of *Jingge* in women's mosque culture is vague, their estimates ranging from 'several generations' to 'more than 200 years.' In the latter estimate, as we have argued (Jaschok and Shui, 2005), the emergence of *Jingge* into religious female education would have taken place around the time of the inception of female madrassas and women's mosques.

What were the primary uses for which the *Jingge* were intended? Most importantly, they were used as an educational tool to teach young girls basic Islamic knowledge and the scriptural languages, adding liveliness and joy to the discipline of learning (for a more detailed discussion of uses of *Jingge,* see Jaschok and Shui, 2005). They were also considered useful pedagogical tools because they offered easy, accessible and enjoyable means to instruct mature, mostly illiterate women in religious knowledge. Some of the *Jingge*, borrowed from local popular tunes, brought emotional release to women by addressing the loss and disappointment many suffered in the course of their lives. Conversely, the experience of the collective learning and recital of the songs must have added to both their pleasure and a sense of belonging in the communal life of a women's mosque, reinforcing a more emotional identification with their own place of worship and with the congregation as a family of like-minded women. Additionally, the recital of

Arabic and Persian *Jingge* would have had the effect of strengthening their identity as members of the global *Umma* of believers, while simultaneously evoking their common fate of spiritual exile from Mecca, home to all Muslims (Jaschok and Shui, 2005).

GENDERED INSCRIPTIONS IN TRADITIONS OF *JINGGE*

Gender has inscribed performance, form and transmission of *Jingge*. Whereas men copied down the lyrics, women tended to recollect the words through oral recital (but some female *Ahong* resort to *Xiaoerjing*[4]—use of Arabic or Persian characters to transliterate Chinese—to copy the lyrics), with some of the songs only recited in the ambience of women's mosques. This makes performance of religious songs, *Nian jingge*, an integral and unique part of the traditional women's mosque culture.[5] This tradition speaks to the history of women, their communal life and faith, their relations with men and about male religious authority. It does so most eloquently as the very terminology, so our erstwhile reconstruction suggests, is embedded in gendered meanings. Nevertheless, the evaluation of *Jingge* in many conversations with male *Ahong* as somewhat inferior didactic tools and their association with deficient religious knowledge, as well as with social contexts of poverty and marginality, may be seen as emblematic of the difficult course of female religious organization in China's Islam.

The use of the common Chinese language and the reliance largely on oral transmission are in stark contrast with the highly regarded *Shige* (sacred hymns), which are copied and transmitted by male scholars, which are preserved in print as the representative heritage of Muslim religious life, with the language and style considered appropriately elegant, refined and poetic.

The fate of the *Jingge* tradition may be said to expose multifarious inequalities: on the one hand, men's religious culture emphasizes literacy and access to Islamic knowledge through the written word; on the other hand, women's mosques traditionally depend on abridged Persian texts to convey the teachings of the Qurān considered pertinent to women's moral guidance, *Nürenjing*, on the use of *Xiaoerjing* (Arabic/Persian transliteration of Chinese) and on a core oral culture of instruction, worship and transmission.

What can the *Jingge* we know of (the few that have been transcribed and those transmitted orally at women's mosques today) tell us about their religious and cultural heritage and their absorption of influences from local society and from the political preoccupations of Republican-era Kaifeng? We know that women *Ahong* brought so-called *Funü quanjiao ge* (songs of Islamic instruction for women), from among the songs then circulating among Muslims in the wider community, from the streets to the women's mosques, teaching them to receptive believers. A few female *Ahong*,

conversant with Persian or Arabic, used *Xiaoerjing* to transliterate some of the lyrics and copy them for future transmission.

WOMEN'S VOICES, CHANTING IN ARABIC, PERSIAN AND CHINESE

We have identified three broad types of *Jingge* based on linguistic criteria: the *Songs to Instruct in Pronunciation of Arabic* (alphabetically organized) to which belong *Bianba*, *Luanba*and *Tiaozebu* (the practice of pronunciation is in random order). We surmise that *Bianba* or *Luanba* emerged as important educational tools during the first important Islamic cultural movement (late Ming/early Qing, see Jaschok and Shui, 2000a; Shui and Jaschok, 2002), and that many are the creation of contemporary Muslim scholars. Considered suitable for the level of children, they still remain educational tools in women's mosques today.

Arabic Songs

There are two sub-categories of Arabic songs: *Arabic Phonology Training Songs* and *Core Islamic Religious Knowledge Songs*. *Arabic Phonology Training Songs* called *Bianba* (Arabic words are pronounced in alphabetical order) and *Luanba* and *Tiaozebu* (Arabic words are pronounced in random order) are among the most important. All of these songs are lyrical, easy to sing and remember and simple to comprehend. They were thus considered by some women *Ahong* as ideal for the teaching of uneducated girls and women.

Songs for teaching of phonetics and pronunciation had also initially been considered effective for children who were solely Chinese speakers. These songs possibly go back to the beginning of the first Islamic Cultural Movement during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties when adult education became first systematized and was made accessible to a largely untutored Muslim people (Zhao Can, 1989). The second sub-category of *Arabic Songs* concern the *Core Islamic Knowledge Songs*, treated here together with the second linguistic group of *Persian Songs*.

Arabic and Persian Songs

The long history of oral transmission of *Jingge*, with their incorporation of diverse local dialects and colloquialisms as well as a unique amalgamation of Arabic, Persian and Chinese, has somewhat obscured its linguistic and semantic origins. As far as women *Ahong* are concerned, however, they are effective sources of inspiration, vital to aid in instruction in the core precepts of faith, principal Muslim duties, and the lives of saints and ritual knowledge. They also tell of women martyrs, of female paradigms of Muslim virtue and of salvation through submission to God. *Ahong*, in

the course of interpretation, translate their meaning first into *Jingtangyu* (religious linguistic medium used by Muslims that fuses Arabic, Persian and Chinese into a unique form of communication) and then into ordinary Chinese. Whilst the narrative sweep and basic plots of songs have changed little over time, local differences are noted in details of interpretation and emphasis related to an individual *Ahong*'s learnedness, subtlety of understanding and pedagogical skills.

These *Jingge* have a narrative character and carry instruction in the core precepts of faith, telling stories of proselytization and of faith, of the beginnings of Islam and of the biographies of pious Muslim women. They teach the Five Pillars of Faith and instruct in the discipline of daily prayer. The paradigm of an ideal Muslim woman emerges in her practice of constant self-discipline, her readiness to make sacrifices, her courage with which she bears pain and her wisdom and piety from which she draws solace to face the daily trials and tribulations that are the lot of women.

Each new chant would be introduced in Chinese in order to clarify meanings and help women make applications to their own lives. Because of differences in an individual *Ahong*'s linguistic or interpretative skills, minor discrepancies in story content and form have worked themselves into the transmission and become part of the diversity of *Jingge*, characteristic of orally transmitted culture. In such a way, a teacher's cultural background, life experience and also external environment at any given time are imprinted on the performance.

Persian *Jingge* formed part of the early thriving *Jingtang* (mosque-based) education around the beginning of the Qing dynasty (seventeenth century). Serving the needs of female education at this early stage of the Islamic revival, topics were deliberately chosen to encourage women to be compassionate, open-minded and to aspire to the spirit of sacrifice as a much-admired virtue of pious Muslim women. In the Persian *Jingge* still recited today, their literary and poetic borrowings from ancient sources connect directly with the wisdom and poetry of a Persian civilization that was brought to China by Muslims from Central Asia.[6] Arabic *Jingge* appeared later than the Persian versions, and it is possible that they were introduced by Muslim scholars during the time of the Second Islamic Cultural Movement in the Republican era (1912–1949).

Chinese Jingge

Most numerous and rich in content are *Chinese language* chants from which we introduce three representative illustrations in this chapter's next section. They provide ritual and doctrinal knowledge and exhort Muslims to fear God, fulfil their duties and remain pious and obedient. Ballads also narrate women's morality, *Fudao*, women's virtues and spiritual and emotional life. Only in rare cases do we know the author; in the majority of these *Jingge*, anonymous interpreters and singers have over generations

preserved, shaped and, wherever they felt it was called for, altered phrasings and words to reflect changed realities.

The tunes are simple and the language is easily understood and memorized. A range of themes convey ritual and doctrinal knowledge, for example, the *Yimani ge* (Song of Faith), the *Wucishi libai ge* (Song of Five Daily Prayers), *Yisilan ge* (Song of Islam) and the like. Believers are urged to fulfil their duties, worship daily and live as pious Muslims, to exercise mercy and be always attuned to the presence of evil in this world. The *Ahong*'s role in leading by example and the ordinary women believers' duty in emulating her conduct are frequently stated. Women's religious devotion and duties to family and country as devout Muslim women are addressed in the well-known *Quan funűge* (excerpted in the next section).

Many other songs can be said to have been influenced by Han Chinese popular tunes. They became part of women's mosque oral culture, even if no direct reference is made to Islamic teaching, because they too exhort the listener to cultivate humanity and kindness and to live virtuous and exemplary lives. While both Han Chinese and Hui Muslims use the *Jingge* category of *Quanshan ge* (Song of Exhortation for Virtue), the use of *Nian* (to recite) among Muslims signifies the spiritual aspect of mosque-based *Jingge*. Indeed, the terminology on which Muslim women insist, that is, the performance of *Jingge* as *Nian* (recitation, rather than 'singing', of prayer), is perceived as elevating *Jingge* to an event of communal significance (*Zhongguo minjian gequ jicheng, Henanjuan,* The Chinese Folksong Collection, 1997: 351) where women claim a legitimate presence. Spiritual and emotional preoccupations are reflected in the *Kuhua* (Grieving Song), as illustrated next.

MUSLIM WOMEN'S CHANTS—FILLING TRADITION WITH MODERN MEANING

For the historian Vera Schwarcz, memory does no more, and no less, than acknowledge the fragmented nature of all human time. Memory 'is the knowledge that an absence has to be bridged with words' (Schwarcz, 1998), troubling and destabilizing the oppressive hold of 'the lexicon of public events', of the dominance of official historiography over personal remembrance. But there is an active side to memory, as Paul Ricoeur (1999) points out. In the act of remembering, when memory is a voice rendered in a social space of support and affirmation, the joint ritual of remembering may transform even a Grieving Song into an assertion of hope.

Gaining Strength from Religious Faith

The following *Kuhua* was performed for us by Li Xiangrong from a Kaifeng women's mosque. The narrative concerns a young woman who meets a young man at a mosque. He persuades her to read the scriptures,

and their attraction develops into mutual love. Before the marriage can take place, he leaves for Weihe County in Gansu Province to study Islam; there he dies. The young girl weeps at night, shedding secret tears, and lamenting her loss. She is overheard, so says the story, and her lament was recorded, thus becoming familiar to many women. Li Xiangrong remembers that during the time that the *Jingge* was taught to her, around 1940, neither young maidens nor young married women were allowed to take part in reciting it. It was to be recited by middle-aged or elderly women only.

Li Xiangrong, who loved *Jingge* from her earliest years, remembered this *Kuhua* for us:

***Kuhua* (Grieving Song)**[7]

Ai! Yearning for You, I am Yearning for a Man of True Knowledge. They say there is no Comfort sitting on a Wooden Bench, studying the Holy Books. I have never sought Possessions, sought Riches and Honour; for You, I have not married the Official, I have married the Honorable *Erlin* [scholar with profound knowledge of the Islamic scriptures].

I thought when the Roses Bloom, we will be together, the Roses are Blooming, but we are apart.

I thought when the Peony unfolds its Petals, your Studies are done, but like the Luomi [?] only Loneliness and Sadness Abound.

I thought when the Cockscomb Blossoms, it would break into Smiles, but you have given me Sunflowers instead, their Heads Drooping.

I thought that Pomegranate would Drench the Courtyard in Red, but you gave me Flower-Petals from the Pear Tree, shivering in White; Compassionate God, have Mercy on me!

I thought that when Baila [?] Flowers bloom, all the People would like them well, but I did not know that when your Gaizheng [?] Flowers opened, there was no one to Gaze upon them.

Compassionate God, have Mercy on me!

I thought that when the Phoenix descends on the Parasol Tree, skipping from branch to branch, Happiness would fill us; I did not know that you'd give me prickly branches on which the Phoenix caught, lacerating the Heart.

I thought that as the Juzheng [?] opens its Petals, we shall grow old together, but I did not know that you'd give me Orchids and never reach the end of the Road.

I thought that you would ride your Horse up and down the Main Street, I did not know that your Horse would gallop over the Wall and never return.

I thought that the Geese and Ducks would happily swim along the River, I did not know you would will them into the Mouth of Death.

I thought that the Peach Blossom would bring forth Fruit, I did not know that the Peanut Plant would blossom, but its Seeds end up scattered on the Ground. Compassionate God, ah, have Mercy on me.

Nature, with its seasonal flowers and plants, its wildlife and familiar landscapes, supplies the expressive language through which are evoked love, faith, sorrow and loss. The *Jingge* tells us of women forced, not unlike their contemporaries, to wait at home for their beloved in anticipation and dread. But unlike other women around them, they can turn to their God for consolation.

Being a Good Muslim in an Uncertain World

The following, equally popular chant has already been transcribed and now forms part of *Yisilan jiaoyi ge* (n.d.: 55–7). This *Jingge* addresses both women and men.

***Haoren ge* (Song of A Good [Muslim] Person)**
Allah created all creatures
Only Human Beings are its Crown
Among Human Beings are the Good
And moreover, There are Those, who Excel

The Good before anything else, show Devotion
The Good before anything else [*xiaoti*] defer to their Elders
The Good [*zhi lianchi*] value honesty of character
The Good honour the Rites of Worship
The Good Do Not Indulge in Wine
The Good Do Not Attach themselves to Prostitutes
The Good Do Not Gamble
The Good Do Not Let Themselves be Swayed by Sentiment
The Good Do Not Depend on Riches
The Good Do Not Abuse Power
The Good Do Not Instigate [Evil]
The Good Do Not Harbour Envy
The Good Do Not Speak False
The Good Do Not Make Game [of Someone]
The Good Do Not Engage in Idle Talk
The Good Do Not Defame
The Good Have No Depraved Friends
The Good Do Not Squander
The Good Do Not Sink Into Indolence
The Good Do Not Fritter Away [Possessions]
The Good Do Not Behave Frivolously

The Good Do Not Adorn Themselves
The Good Labour Hard
The Good Study diligently [*siben*] the Sacred Texts
The Good Love Their Country
The Good Abide by Law and Discipline
The Good Are Not Overbearing
The Good Are Not Equivocal
The Good Provide Succour in Adversity
The Good Practise Kindness
The Good Facilitate Convenience [for others]
The Good Allow for Bargains

The Wicked Curse The Good
The Good Speak Truth
The Wicked Assault The Good
The Good Look to Defend Themselves
No Matter How Trivial or Great
The Good have a Conscience without Guilt
The Rich Do Good,
Beneficent deeds merit Afterlife
The Poor Do Good,
Engendering Benefits Unimaginable.
The Young Do Good,
Much Prestige awaits the Older Generations
The Old Do Good,
Absolving greatly a life's sins
The Weak Do Good,
The Strong Feel Ashamed and Sorry
The Wicked Do Good,
Reputation increases thousand-fold
The Good, treasured by Their Village and their Party
The Good, their Nation's lucky Charm
Each and Everyone Does Good
This is the meaning of this Song.

An extensive list of attributes defines 'the good' (and thus also 'the bad') conduct of both Muslim women and men. Muslim exemplary ethical values, personal and public conduct, express themselves in industrious habits, good and law-abiding citizenship and fearless practice of Islamic faith and rites in the face of all obstacles and temptations. Prospect of afterlife, absolution of sin, and so on, are pronounced as the direct outcome of Muslim goodness in action, but there is also a strong sub-text of rational thought. Good life engenders wider change, irrespective of individual or national salvation. 'The Good, [are] treasured by their Village and their Party; the Good, their Nation's lucky Charm.' It is a *Jingge* chanted as assertion

of robust faith in a time of flux, of moral uncertainty and glaring social inequalities. It also expresses the certainty that the moral principles which constitute a 'good' Muslim life are inherently superior to all that a chaotic and corrupt society has to offer. Furthermore, regardless of gender, class, age, education and wealth, within this symbolic universe all are subject to the final judgment of Allah.

Making a Virtuous Muslim Woman: Quanjiao ge (Song of Instruction)

Often of a solemn and didactic nature, religious songs—whether praising filial piety or hailing virtuous women, as does *Quanjiao ge*—testify to the intermingling of diverse local cultural traditions and to their shared gender prescription (Dong and Arkush, 2000). We have chosen one central text addressed to women, still beloved today because it expresses women's unique experiences and history.

Quan funü (Exhorting Women) (*Yisilan jiaoyi ge,* n.d.: 82–85)
Women, Listen and Be Enlightened,
Not to Learn, Not to Ask, This is Poor Conduct.
In Childhood to Miss Out on Religious Instruction, Is Never To Grow into Adulthood,
In Matters of Faith Not Understanding, Is Violating God's Law.
Not Praising Allah, Not Practising Filial Piety, Not Fearing Afterlife.
Living and Dying in Confusion, This is Oblivion to the Passage of Time.
As For Women Who Worship, The Rewards are Especially Great,
Worshipping Day after Day, And the Rewards are Doubled.

As For the Prophet's Daughter Fatima, Hers Was a Character Unrivalled,
Ayesha Spread The Faith for the Prophet in Mecca.
Khadeejah, To Be the Prophet's Companion, Married When Already Forty Years of Age,
To Assist the Prophet to Proclaim God's Word, Sacrificing Wealth, Abandoning Home.
Just as These Esteemed and Virtuous Women of Highest Moral Character,
So You, Sisters, may Learn to Follow in their Footsteps.

Should You Fall into Evil Habit (*E-xi*) and not be Open to Wise Counsel,
When Punishment Is Metered Out at Death, There is No Recourse.
Have You not Thought Of Who Created You?
In Whose Jurisdiction Are Life And Death?

Who Provides You with Food and Drink, Who Calls Upon You?
Darkness Turns Light, Light Turns Darkness (*Heile ming,mingle hei*), Where To are You Hastening?
Heaven and Earth, and all its Creatures, Who has been their Maker?
Paradise and Hell are Within Whose Control?
Acknowledge—Your Life is God's Creation.
Allah Made Parents for Procreation, thus comes about Family.
Sincerely believing In God, His Invisibility, Is Peace And Serenity, Is the Way,
Neither of Outer Form, Nor of Inner Materiality, God Is Always, Everywhere.
Take Cognizance of God, Who Holds The Cosmos Within His Control
And the Whole World will Arise With New Vigour (*Tiaoyang pushi*).

Is this Not Just Like Our Own Life, Not Parting from Home,
We Observe the Five Pillars of Faith, Worship God the Almighty,
To one's utmost, We Practice Filial Piety, Respecting and Obeying Parents.
Each Day, Five times, We Pray, Asking for Protection of the Family,
We Submit to Parents-in-Law, Follow Our Husband, Gently Bringing Up our Children.

Filled with certain ambiguities, open to different interpretations, what understanding does this *Jingge* yield about how women's subjectivities were moulded during a time of social and cultural transformation? It brings confirmation of the importance of religious women's roles in family and society, but it also demands of women to ask questions, to be curious, to engage in learning and to understand the impact they have on people around them. This was Guo *Ahong*'s interpretation of the meaning. Guo *Ahong* has been presiding over women's mosques now for many years, and this *Jingge* is among her favourites.[8]

Women are exhorted from a young age to learn about their faith. To awaken to the presence of God is to evade falling into sinfulness. Pressing hard on women is the passage of time which is mortal time, transient in nature. Fatima, Ayesha and Khadeejah are the great Islamic role models, women who were close to the Prophet, and ordinary women are exhorted to emulate them. Their characters, religious mission and readiness to sacrifice wealth and status for the Higher Good, providing assistance to those [men] who are serving God, give all believing women inspiration and motivation.

Then follow dire warnings of the consequences of 'evil habits' (*E-xi*) for the believers' chances of afterlife, and these warnings are strengthened by a vivid rendering of God's power and control over the cosmos. Only here can the source of eternal life, and of new life, be found. Within this

depiction of God's universe, women's role emerges as a central pillar upon which the survival of family, of all, rest. Woman is the axis around which all revolves—past, present, future and afterlife.

The *Jingge* urges women to walk the path of enlightenment. Women's ignorance of doctrine, of central Islamic duties, is fatal to not only their own prospect of immortality, but the *survival of all depends* on women's willingness to educate themselves into conscious and enlightened subjects. Women are called upon as educators to shape the fate of those around them; in this calling they are also given roles of central importance to Muslim and non-Muslim society.

JINGGE AND FEMALE RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN THE LOCAL HENAN CULTURE

Still recited today, *Jingge* in the main promote the core tenets of Islamic principles, instil a proper Muslim code of conduct, express pride in Muslim cultural traditions and criticize violations of Islam (as in the case of the above-cited *Haoren ge* [Song of A Good (Muslim) Person]). Some of these chants make direct references to practices committed by their non-Muslim (Han) neighbours, thus highlighting the superiority of Islamic teachings and practices over other moral codes. The *Shiburen* (Ten Unkind Deeds) chant (*Qingzhen quanjiao ge*, 1922: 65–8), for example, condemns the contemporary practice of abandoning a still-born child's body in the wilderness, calling such behaviour 'inhumane' and 'heartless towards one's own child.' Other criticisms are targeted at the popular application of *Fengshui* principles among Han Chinese in the choice of burial site for parents which, according to the *Shiburen* chant, is guided by self-interest rather than by the desire to honour the dead parents.

The history of the flourishing culture of *Jingge* during the Republican era was followed by its subsequent silence when condemned as part of 'feudal' culture during the Communist campaigns against all established religions after 1957. *Jingge* were disregarded by scholars and practitioners of Islam, including women, as being tainted by associations with cultural and intellectual backwardness. This neglect might be seen as emblematic of the changing place and relevance of women's mosque culture in relation to Chinese society, to local society, to Muslim communities and, ultimately, to their own congregation of believers. Our limited knowledge of cultural and educational changes in Kaifeng's women's mosques during the Republican period and of the function of *Jingge* in bringing illiterate women into religious education, however rudimentary, illuminates some of the unique features that Muslims made their own cultural legacy. The subsequent decline of the popularity of *Jingge* also sheds light on their inter-dependence with reform movements, including women Muslim intellectuals whose class, education and social milieu made possible important critiques of prevalent

gender codes in Islamic thought and interpretations but also restricted their own understanding of women's lives outside a limited discursive space.

Whilst proudly seen as an integral part of Islamic female culture, *Jingge* also reveal the consequence of the enclosed culture of which they were, and once again are, a part. They have remained a somewhat inert vehicle of a women's mosque tradition. Because for too many years they were 'hidden' from public knowledge, they are also steeped in conservative Islamic morality. It should be noted that in contemporary times, associations of the practice of *Jingge* with illiteracy, rural backwardness and low spirituality have made younger generations of female *Ahong* and ordinary believers reject these songs as an embarrassing legacy and antithesis of twenty-first century modernity; their place is within the rustic courtyards of old women who do not know better.[9]

Yet *Jingge* are not an expression apart or closed off from other meaning systems. Female-led religious organizations were common across religious, ethnic and class divides, performing worship away from the household, in mosques, churches, shrines and temples. We can trace certain mutual influences in the evolution of *Jingge* in Buddhism and *Jingge* in Christian religion (in present-day times referred to as *Lingge*) in certain popular folksongs, *Geyao*. A thriving and long-standing female religious cultural tradition in central China, already described in the previous chapters, reminds us of the ubiquity of temples and shrines dedicated to deities and deified nature, not necessarily inside any single 'noble' tradition, in which women have been contributing to a rich mosaic of highly fluid, gendered cultural narratives (see, among others, Dong, 2002; Dong and Arkush, 2000; Rees, 2000).

Nowadays, elderly women *Ahong* in Kaifeng have begun to teach *Jingge* to young girls and started to talk of what life was like for earlier generations of women, particularly in the years before 1949, during the Republican era, when *Jingge* were at their height of popularity. The chants are also now starting to be revived in neighbouring mosques, with *Ahong* eager to prompt older believers' memories before it is too late. So a bridge is being built across a lost time, with these *Jingge* communicating the suffering, joys, faith and aspirations of past generations of believing women for younger women to listen to and to understand.

We learned that Muslim women intellectuals widened the discursive space for non-mainstream voices through assertive participation in debates over the goals and means of reform. Although not directly concerned with the situation of women's mosques in China's interior—perhaps even being unaware of the significance of such women's sites—their advocacy of an enhanced role of Muslim women in public life for the good of Islam nevertheless helped to facilitate interest by Muslim reformers in the institution of the women's mosque. Women *Ahong*, jointly with progressive educators, were able to bring fresh approaches to religious instruction and a more expansive canon of religious teaching materials into the mosques. We now turn, in the following chapters, to the role played by Catholic

missionaries in the lives of local women and girls. In close neighbourhood with Hui Muslims' women's mosques and madrassas, the Catholic Sisters from the United States set up a Catholic orphanage, Catholic schools and, subsequently, native convents for native Catechist Sisters. They added to the growing social mobility of Kaifeng's women, many from poor backgrounds. Yet by failing to understand local Catholic practices outside the confines of familiar convent discipline, the American missionaries also served to diminish the prospects of certain women, known in Western missionary literature as 'Chinese Virgins', who might be counted among the most loyal, and engaged disciples of the Catholic faith.

Part II

Republican China

Modernization, Religion and Space—Catholic Women in Kaifeng

6 Contesting Female Space in Changing Times

The Catholic Providence Sisters and Chinese Catechists

Between the 1920s and the 1940s, a new force entered the religious life of Kaifeng with the work of the Catholic Sisters of Providence from St. Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana. They sought to create a social space in which to launch the mission of salvation, its religion and practices steeped in a culture of different origins. This space, one might argue, came to serve a local timeline and political agenda for modernization that would ultimately subvert the Sisters' attempt at nativizing girls and women for their needed participation in the missionary field. In this chapter, we explore the evolution of their work and the challenges it posed during a time of considerable political turmoil in China as they experimented with an array of strategies to nurture faith through education, welfare and career opportunities for local women. In this they added to opportunities for change that, as preceding chapters have shown, were starting to open up for local girls and women as an integral part of the national and local drives for modernization.

In offering schooling and vocational training for girls, but also providing for relief of the poorest and most vulnerable members of the local population, the American Sisters became useful contributors to local government efforts to bring basic tools of literacy to many hitherto excluded members of the population, particularly girls and women. Through provision of welfare institutions, the Sisters helped to alleviate some of the harshest suffering caused by natural calamities, as many local sources point out, which were all too often exacerbated by poor governance and political instability. Indeed, even the missionizing character of their social and educational projects did not incur for the Providence Sisters (or for other missionary organizations) the classificatory label of 'superstition' with which Daoist and Buddhist female organizations were branded. The quality of school education offered, the range of subjects in the educational curriculum of missionary schools, the calibre of teachers and so on were in line with the 'Christian General' Feng Yuxiang's reformist zeal to bring Kaifeng, and indeed all of Henan then under his governorship, into the twentieth century (Sheridan, 1966).

In this and the following two chapters, we include both the American Providence Sisters and the local women who were attracted to the faith,

converted, and then entered the first native religious convent set up by the Providence Sisters. As we will show, these Chinese converts were not considered to be of the same status, with very few given the opportunity to join the ranks of the American Sisters. The majority were assigned a status distinctly short of full ordination, something many Chinese women religious came to resent; others more readily acquiesced to having a relatively humble designation. A third group, the Virgins or *Shouzhen guniang,* interacted with the Sisters on occasion, but very few entered the Kaifeng-based convent of Sister Catechists. Most chose to do their religious work away from the Providence Sisters, continuing their lives as celibate women in the local tradition of *Shouzhen guniang.* Why did these women prefer their often solitary lives, travelling alone to remote and outlying Catholic communities, spreading the biblical message in villages where no Western missionaries dared to brave banditry and rural hostility?

We begin by drawing on the writings of American religious women, then turn to the more scarce documentation by Chinese converts of that time and some contemporary reflections on the past that tell us of the difference made by the missionaries in the lives of women caught up in the processes of modernization in Republican China. The very different choices made by the Chinese Providence Sister Catechists on the one hand, and the *Shouzhen guniang* on the other reveal the place of modernization in believing women's lives. Following our interpretations of these groups in Kaifeng, we offer a case study of the tradition of celibate women in Jingang, a historical Catholic missionary stronghold in the south of Henan Province; this allows us to explore the place of local popular traditions in women's negotiations of competing claims to their allegiance.

THE AMERICAN PROVIDENCE SISTERS: THE MISSION AND THE CROSS

The Congregation of the Sisters of Providence at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods came into existence when women religious from Catholic France were seen as necessary in order to bring Catholic education to the inhabitants of Indiana.[1] Under the charismatic leadership of Mother Theodore Guérin from Brittany, six Sisters of Providence had followed the request of the bishop of Vincennes to bring their calling—an active engagement in education and social service—to the cause of the revival of Catholicism in the state of Indiana (Mitchell, 1998; Wolf, 1990). They arrived in the United States in 1840. Eighty years later, members of this same Congregation once again followed the call of the church, in the person of the Italian Joseph Tacconi, the appointed vicar apostolic of Henan Province and bishop of Kaifeng.[2] In an agreement drawn up on 29 September 1920, the Superior General of the Sisters of Providence, the Reverend Mother Mary Cleophas, agreed 'to send six Sisters to establish a House of the Congregation and to conduct the School

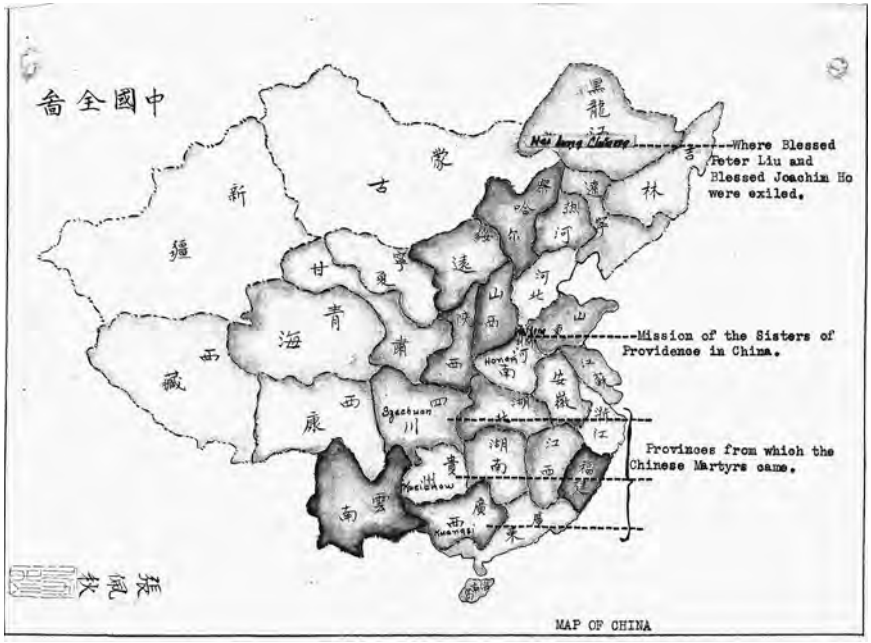
assigned them by the Bishop Vicar Apostolic at Kaifengfu' (Sisters of Providence Archive, hereafter SPA; CN-0083: Box 3, FF1).[3] In a very forthright study, written in 1990, the Sister of Providence Sister Ann Colette Wolf suggests that when the original group of Sisters, who came to be known as the 'Noble Six', set out 'to help China educate and train its women' (Wolf, 1990: 13) they found themselves surprised and vulnerable tools, at least initially, in the ambitious project of Bishop Joseph Tacconi for acceleration of Catholic missionizing among the local population, especially its elite families, through directly targeting the female population. He needed nuns to gain entry into the world of women that was barred to him.

All parties were in agreement with the sentiment expressed by the Cardinal Gasparri who wrote to Mother Mary Cleophas on behalf of the ailing Pope Benedict XV. He noted on the occasion of the imminent departure of the Sisters for China:

> It is evident that you appreciate the wretched condition of the young uninstructed girls of the Orient, since you have sent members of your Order into the Vicariate of Eastern Honan [Henan] to establish Catholic schools there under the auspices of the Bishop of Aradiens. What you have done is most agreeable to the Holy Father, who desires nothing more than that the light of the Gospel be carried to those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death.
>
> It is indeed *a matter of greatest import that the young girls of the highest ranks be rightly and sacredly moulded, for upon consideration one appreciates how much these young girls might do that would be more worthy of culture and humanity.*
>
> *There is great effort on the part of the sects to infect the minds of these young girls with various errors; hence, the August Pontiff is greatly delighted by the ardent faith with which are you hastening to extend the Kingdom of Christ, and he also trusts that you are vigorously planning the most holy work for future years* (SPA, CN-0083: Cardinal Gasparri, Dal Vaticano, to Reverend Mother Mary Cleophas, Superior General; emphasis added).

The Cardinal's reference to the targeting of Chinese females of the higher classes and to the competition among the various religious denominations for control over female education in China resonated with the Sisters. It also pointed to the dilemma of the Catholic Church in China: how to reach beyond their traditional rural, marginal and impoverished congregations to members of the more influential classes. In view of the lack of Catholic education for women, the Sisters of Providence were indispensable as providers of instruction to benefit girls and women of all social classes.

Within months of their arrival in 1920, the charismatic Sister Marie Gratia Luking, appointed as the local Superior, set up a school for young women. As she would write in 1935, 'America, which until a few years



Map 6.1 Mapping Catholic China, 1923. Map of China drawn by Zhang Peiqiu for the Sisters of Providence. SP Archive, Box 7, 1933–48. Printed with permission by Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, Inc.

ago had herself been a mission country, was awakening to the fact that she must give of what she had received' (SPA, *The Bugle Call*, XV(1), 1935: 3).[4] Contemplating reflectively over the 'cross'[5] the Sisters bore in their early period in Kaifeng, Sister Marie Gratia remembers: 'The poverty of the Chinese house, the entire absence of all modern conveniences, the accommodating of one's self to strange foods, the almost insuperable difficulties of the language, the strange customs, the limited range of social intercourse, the feeling of powerlessness before some of these difficulties called for the strong grace which accompanies a mission vocation' (SPA, *The Bugle Call,* XV(1), 1935: 3).

THE SITE OF RELIGIOUS LABOUR

The newly arrived Sisters were overwhelmed by the poverty, religious fervour and their ignorance of society's norms and customs around them. Writing for her home audience, Sister Marie Gratia recalled their earliest impressions in most vivid language. Her article suggests, on the one hand, a sensual overload of unfamiliar landscapes and people, of a cacophony of

sounds and shrill voices, strange colours and exotic smells; on the other hand, she records a keen sense of absence. 'There was no cathedral, no school, nothing. Everything was in embryo' (*Ibid*.: 4).

As repeated references in later years in letters to friends and family would testify, the zealously maintained cleanliness within the eventually established Providence compound—with cleanliness an absolute mantra for the Sisters—made for a stark contrast with 'the dirt and filth' outside, quickly engendering an apt and often cited metaphor for the state of spirituality of local society, and for the missionary road yet to be travelled. 'Everybody in our compound, Catechists, children, etc., is very clean', so Sister Francis de Sales Russell writes in November 1934 (SPA, Letter to Sister M. Theodore, dated 12 November 1934, Kaifeng). She continues, 'No words could describe the dirt and filth of the people outside. It is simply indescribable the way these people live.' The impact on Sister Francis was physical: for many months she suffered from 'violent' vomiting and dysentery. 'Generally every time I go out for any length of time, I return sick. The sights and smells do me up.'

The Sisters noted with shock the presence of other religions in Kaifeng on occasions when they observed the dragon dances that wound themselves through the streets to pray for relief from the devastating drought which afflicted Henan in 1920. They were even more sensitive to the 'pagan nuns who occupied the temples and whose reputation was none too good' (*Ibid*.: 4), awakening the Sisters' fears of being lumped together in popular perceptions of 'nuns' with what were referred to as 'disreputable' women dedicated to the worship of 'pagan' gods.

References to a Buddhist religious come a few years later in an article authored by Sister Marie Gratia entitled 'Can We Convert a Buddhist Virgin?' (SPA, *The Bugle Call* 8(4), 1934: 62) and tells the story of the cousin of one of the Chinese Sister Catechists, Sister Agnes. She refers to the cousin, who lives as a 'Buddhist virgin' whilst caring for an ailing mother. Interestingly, issues of the superiority of either religion are addressed through the spiritual state of their celibate women, with the Buddhist cousin claiming her serene and solitary meditative state was more conducive to spiritual perfection than the distractions offered by the Providence community. Although there is no doubt on the part of Sister Marie Gratia who is worshipping 'the true God', the Buddhist believer is allowed dignity and the miraculous working of Buddha who, so interprets the Sister, saved her from an unwanted marriage by turning her hair white.

The Catholic cathedral was situated right in the Hui Muslim quarter, but notes about the large Muslim population were even scarcer. Typical is this laconic, even dismissive, reference in the student missionary paper, *The Bugle Call*: 'Mohammedans are a class distinct from the Chinese and do not mingle with the natives. They are called *Hui-tse* by the Chinese, that is, *the people who are always going to return home*, but much to the chagrin of the natives the followers of Mohammed remain in the city. They have

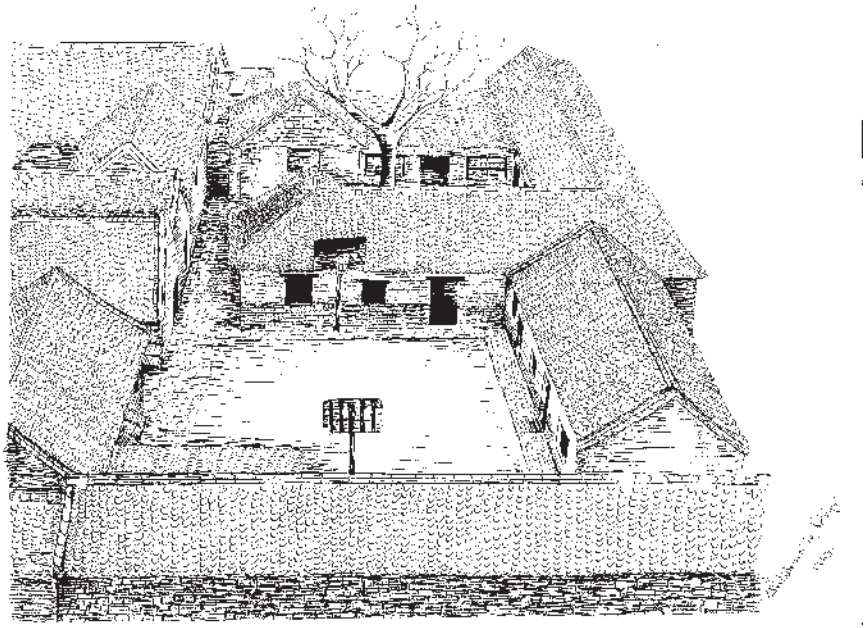


Figure 6.1 Sisters of Providence compound in Kaifeng, 1923. Printed with permission by Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, Inc.

a mosque where religious functions are carried out with the most exact observances. Yearly they observe a rigid fast and as far as we can learn do not depart from the teaching of the Koran. They occupy a section of the city adjacent to our mission . . . Conversions among this class are extremely rare. They do not inter-marry with the Chinese, nor is there the least social intercourse between the two peoples' (*The Bugle Call,* 1(1): 3).

The Sisters experienced civil strife and fierce military battles for Kaifeng led by rival warlords. They stayed on through assaults on the city's ancient walls and in the face of threats of military rampage and looting, leaving only in 1927. As Northern and Southern troops clashed, battling for supremacy, the Sisters feared being cut off from the outside world. They departed at the last possible moment, and they returned at the earliest possible moment, in April 1929. Fear of the 'diabolical' influence of the 'Red Doctrine' pervades letters sent back home, and the Soviet Russian presence in China was held responsible for the Sisters' experience of Chinese hostility towards Western foreigners in general and towards missionaries in particular. Thus even in their apparently remote mission station, the Sisters felt themselves part of global conflicts between the 'impious net' controlled by Soviet Russia and their own mission to bring a message of civilising faith. Social unrest and uncertainty made it inevitable that the Sisters should dread excursions beyond their courtyards, where soldiers and civilians alike during the

warlord years inspired dread. Yet even in moments where they had to flee amid the chaos, 'The element of adventure had a fairy-like power to change tragedy into comedy' (SPA, *The Bugle Call*, 5(1), 1935: 18).

The Providence Sisters also reported striking local social and cultural changes. Within the 1920s, the first decade of their life in China, they observed important shifts in fashion and in the general external appearance of a rapidly spreading commercial urban landscape. They noted such evidence as the disappearance of the queue, or pigtail, the men's hairstyle still ubiquitous when they arrived in Kaifeng; prohibitions on female students with bound feet being admitted to the school; the invasion of ordinary Kaifeng streets with commercial signboards. These signs indicated that changes apparent in China's many urban centres had come also to Kaifeng. The Sisters contributed to these developments when they insisted on getting girl students out of trousers and into frocks, and boy students out of skirts and into trousers! Their intent was to shape modernization as Christian morality. Whilst much was disapproved of, the Sisters approved of the proposed changes for women under the new Nationalist Government by which women attained the right to higher education; they applauded the official edicts against footbinding, the outlawing of arranged marriages, and the like. All these were deemed by the Sisters as the positive outcomes of a progressive 'Open Door' policy.

The Sisters had expected, even aspired to, the 'cross' of poverty, deprivation and barbarian customs. They expected to do battle for the conversion of Chinese souls and professed their readiness to literally give their lives. They were, however, less prepared for the conflicts and tensions that arose within the community of missionaries between the Sisters and the Bishop Joseph Tacconi, between the Sisters and their Chinese fellow religious and, most painful perhaps, among themselves. The Sisters had not anticipated that they would be caught up with everyone around them in the volatility of a society in transition, in turmoil and in the process of modernization between 'Chinese authenticity' and 'Western progress.' Nor did they expect that their presence would pose conflicts and dilemmas for local converts over how to express their new faith and allegiance to the American Sisters, whilst not compromising their place in local society where women's impact in public life was increasingly apparent whether through the use of mass media or through collective action.

When visiting the Providence motherhouse in Indiana to request Sisters for mission work in China, Bishop Joseph Tacconi had made promises to provide comprehensive material and practical support for their educational and welfare work. The Providence Sisters anticipated generous living quarters and school buildings where daughters of the more privileged classes could be invited to attend as day pupils and boarders. This was the vision conjured up by Bishop Tacconi. Upon arrival, however, the Sisters found a harsh climate, run-down buildings, lack of provisions in a food-starved county, staff with no English-language facility and little hope that their plans could be realised in good time.

Nothing in the Sisters' diaries and letters indicates that they had any inkling of how provocative the location of their extensive grounds must have appeared to local inhabitants, with the tall Catholic cathedral dominating a predominantly Hui Muslim quarter. Ignorance of the local culture and of vibrant developments that were taking place right across the nation and resonating in Kaifeng accounts in large measure for the fact that relatively little commentary on Kaifeng residents' reactions and responses entered the diary notes of the Sisters, apart from amusing accounts for the benefits of readers back in Indiana on the instant sensations caused by foreign appearance and religious dress.

The Providence Sisters' archive in Indiana contains drawings and photographs of the property the Providence Sisters took over for their use. Once the impressive home of a wealthy elite family, the compound contained more than a hundred rooms to house the many wives and extended household of the family. The Bishop had purchased the property, which had apparently been in some disrepair because it was 'spooked' and thus perhaps a bargain for the shrewd churchman, right in the Hui quarter of Kaifeng, close to Kaifeng's major ancient mosques. The property was surrounded by densely populated neighbourhoods, the majority belonging to the large Hui Muslim population, and close to a much-resented public music hall. The music hall was situated just opposite the building which housed the Sisters' cells, and it was said that 'horrible music is dispensed on summer nights till 5 A.M.' (*The Bugle Call*, 5(1), 1925: 8). It was also close to the *Shengmu* (Heaven's Holy Mother) Temple and to the soldiers' barracks. Every morning, soldiers would practice at the officers' lodge opposite the main gate during the time of mass, with drums and band playing. As the Sisters wrote, they ventured out as rarely as possible, so did not worry about the soldiers. Even anti-foreign demonstrations during this time, organized by students in Kaifeng, happened only infrequently.

When the property was purchased for the use of the Providence Sisters, half of it was retained by the Bishop for the cathedral and his own residence, separated by a wall from the Providence Sisters' site. The Sisters' site had five courtyards, lined by small buildings containing the dispensary, classrooms, a chapel, a knitting machine room, the Sisters' refectory, kitchens, a parlour, a library and a music room, dormitories and dining rooms for older and younger girls, the Sisters' cells and the laundry room. When we consider that the *Huamei nü xuexiao* (Chinese American Girls' School) in its opening year received 40 pupils, admitting in subsequent years ever higher numbers of pupils, we may understand how crowded the quarters were.[6]

Whatever the less than perfect conditions of the compound, one Sister noted, 'There's the touch of Western culture, the result of the Sisters' struggle against dirt and disease. Outside those walls, horror envelopes you, permeates you, all but drowns you' (SPA, Sister Francis de Sales Russell,

Letter to Sister May Theodore *et al*., dated 29 December 1934: 16). Only divine inspiration and support from the small band of Sisters could instil the missionaries with the much-needed strength 'to look beneath the crust and see the soul to save' (*Ibid*.).

THE PROJECT OF NATIVIZATION AND CREATION OF A CHINESE SISTERHOOD

The Providence Sisters in Kaifeng and in Saint Mary-of-the-Woods were unanimous in their wish for admission of Chinese women to the Providence Sisters. As early as 1925, letters and diary entries discuss preparations for a Chinese novitiate, its financial viability and the qualifications expected from candidates. Whereas the bishop, anxious about economic burdens on already stressed diocese budgets, vetoed early plans for a novitiate, the debate among the Sisters concerned the quality of the candidates for admission. The Superior of the Kaifeng mission during this time (1923–27), Sister Joseph Henry, argued for piety as a decisive and sufficient criterion. However, the three young Kaifeng women she put forward were rejected by Sister Marie Gratia, her predecessor, as too poorly educated and too physically handicapped by their bound feet to be able to perform the task each member of the Providence Sisters, as a teaching order, was expected to contribute to the Society (Wolf, 1990). Sister Marie Gratia was anxious to commence the process of proselytization among Chinese by Chinese, vital to the eventual victory of the Catholic Church in China, with the best possible candidates. She wrote to Mother Mary Cleophas that 'So much depends on the first seed sown that one cannot help but hope it will be good seed' (quoted in Wolf, 1990: 56). What this indicated quite early on was a conflict common to many a mission, that is, whether to 'go native' or to stay unchanged, continuing the culture of the motherhouse. Sister Ann Colette Wolf noted that 'Sister Marie Gratia believed that unless the missionary wherever possible aimed to think and act as the Chinese thought and acted, she could not make much of an impact on those she had come to serve. In contrast, Sister Joseph Henry was convinced that the most important duty she had as Superior was to insist on the strictest carrying out of the minutest detail of the life of a Sister of Providence as it was lived in the United States' (Wolf, 1990).

Further illuminating information on these debates comes from a later report on the background of the initiative for The Providence Sister-Catechist Society (SPA, Providence Sister-Catechist Records, 7–0-2: 4. Sister Francis de Sales to Reverend Mother Rose Angela, 24 November 1961). Sister Marie Gratia's stay with the Maryknoll Sisters in during their exile from Kaifeng (1927–29) shaped her thoughts over the nature of the native society she wanted to found in Kaifeng. It was to be modelled along the habit and rule which governed the Maryknoll Sisters' model of

Figure 6.2 New Arrivals Waiting to Be Instructed, 1931, *The Bugle Call*, 10(4): 57. Printed with permission by Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, Inc.

indigenization (see Bradshaw, 1982). More generally, however, the decision made by Sister Marie Gratia and the Providence Sisters needs to be seen as part of the thinking which informed many debates among foreign missionaries in China at that time over how to resolve 'the problem' of continuing the mission in the face of danger and obstruction to foreign

missionaries' work, as well as how to conduct relations between foreign and Chinese religious within a given congregation. The consensus was in favour of 'a native Society, separate from a foreign Community' (SPA, Providence Sister-Catechist Records, 7–0-2: 4. Sister Francis de Sales to Reverend Mother Rose Angela, 24 November 1961). The letter continues, 'There seems to be an ingrained hatred of foreigners and their ways in the Chinese. In their own Communities they would be happy with their own customs of housing, clothes, food, etc. The foreigners would be healthier and happier not to have to go "native"' (*Ibid*.). The experience of the China missionary Father Lebbe, a Vincentian, who was forced after 'terrible persecution' in his own Community to leave his order, resonated among his fellow missionaries as well as among the Providence Sisters. Critical of the colonial and hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church in China, the Belgian priest had supported what became known as the 'Tientsin [Tianjin] Model', advocating compatibility with science and democracy and propagating 'social Catholicism' for a more progressive understanding of the role Catholicism could play in the 'national salvation' of a reforming China. The demise of this missionary model came quickly with the arrival of Vatican representatives, the Vicars Apostolic, in 1922 (Jacques Leclercq, 1958). The Providence Sisters, in contrast, required a solution that would allow the greatest possible educational influence on local women without blurring boundaries between themselves and the Chinese co-religious. They also saw the need for a native Sisterhood in order to continue the mission work during times when political and military unrest would enforce the foreign Sisters' withdrawal, perhaps even their permanent departure, from the country.

CREATING THE FOUNDATION FOR A NATIVE CATHOLIC SOCIETY

Bishop Tacconi consented to provide two residential compounds with adjoining buildings from the large cathedral grounds for the use of the native catechists. This was to be a temporary measure until a new site could be built elsewhere. He also agreed to provide for their basic needs, stipulating that 'the food, clothing and everything required for their use be Chinese, nothing expensive, both to minimize expenses and also to prepare the catechists for the circumstances in which they will have to live on the missions' (SPA, Providence Sister-Catechist Records, 7–0-2: 4, Box 29. Sister Marie Gratia to Mother M. Raphael, 11 November 1929). In this same letter, in which Sister Marie Gratia conveyed news of preparations for the commencement of the Society, she also expressed concern over 'a spirit of mutual responsibility' needed to carry out the new venture, involving the Diocese under Bishop Tacconi as much as the Providence congregation. Intense negotiations in Kaifeng between the Bishop and the Providence

Sisters (guided to a certain extent by the Motherhouse in Saint Mary-of-the-Woods) decided the nature of religious instruction and the nature of the work and role in the overall mission project in Henan but, if needed, also elsewhere in China.

Six months of postulancy was to serve as preparation for the religious' reception into the new Society, at which point the uniform of the Catechist was granted. The Catechists would 'be invested with the miraculous medal of the Immaculate Conception blessed on the occasion and conferred by the Bishop or whomsoever he may appoint . . . After two years' novitiate they shall make temporary vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience for one year' (*Ibid*.: 2). A black veil was worn from this point onwards, replacing the white veil worn as Novice. In order for Mother M. Raphael and her council to form a proper impression of the proposed attire, Sister M. Margaretta was instructed to dress 'a doll in the uniform' to be sent to the Motherhouse for inspection and approval (*Ibid*.: 4).

Sister Marie Gratia then outlined the spiritual exercises to support the catechists for their intended work on the missions. They would share with Chinese Christians the recital of the same morning and night prayers, with the addition of brief meditation, holy mass and sacraments, noon prayers, rosary and evening spiritual contemplation. In addition, weekly confession and a monthly and annual retreat were to add to the spiritual discipline and firmness of purpose of catechists who would frequently find themselves far removed from Kaifeng, in difficult and often unwelcoming communities.

Figure 6.3 American Sisters of Providence, Chinese Catechist-Novices, Professed and Postulants, 1931, Nan Kuan (Nanguan) Convent, Kaifeng. Printed with permission by Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, Inc.

Their responsibilities were to be catechetical work, working among women and children, instructing them for full religious life and sacraments. Where possible, religious instruction was to be provided in schools; otherwise Catechists would visit in homes, ready to reprimand those in danger of lapsing in their faith. Catechists would also be asked to teach religious knowledge to lower grade classes in primary schools, help with dispensary work in mission stations and visit the sick at home, facilitating access to potential converts. Holy baptism could thus be administered to anyone close to death who was willing to receive the sacraments. Furthermore, catechists were to train suitable Christian women to care for church and priest vestments (*Ibid*.).

THE CHINESE PROVIDENCE SISTER CATECHISTS: STATUS, ROLE AND GOVERNANCE

The Bishop had set January 1930 as the beginning date of the Society. On 7 May 1930, the first group of postulants, Mary Chao and Lucy Shen, received the grey habit and white veil of the Catechist. 'Our seven remaining postulants are eagerly awaiting the happy day when they too will be allowed to don the pretty grey habit of the Catechist' (SPA, Providence Sister-Catechist Records, 7–0-2: 4). Sister Marie Gratia gave a full description of a typical Providence Catechist to readers of *The Bugle Call*: 'See a young girl of medium height, slender, robed in a long, loose gray gown . . . A gray leather belt confines the robe; a gray cape falls in graceful folds to the waistline. The novice Catechist wears a white veil, but, novitiate days completed, the Providence Catechist will wear a black veil. A gray rosary at her side and a large medal of the Blessed Virgin suspended on a black cord about her neck complete the uniform of the Providence-in-China Catechist' (SPA, *The Bugle Call*, 9(4), 1930: 61).

Some Catechists impressed Sister Marie Gratia with their spirit of poverty. 'I have been looking at their clothes. They beg and beg to keep their old things until they are patched and patched. I am so edified' (SPA, Providence Sister-Catechist Records, Sister Marie Gratia to Mother M. Bernard Laughlin, 10 July 1940, Kaifeng).

The linkage of race and status implicit in the religious hierarchy of American Sisters and Chinese Catechists became a subtext of grievance for some Chinese women and a difficult historical legacy for the American Sisters, following the Sisters even when they fled to Taiwan. The Providence Sister Eugenia, when writing on their situation in Taiwan in 1955, reflected on the historical origins of the Sister Catechists in Kaifeng. She felt it necessary to dismiss misconceptions of the Sister Catechists' role as conventionally defined as 'a layperson instructing in faith' on a voluntary basis. Such had never been the role of Chinese Sisters:

> During the past quarter century a new meaning has been added to the word "Catechist." To the initiated it now means a native Religious, man or woman, bound by simple annual vows. The group to which the catechist belongs lives together, whenever possible, and devotes itself to the teaching, catechetical work, or to dispensary and medical clinic work.
>
> Such a group is the Providence Catechist Sisters, established in 1929 with the Motherhouse and novitiate in Kaifeng, Honan [Henan], China, under the protection of Bishop Tacconi of Honan (SPA, Providence Sister Catechists, 1929–1986: 48–9, 93. 7–0-2: 4. Sister Eugenia).

This view was in line with the decree of the Vatican that no 'native' religious society could take perpetual vows; instead, Sister Catechists' vows were to be taken annually.

The admission of Mary Chao and Lucy Sun (also referred to as Shen) in 1929, both from Henan, was soon followed by Agnes Li from Kaifeng. 'The project was the first of its kind in China', so wrote Sister Marie Gratia (SPA, diary of Sister Francis de Sales, Diary I, 1939). On 1 May 1929, Bishop Tacconi celebrated mass and blessed the candidates who received black capes and white veils.

In January 1932, news reached the Sisters that the first formal approbation of the Holy See had been given to the Providence Sister-Catechist Society, raising it to the status of a religious congregation.[7] On 31 May 1933, Bishop Tacconi signed a deed for the Catechist Society to erect a new convent; in June that same year, Sister Marie Gratia started the process of building, while continuing to fundraise among expatriate and Chinese philanthropists. It appears that shoddy construction was the reason for the collapse of the protective wall between the novitiate and the street, 'thus causing great annoyance, as the passers-by liked to see beyond. A good brick wall was most necessary, but, the expense!' (SPA, Providence Sister Catechists, 127–0-2: 4).

The Chinese Catechist Sisters' convent in the Nanguan district, where Sister Francis de Sales Russell took charge in 1934, provided reflections over the differences that straitened economic circumstances and cultural deprivations imposed on the Providence community of American and Chinese co-religious in Nanguan. Cleanliness of the kitchen and cooking utensils, observation of hygiene as well as the tradition of eating together and paying attention to table etiquette all became matters for reflection and, to a certain extent, accounted for the practice of segregated food preparation and eating. Sister Francis remarked in a revealing aside to her family back home: 'If going to China is a big step, going to Nan-Kuan [Nanguan] is a step further. S. Mon. and S. Marie Patricia [normally in charge of Nanguan] are saints to be able to stand it' (SPA, Sister Francis de Sales Russell, Letter to Sister May Theodore *et al.,* dated 29 December 1934, Kaifeng).

A description of the location and site of the Nanguan Convent in 1934 states laconically: 'Nan-Kuan is a suburb of Kaifeng, outside the walls [of

Kaifeng City], and consists mostly of unspeakably dirty mud-houses, foul open shops, bad districts, and numerous soldier barracks. In case of bandit, Communist, or inter-army troubles, Nan-Kuan would be the butt' (SPA, Sister Francis de Sales Russell, Letter to Sister May Theodore *et al*., dated 29 December 1934: 3, Kaifeng). Not only was the community vulnerable in times of military action, even inside the Nanguan compound American Sisters lacked their own private space and were forced to sleep in the postulants' dormitory.

The primitive condition of the Nanguan convent was related in many letters written by the American Sisters to their readership back home. Icy brick floors, kitchen fires fed by coal dust on which Chinese and 'foreign' foods were separately prepared, desolate surroundings and fly-infested cooking surfaces all revealed their straitened finances. Another reason, however, accounted for a certain absence of home comforts and the contrast with the convent in town. Sister Francis de Sales Russell wrote that 'S.M.G. [Sister Marie Gratia] doesn't want the Catechists to become accustomed to foreign things. When they go out to the country missions where life is still rawer, they might be dissatisfied. As it is they have things a million times nicer than they had in their homes. Most of them say that before they came they were used to living and sleeping on a pressed dirt floor' (SPA, Sister Francis de Sales Russell, Letter to Sister May Theodore *et al*., dated 29 December 1934: 5, Kaifeng).

The Chinese and English languages, music, arithmetic and sewing were taught (SPA, Providence Sister Catechists, 7–0-2: 4. Box 29:16) to the Sister Catechists, arousing considerable interest among wealthy Chinese families with daughters. One such young woman was Therese Jen who came to Kaifeng with a cow as her dowry (*Ibid*.: 20). Regulations asked for postulants to bring a dowry of 150 Chinese dollars. This was to cover their expenses during the months of preparation for full professed status. More often than not, poverty-stricken families were unable to afford what was a very large sum of money, and the Providence Sisters had to rely on donations. This meant that in certain situations applicants were asked to delay entry into the religious society or were turned down altogether because they were unable to raise the amount required for admission.

THE CHINESE PROVIDENCE SISTERS

While the Providence Sisters in Kaifeng were making preparations in 1929 to set up the Sister Catechist Society, a somewhat higher status was considered for a certain group of girls. Sister Maria Gratia wrote to the Motherhouse that 'The Bishop wanted to make arrangements at once through the Consul here to have Miss Adeline (the Italian girl) and Miss Ying of Pekin who has been with us since September to go to Saint Mary's at once to enter the Novitiate as soon as it could be arranged. I told him I had written

you but had no reply. It would be the greatest triumph for our cause if you would take Miss Adeline, Teresa Ying and Agnes Li (our present candidate [for the Sister Catechist Society]) to America to enter the novitiate. They are all most promising' (SPA, Box 29, 7–0-2: 4, Sister Marie Gratia to Mother M. Raphael, 11 November 1929). She continued that she considered it would be most effective if in Kaifeng they focused on training Catechists for primary school level, whereas those returning from Saint Mary-of-the-Woods as Chinese Sisters of Providence could devote themselves to the task of higher education.

ONE MISSION AND TWO COMMUNITIES

'Would you like to know how the two Communities are run side by side here?' asks Sister Francis de Sales of her readers back home. She answers, 'The Catechists are really separate and some day (the Bishop says not for 50 years will they be ready for it) they will grow their own' (SPA, Sister Francis de Sales Russell, Letter to Sister May Theodore *et al*., dated 29 December 1934: 6, Kaifeng).[8] This was a reference to a decision that the Constitution of the Society providing for self-governance would be dormant until the bishop, as Vicar Apostolic of East Henan, judged the Chinese Catechists to be sufficiently mature (SPA, Providence Sister Catechists, 1929–1986; Note from Sister Marie Gratia to Reverend Mother M. Raphael, Letter dated 16 July 1931). The Constitution was closely modelled on the holy rules of the Providence Society, with minor modifications 'to suit conditions' (*Ibid*.), emphasizing the virtues to be practised, particular duties, instructions and material life. Much in the values to be nurtured, such as self-effacement, humility and obedience, the spirit of self-sacrifice, modesty and chaste poverty would have suited these women. Other strictures would have been more difficult to execute, such as the obligation when travelling to 'request the favor of a secluded apartment and be served there; they shall not eat with seculars when it is possible to do otherwise' (Constitution, Chapter Twenty-Two. 49. SPA, Providence Sister Catechists; attached to Letter from Marie Gratia to Reverend Mother M. Raphael, dated 16 July 1931). Also, prohibitions on seeing family, unless in case of emergency, will have been painful to the young women thrown into the strict regime of such an alien discipline of body and mind.

Daily discipline was strict. Rising at 4:50 a.m., Novices and Postulants said their morning prayers in Chinese, while at the back the two American Sisters in charge would be simultaneously praying in English. This was followed by meditations, again read aloud in the two languages (the Chinese was read by the most educated Chinese Sister, Sister Gertrude). Six o'clock in the morning was Latin mass for all. While the Providence Sisters continued to say office, the Catechist Sisters engaged in their tasks until 7:00 a.m. when they would eat their morning meal, separately from their American co-religious. Sister Francis remarked, after describing local

food etiquette, 'We have not yet gone native with regard to food' (*Ibid*.: 7). Breakfast was then followed by religious instruction and subsequently, by classes in English, in rudimentary Latin for the purpose of prayer, in arithmetic, in the Chinese language, in writing and literature as well as singing. Twice a week this education would be supplemented by classes in Catholic doctrine, taught by a priest. At 11:45 a.m., prayer in Chinese was followed by recreation between 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m., a time used by the American Sisters to engage in informal conversation and to practice their Chinese language skills. More prayer was followed by classes until 4:00 p.m. Then choir practice filled in the time until the five o'clock office, after which the Catechists were at leisure until supper time at 5:30 p.m. The meal was followed by sewing or study until evening prayers at 6:30. The Rosary in Chinese (the American Sisters would use English) would be concluded by everyone gathering together when the Catechists could occupy themselves by sewing or knitting, while listening to a reading from a religious text. Evening prayers concluded with night prayers at 8:30, after which all would retire to bed (SPA, Sister Francis de Sales Russell, Letter to Sister May Theodore *et al*., dated 29 December 1934, Kaifeng). This was a daily discipline of mind and body, designed to prepare the Catechists for their missionary task in the poorer rural parishes. Thus a delicate balancing act had to be achieved: the Catechists had to be educated, instructed and immersed into a life-world alien to their accustomed ways of life, but at the same time they were required to maintain their commonality with the local women they were to teach and/or convert.

Postulancy lasted six months, the novitiate two years. Led by Sister Marie Patricia, the Mistress of Novices, who was assisted by Sister Monica Marie and Sister Gertrude, one of the most educated Chinese Professed Sister Catechists, the young women were prepared for their mission in the most difficult rural areas, often without even a priest.

WORKING FOR GOD AND THE PROVIDENCE MISSION

The Catechists were entrusted with multiple tasks: they were sent out to assist priests in their parish work and conversion of 'pagans'; they staffed outlying mission stations which provided welfare and social services and always religious instruction; and they visited the sick at home and supported the faith of isolated Catholics. They taught in the various schools and cared for orphans in the Holy Childhood Home in Kaifeng. They provided clerical support, purchased food, did the laundry and cooked and cleaned in the Nanguan Convent and in the Central House. Besides the Providence Sisters' institutions, the Bishop's household and the Kaifeng seminary with its male teachers were also in need of staff to supply clean, ironed clothing. Visiting priests needed vestments and Neophytes required baptism garments, and female Catechists worked to provide all these needs.

The first Catechists began to work among children in September 1934. A letter written in 1935 by Sister Francis de Sales Russell from Kaifeng makes reference to the work of the Chinese Sister Catechists (SPA, 2, Box 7. Letter dated 23 November 1935). It conveys distrust of the Sisters as 'Chinese'; she says of the situation at the orphanage, managed by Chinese Sisters in the absence of a sick Sister Agatha: '[W]e all know that the Chinese cannot long take care of anything by themselves without reverting to type. Leave them alone a little while and they go back to filthy ways of living' (*Ibid*.: 3). This slighting reference suggests the difficulties of working together at close quarters, considerations which in the late 1920s had given rise to the founding of the Sister Catechist Society. Given the small size of the mission and the need to cooperate in their many tasks, however, necessity did not always make this separation feasible.

Yet distrust was also mixed with pity. 'Women are slaves in China. It is only in the last 10 years that women have been allowed to go to school. Poor creatures! Their faces show the dull slavery that has been their lot for thousands of years' (SPA, Sister Francis de Sales Russell, Letter to Sister May Theodore *et al*., dated 29 December 1934: 6). This was a strong sentiment felt by all members of the Providence Society, which was a teaching order, for the mostly uneducated and parochial women whom they recruited for the Catechist Society.

In spite of their presumed limitations, the Chinese Sisters had opened up rural missions hitherto unthinkable for the American Sisters. Within five years, they were staffing eight missions in the countryside, with a ninth to be opened shortly. Sister Francis gives an illustration of their successful approach to converting the natives: 'Sister Rose, the most foxy and most modern one of the whole crowd [of Chinese Providence Catechists], came back from her mission a few days ago to ask SMG [Sister Marie Gratia] for another Sister for their mission. There were two there and the priest wants three. Before they went there, he had only a handful of Christians for Mass on Sundays. Shortly after their arrival, they made a census of the Christians and talked to them, especially the women. Little by little, the people began to come to Church and now he has a whole congregation' (*Ibid*.: 3). Another Sister, Sister Bernard, who appears to have been active as a Catechist long before the Society was set up, was thought most suitable for 'some real missionary work' in a place (not named in the letter) without priests or a tradition of Catholicism. 'She says they are very primitive people and she rather dreads the job, but she is a fine one for it' (*Ibid*.: 4).

'GOING NATIVE'—MOULDING THE PROVIDENCE CATECHIST

When Sister Marie Gratia Luking lamented to the Mother Superior, Mother Mary Bernard Laughlin, that Chinese women were unaccustomed to traditions of celibacy, she was ignorant of the widespread historical and

modern traditions of Chinese female celibacy. These covered *Zhishunü* (women who remained celibate upon marriage), *Gupowu* (single women's houses), 'faithful maiden cults' (W.J. Lu, 2008) and other celibate statuses Chinese women chose within various religious traditions, including indeed the Catholic *Shouzhen guniang* she would have known about. For Chinese women religious, Sister Marie Gratia wrote, 'there were no traditions' of celibate religious life (SPA, 7–0-2: 4, Box 29. Sister Marie Gratia Luking to Mother Mary Bernard Laughlin, Letter dated 1 July 1939, Kaifeng). Young women 'not so highly gifted' or 'of a careless nature' had to be guarded, instructed carefully and patiently and watched over during their time of preparation for full status as Catechist Sister. Tensions inside the Providence community over conduct and in particular over obedience became a source of worry to Sister Marie Gratia.

It is difficult to find evidence which would tell us what created such tensions that by 17 January 1938 the Postulant Theresa Yu is described as 'giving us considerable trouble. She has been slipping notes to [the Chinese] Sister Augustine, a Novice who is helping at the Holy Childhood. She can not be out of sight for a moment' (SPA, Sister Francis de Sales Russell, Letter to Sister May Theodore *et al*., dated 29 December 1934: 28, Kaifeng). One day later, Sister Marie Gratia is forced to 'unvest Sister Augustine who is the originator of an insurrection' (*Ibid*.: 28). She received support for this from the Bishop who demanded dismissal of all participants in the affair. When Sister Marie Gratia came to 'unvest' Sister Augustine, 'she had a hard time getting the habit off' (*Ibid*.: 28). It furthermore appears to have been this Novice who tried to induce others to leave the Providence Sisters to set up a society of their own. She too claimed support from the Bishop.

On 19 January, Sister John (Anna Yang) and Sister Josephine (Josephine Tu from Hsiao Yao, Henan) went to the Bishop who granted dispensation to Sister John from her vows. Sister Josephine was told by him 'that she was too stupid.' It appears that disobedience or alleged disobedience and refusal to listen and obey were the most prevalent attributes most resented by the Providence Sisters. It is difficult to unravel all the causes which contributed to deteriorating relations but when Sister John was leaving, Sister Francis recalls that she confided in her 'that from the time of Sister Eugenia's death she had done one thing after another to get herself put out of the Society. Obedience was getting harder and harder, and she felt that sooner or later she would go' (*Ibid*.: 32). Another Catechist, Sister Philomine (Mary Li) left after seven years with the Providence Sisters (*Ibid*.). The exact circumstances, the nature of the relationships and the developments leading up to the departure from the convents, are by now difficult to establish.

Whereas Chinese Catechists were under close surveillance as long as they stayed in the Nanguan Convent, their prolonged stay in rural missions gave rise to tensions between the Providence Sisters and the priests, many of them Italian, under whose guidance the Catechists worked. Fear over the deterioration of the spiritual life of Catechists away on their duties was

compounded by the low opinion of 'the priests.' According to Sister Marie Gratia, writing in 1936, they 'do not all realize the importance of strict observance . . . A few of the Sisters have told me how in some places the Priests have encouraged the Sisters to leave saying their Office in common, and to go on long trips to the country unaccompanied, etc., another even suggested that they take off their Holy Habit and go out to some places. The poor, young Sisters have such problems to face . . . It would seem that some of the Priests only want to see how far they can go in each laying down a law for himself' (*Ibid*.: 3).

In December 1941, the American Sisters were placed under house arrest by the occupying Japanese forces and subsequently transported to the Weishien (*Weixian*) Internment Camp for foreign residents. After five months of internment, the Sisters spent two years in a school run by Spanish Sisters in Beijing, returning to Kaifeng only in 1945. During all these years, there had been 'no communication whatever with the Chinese' (SPA, Box 29, 7–0-2: 4. Sister Francis de Sales to Reverend Mother Rose Angela, Letter dated 24 November 1961). Returning to Kaifeng, the Sisters were confronted with a changed and more difficult community among the Nanguan novitiate, with the discipline of old replaced by internal factionalism. In a letter to Indiana, Sister Maria Gratia talked of dissension among professed Catechists which made progress impossible 'in getting the Chinese Sister-Catechists spiritually rehabilitated. Five were recently dismissed and one or two more may have to go' (SPA, Providence Sister-Catechist Records, Sister Marie Gratia to Mother M. Bernard Laughlin, Letter dated 25 December 1946, Kaifeng). Intense loyalties to a chosen leader and animosity towards rival cliques were an enduring feature of convent life.

Where a Providence Sister gives more detailed descriptions of Chinese Catechists (as in a letter written by Sister Francis [SPA, Sister Francis de Sales Russell, Letter to Sister May Theodore *et al*., dated 29 December 1934: 8–10, Kaifeng]), the descriptions are confined to physical features and implementation of duties. No references appear about family background, individual motivation for entering a religious society, history of conversion or personal insights into a given individual, revealing of the social distance between Providence Sisters and local Catechists. Only one observation allows for a tantalising glimpse of unequal social relations among the Chinese women, otherwise often grouped together as daughters from poor, disadvantaged and mostly rural families: 'Sister Angela [a Catechist] has a better education and comes from a little better home than the others and is inclined to be a little superior in her way' (*Ibid*.: 9). It is such 'superior' quality that inclined religious women from more well-to-do classes to continue as *Shouzhen guniang*, independent, celibate female religious.

Occasional observations are revealing but rarely followed up as when in 1924 a profile in *The Bugle Call* of two young Kaifeng girls, Wang Chao Wei (Mary Wang) and Liou Hung Hsu (Mary Liou), mentions in passing that 'They aspire to be Sisters some day. Their object is to become leaders

of their own Chinese girls into the realm of Christian womanhood' (SPA, *The Bugle Call,* 3(5), 1924: 72).

Many factors generated an uncertain and often trying atmosphere for the members of the Providence community in Kaifeng: news of military campaigns; personal witnessing of the ravages inflicted by war on increasing numbers of wounded and mutilated soldiers for whom the Sisters cared when trains transporting military personnel came to a temporary stop at Kaifeng Railway Station; intensification of generalised insecurity; frequent bombings of the City; and constant anxiety over the economic and political viability of the Sisters' mission projects. Although letters assured those at home of the Sisters' faith in divine providence, this may not have been altogether the case with local Sisters. For Chinese Catechists, teachers, and staff, personal conflict over allegiance with, or against, the American Sisters during these years would have further exacerbated tensions and informed perceptions of personal relationships.

The Chinese Sisters had stayed on in Kaifeng when the American Sisters were taken to Weixian Internment Camp. Among them was Sister Agnes Joan, one of the few fully ordained Chinese Providence Sisters. She notes in her diary, in short and succinct phrases, their fate under Japanese occupation when Kaifeng City government officials took careful inventory of all possessions and also of staff allegiances, resulting in the loss of position for a number of teachers. The Chinese Sisters had felt a clear foreboding in 1942 over the increased likelihood of the imminent removal of the American Sisters from the country. Sister Agnes Joan's notes suggest that loyalty and responsibility on the part of local Sisters towards the community of Providence Sisters, under the leadership of the American Motherhouse, and towards the survival of their welfare and educational projects in Kaifeng were tinged by fear of their own prospects should the missionary institutions come under attack (SPA, Diary Notes of Sister Agnes Joan. 1 Box 5, 8 December 1941 to 24 August 1942).

In the immediate months following 1945, the year of their return to Kaifeng from the national capital, the American Providence Sisters could proudly point to the promising growth of their small community, which in 1947 counted 59 professed Sisters, nine Novices and 11 Postulants. In 1948, however, their thoughts were focused on the sustainability and integrity of the religious community without their American Sisters' leadership. Indeed, discussions among all missionary societies in China arose over the impending evacuation and the fate of their native members. Sister Marie Gratia had asked the Superior for advice, and in response to a letter from the Mother Mary Bernard Laughlin, she wrote, 'The answer you give about the Sister-Catechists going to the U.S.A. assures me of God's Holy Will. Some of the Sisters thought, in case we have to leave China later, say by order of the American Consul, it would be nice to take the ones here, all young, along for some training. I, myself, feel what you and the members of the Council have decided, is best. Three other American communities have

taken their Chinese personnel over, or have that intention, but the Chinese Sisters of those communities are a part of the American House, even though they have made their novitiate over here, while the Sister-Catechists are a distinct, native society. I really believe if they were consulted, which has not been done, they would prefer to remain in their own country' (SPA, Providence Sister-Catechist Records, Sister Marie Gratia to Mother M. Bernard Laughlin, Letter dated 20 July 1948, Kaifeng).

In all, 18 Catechists Sisters decided to join the American Sisters and departed for Formosa (Taiwan). To quote Sister Francis de Sales, 'Eighteen wanted to go with her [Sister Marie Gratia]; the others said they would try to hold our places in Kaifeng and the house of studies in Peking. Some of the finest, staunchest Sisters in their Community offered to stay behind and weather the storm. Sister Clare was left in charge of the Sisters in Kaifeng and Sister Mary Catherine was in charge of the Sisters who stayed in Peking. Both these Sisters were real *women* and sterling religious. These Sisters are in the Church of Silence. There has been no real news of them. No doubt many of the 42 who stayed behind have had to return to their homes' (SPA, Providence Sister-Catechist Records. Box 29, 7–0-2: 4. Sister Francis de Sales to Reverend Mother Rose Angela, 24 November 1961, original emphasis). These letters suggest that the American Providence Sisters believed their project to 'nativize' Chinese fellow religious had succeeded.

When the missionaries left behind their religious, educational and welfare institutions, which had served so well the modernization drive of the 'Christian general' Feng Yuxiang, these were quickly appropriated by the Communist Party/State for its own use. The very efficiency of the organizations eased the 'handover' into Communist control and their transformation into institutions instilled with a new revolutionary purpose. The intrinsic association of Christianity with the 'objective enemy' of a sovereign, independent China in the manifesto of the Communist Party/State entailed the necessary symbolic and political discrediting of all public institutions previously claimed by Western missionaries. At the same time, their takeover by the Communist State transformed what had previously been effective brokers of the Christian mission into equally effective brokers of Communist ideology and legitimization of a new rule.

It is disputed how soon the native Chinese Providence Sister Catechists at the Nanguan convent declared independence from their American Motherhouse, and how many vowed their allegiance to the Communist Government. Eventually, however, all Sister Catechists integrated into the official patriotic Church. Ironically, the women most derided by the Providence Sisters for their unsuitability to a life of disciplined cloistered life, the 'Chinese Virgins', would offer the local authorities the greatest resistance. This most 'native', but not 'nativized', institution of virginal religious adopted instead a fluid approach to the growing official persecution of religion after 1949 when it dissolved its most visible spaces of congregation and education and merged into the silenced, but quietly supportive, community of the faithful.

In adopting such an approach, they fell back on centuries of tradition—neither silenced at home nor colonized by the universal Church.

We have shifted perspectives in this chapter to focus on Catholic women on the inside and on the institutional margins of the Catholic Church in Kaifeng. Officially sanctioned and actively pursued modernization of the nation through the education of its women served the purpose of Catholic (and other Christian) women's organizations well, strengthening their goal of widening the influence of their organization in Chinese intellectual and social life. But as the case study of the American Providence Sisters in Kaifeng also illustrates, when they successfully entered a partnership with the government intent on raising the level of female education, their widening of the public space saw a concomitant diminishing influence of the space hitherto occupied by an indigenous institution of female religiosity, the *Shouzhen guniang*. Yet while the role of *Shouzhen guniang* in Church affairs was greatly curtailed in the course of the foreign Sisters' systematic 'nativization' of locally indigenous forms of celibate women, their standing nevertheless remained high in the community of believers. The intimate knowledge of local affairs and the fearless character of many of these single, celibate women would prove indispensable to the survival of the Church in subsequent years of civil war and during the years of persecution under Communist rule.

7 Catholic Virgins and the Growth of Local Spaces for Women

> The Instruction of Propaganda Fide issued in 1784 regulated the activities of the *Virgins*: '*In no public meeting of men will these Virgins preach the Word of God*, or teach or secretly read or individually perform, or in any way announce: for this is rejected by the Apostle [Paul]' (Bradshaw, 1982: 31; emphasis added).
>
> Like in Buddhism, through Christian religious activities, women forged communicative affiliations among themselves in a realm that was partially separated from the male realm (Standaert, 2001: 396).

In a study of late Imperial society, Eugenio Menegon (2004: 198) traces a tradition of celibacy nurtured by both Buddhism and Daoism—each varying in strength through time—which were manifested through different forms and exemplified in powerful role models (*Guanyin* and *Miaoshan* as Buddhist Virgin goddesses; the goddess-shamaness *Linshui Furen* in Daoism). These traditions in turn opened up possibilities for Western missionaries to imaginatively insert the status of Catholic virgins into an elastic 'conceptual repertoire' (Menegon) of locally acceptable female roles, thereby creating a new social space.[1] A certain congruence between familiar concepts and new religious teaching facilitated acceptance, even indigenization, of Christian concepts and practices (Laamann, 2006). Menegon observes that in the course of the eighteenth century:

> The Christian community effectively created a space for Christian values and practices initially considered controversial in the local context (for example, virginity of consecrated people). These results were accomplished by appropriating, and also subverting, certain congruent Chinese values (for example, widow chastity). In this way new values could slowly find a place in the local conceptual repertoire (Menegon, 2004: 238).

Such accounts of women's negotiations of statuses, in apparent conflict with Confucian moral codes of paradigmatic female conduct, testify to the ways that religious aspiration could lead to choices which, whilst not overturning the orthodox primacy of marriage, bypassed it in favour of alternative practices. Moreover, women's exercise of 'unorthodox' preferences for life beyond the 'hearth', however maligned by Confucian observers, was by no means rare. Not only did Buddhist and Daoist traditions offer alternative outlets for their female devotees and Islamic women's mosques

represent women's claim for justice and equality, there were also, as Entenmann (1996) points out, parallels with popular quasi-religious institutions. Sisterhoods in late Qing and Republican Guangdong saw women take vows of chastity and reject marriage. Single women lived in *Gupowu* (women's houses) or so-called vegetarian halls set aside for their use.[2] Against the background of such complex religious and cultural affinities of women at the most local level, the fluidity thus suggested of women's historical, and contemporary, social mobility complicates the more conventional notion of female confinement within a stark public/private socio-gender arrangement. Instead, it is proposed that women were neither ever entirely confined to the domestic sphere nor entirely at liberty in public; rather, they negotiated, expanded or took advantage of opportunities arising locally or emerging as a result of external influences.

The Catholic Church, particularly in the early phase dominated by Jesuit sensitivity to the prevailing gender code, was apprehensive about possible charges of immorality over the mixing of women and men. Fear of accusations of moral corruption caused missionaries to request exemption from conducting certain sacraments in the conventional manner. For example, the sacrament of baptism would be performed in such a way that physical contact with female converts could be avoided. However, Menegon's study of the much more aggressive Dominican missionizing in sixteenth-century Fuan, in Fujian Province, also suggests that women were among the most fearless and active converts. Most likely familiar with the conventions in Buddhist and Daoist communal temple worship which granted women certain freedoms, female Catholic converts allowed Dominican missionaries to develop 'a more intense relationship with women than the Jesuits ever had' (Menegon, 2004: 211). As far as Christian converts' receptivity to the Catholic practice of monogamy was concerned, men and women responded in a very different, notably gendered, fashion. Whereas male converts were often reluctant to adopt Catholic monogamy as the new marriage pattern, and not uncommonly received criticism when their conduct did not adhere to the missionaries' moral code, female converts, to the dismay of their family and local officials, were much more willing to discard the institution of marriage altogether. But this preference by some women for celibacy over marriage, as Laamann among others (mentioned previously) has maintained, was able to draw on local, and State-sanctioned, cults of chastity as well as on practices of celibacy in Buddhist and Daoist traditions, 'greatly facilitating the process of inculturation' of Christian Virgins (Laamann, 2006: 39).

Whilst women frequently took advantage of fluid cultural milieus to cross thresholds and emerge from confinement, the ideological template that demarcated gender segregation as emblematic of a prevalent social order continued to function as a reference point for apologists and dissenters alike. Accusations over immoral mixing of the sexes was one of the most common accusations against all religious groups classified by

the Qing government as heterodox, such as the White Lotus society.[3] This accusation also haunted the Catholic missionaries as they sought to make inroads into local populations. In order to avoid suspicion, missionaries soon organized not only separate liturgies but also separate meeting places for men and women. As time progressed, and churches were constructed, there were also special church sections assigned to women (*Ibid*.: 395). A 1732 memorial also speaks of a special church for women, listing seven out of a total of 15 churches in Guangzhou (Canton) to have been churches for women under female leadership (*Ibid*.: 396). Women formed their own associations, trained as catechists to baptize dying infants, became leading authorities in the teaching of the faith, and took over where men were considered vulnerable to arrest or persecution. It is suggested that in certain ways they also challenged Western male missionaries with their local knowledge and authority over converts (*Ibid*.: 397). Segregated Catholic churches for women were also part of the earliest tradition in one of the oldest Catholic communities in Henan Province. Luo Yu, in a study of Catholicism in Henan, says that in the Catholic community of Wei Zhuang in the northwest corner of Queshan County, in the diocese of Zhumadian, a *Nantang* (men's prayer section) and a *Nütang* (women's prayer section) were built for segregated worship, with women and men attending mass in separate locations: 'The men's section and women's section were built separately so that worshippers of both sexes can observe mass from their segregated places' (Luo, 2003: 91–2).

Women's attachment to and participation in religions, as we have seen, were a source of irritation and hostility for Confucian literati. But women's religious practices were strengthened by the stimulus of Western Christian missionary outreach to potential female converts, as well as by emerging discourses and transmissions of secular concepts of gender equality, which in turn widened the space of their activities. It is in the intersections of political and secular, as well as religious developments, that we situate the predicaments and opportunities for religious women who, by asserting their rights to choose belief and way of life, crossed thresholds, challenged the centrality of the hearth and participated in transformations of society itself.

THE UNIVERSAL CATHOLIC CHURCH AND CHINESE VIRGINES OR *SHOUZHEN GUNIANG* (AN INDIGENOUS TRADITION OF CELIBATE WOMEN)

The feminisation of Catholic missionary work in 'civilised' regions (North America, Latin America) and also among 'semi-civilised populations' (East Asia, China and India) began during the course of the nineteenth century. Until then—so an article on 'Die Thätigkeit weiblicher Orden in China' (The Activities of Female Congregations in China) informs the readers of

the German Illustrated Monthly *Die katholischen Missionen*—the 'dangerous' work was performed by men, priests and monks (1879: 1).[4]

It is argued here that one of the factors in the call for Western Catholic Sisters to join the missionary work in China was the Vatican's concern over Chinese female religious *Virgines*, as they were referred to in Western literature. These *Virgines* were proselytizing and nurturing the faith of countless Chinese Christians at the most local level. In eighteenth-century Sichuan, 'Christian Virgins' were vital to the support of Christian communities during times of Imperial proscription and an acute shortage of priests. These women provided relief to the poor and sick, baptized dying infants, instructed in rudimentary biblical knowledge and, importantly, taught girls when female education was uncommon (Entenmann, 1996: 181).[5] They kept alive the faith in often remote and, to Western missionaries, nearly inaccessible communities. As Sue Bradshaw (1982: 29) points out, however, whilst 'The method of spreading the faith through the efforts of [local] women had significant results in building a native Church in China', their aspirations and claim to religious authority conflicted with the traditional role of women, encountering resistance both from within local society and the Catholic hierarchy. Indeed, the role played by Chinese Catholic women during the early times of greatest persecution of Christianity, when successive imperial regimes treated Vatican-loyal Christian congregations as 'heretical' and potentially destabilising, has been as controversial as it has been misrepresented.

Following publication of the papal bull of 1724 forbidding all Catholics' practice of 'the Rites and Ceremonies of China', activities of foreign missionaries became heavily circumscribed (Laamann, 2006). Under such circumstances, Chinese Catholics were forced to sustain religious life largely without the guidance of priests and under conditions of great secrecy.[6] Without the support of pious Chinese women, survival of religious knowledge and the rites of faith would have been in doubt, subject to the same pressure of assimilation as was the case with other religions that had come to China. These pious women were known as *Virgines* 'who had dedicated themselves to a life of celibacy for the service of the Church and conducted most of the preliminary instruction for baptism' (Bradshaw, 1982: 30). Yet, however indispensable, they were from the start 'regarded with suspicion', as Sue Bradshaw puts it (*Ibid*.: 31). Bradshaw's explanation for this distrust is the transgressive nature of their single status in a society where women gained status through the bearing of sons. However, Buddhist and Daoist nuns were not uncommon in Chinese society, nor was the practice of celibacy in more affluent families unknown (see, for example, a recent study by Lu Weijing, 2008; see also Entenmann, 1996: 183). We would argue that at least as likely a source of hostility was their unusual status in a Catholic Church where the Virgin Mary was the paradigmatic role model for women, the central metaphor for meek submission and acquiescent subordination.

Both local animosity in Confucian society towards voluntary celibacy and the fear of charges of immorality levelled at priests and female converts alike, together with the Church's own misgiving over celibate women's role in the religious congregation, led in many places to the tightening of control. Thus in 1744 the Dominican vicar apostolic in Sichuan, Martiliat, issued regulations for the establishment of the Institute of Christian Virgins. The regulations were modelled after the Dominican mode of supervision of Virgins in Fujian, covering their conduct at home (as they lived with their natal families) and in society, their appearance, religious discipline and responsibilities. As Entenmann suggests, the protection accorded them by male clergy was not unlike the Confucian concept of *Sancong* (dependencies on father, husband and son), locking women into a dual dependency on men for religious and cultural legitimization (Entenmann, 1996: 184–86).

Contemporary instructions from the Church are illuminating for their severity in tone and guidelines. Only after reaching the age of 25 were *Virgines* allowed to make temporary, very rarely perpetual, vows. They lived at home and were exhorted not to wear any distinguishing dress; in other words, their lives outside properly walled cloisters were to be expressed in their exclusion from membership of the Church institution. According to Sue Bradshaw, 40 years after a papal bull pronounced the end to the Rites Controversy, the Church was sufficiently perturbed to compose new instructions directed at the activities of unrepentant Chinese *Virgines*:

> The Instruction of Propaganda Fide issued in 1784 regulated the activities of the *Virgines*: "In no public meeting of men will these Virgins preach the Word of God, or teach or secretly read or individually perform, or in any way announce: for this is rejected by the Apostle [Paul]" (Bradshaw, 1982: 31).

Bradshaw tells of *Virgines* who proved less than compliant (unlike Chinese priests whose religious, but no less professional and economic, dependence on the Church institution brought them more quickly into line with Church discipline). The *Virgines* supported church and religious life, assisted priests, taught rudimentary religious knowledge, led in daily prayer and read the Scripture during celebration of the mass, apparently ignoring or unaware of the 1784 decree. At the same time, as Entenmann (1996: 193) points out, the Church sought to confine their role to teaching (female) children, restricting their physical mobility and social engagement. Whilst ever greater Church resources were poured into boys' schools, female education emphasized religious instruction at the expense of academic excellence. This trend continued and was exacerbated in the following decades by an ever-increasing marginalization of religious girls' schools. This development in turn contributed to the diminishing impact of Virgins on mainstream Church culture.[7]

Yet local celibate women were unwilling to quietly acquiesce to the ever-increasing restrictions. From 1800 to 1850, the leader of the Nanking Christians, the widow Hou Ta-kuan, together with other celibate women, resisted control by the Jesuits who arrived there in the mid-nineteenth century even as the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 and other treaties opened China to Western missionary activities. Given strong popular hostility to and widespread persecution of Christian believers, the fact that by 1850 the number of Catholics in China had risen to 320,000, as Bradshaw points out, 'must be a tribute to the efforts of mostly Chinese Catholics, both clerical and lay, men and women'(Bradshaw, 1982*:* 31). There are also, however, clear indications that Western missionaries in 'hostile' environments depended on local celibate women, as was the case with the Lazarist missionaries who had missionized in Henan before 1865 (Lazzarotto, 2000).

An article published in January 1879 in the German missionary journal *Die Katholischen Missionen* makes due reference to the contributions of 'die chinesischen Jungfrauen' (Chinese Virgins) to the important goal of the Catholic mission. 'Their services have always been useful and the success of their work is great. However, they are deficient in terms of proper schooling and [they lack] a firm leadership' (*Die Katholischen Missionen*, 1879: 6). These 'deficiencies' were to be remedied by the European Sisters under whose religious guidance and educational instructions the *Virgines* underwent the regime of a two-year novitiate. Commenting on the progress made so far, the author of the article informed German readers that already 'in the great diocese of Jiangnan [Zhejiang Province, centred on Shanghai] more than a hundred of these *Virgines*, having been instructed by Sisters, are of greatest use to the missionaries' (*Ibid*.).

The tension between the Vatican, through its vicars apostolic in China, and the *Virgines* remained an issue in subsequent years. Bradshaw maintains that 'they [the *Virgines*] refused to yield their positions of leadership' to the returned Jesuits. Evidence for such tension can be found in a new Instruction of the Congregation de Propaganda Fide in 1883. Those continuing their single life were to be restricted to temporary vows and ordinary clothing, excepting those of 'exceptional virtue' (Bradshaw, 1982: 32).

Apart from pursuing the close discipline of Chinese religious women through their integration into European congregations, another policy was to culminate in the establishment of native congregations, self-governing and self-reliant (as would be the aim of the Providence Sisters in Kaifeng), integrating as many 'exceptional', that is compliant, *Virgines* as was possible.

How many such *Virgines* were there? Understandably, there are no reliable statistics on women who were indeed doubly 'outsiders': outsider in their local non-Christian environment and outsider within the institution of the Catholic Church. Sue Bradshaw gives sets of statistics from largely missionary sources, reflecting the preoccupation of local foreign missionaries with reasserting control over the native Church. Our own investigation

through interviews of elderly believers suggests much higher figures and a situation—which lasted right into the 1950s, indeed into the twenty-first century (as discussed later)—where *Shouzhen guniang* (daughters who preserve chastity; referred to colloquially as *Zhujia guniang*, daughters who stay at home, or *Lao guniang*, spinsters) were 'ubiquitous' in Catholic communities in Henan (Interview, August 2005, in Kaifeng).

According to Bradshaw, between 1900 and 1914, when Chinese Catholics numbered about 1,519,000, an important development continued to be the setting up of religious congregations for Chinese women. By the mid-1930s, 42 Chinese congregations, at the diocesan level, totalled 2,403 members. Added to this membership, 1,016 Chinese women had joined 50 foreign congregations (1,693 foreign Sisters). The number of *Virgines* during this time was about twice the number of Chinese Sisters, given as 6,211 *Virgines*. They served the Church as Catechists and teachers (Bradshaw, 1982: 36). These roles allow us to understand their importance to the survival and growth of the Catholic Church in China, and further indicate an educational level that far exceeded the standard educational level of women at that time. This reality is at odds with their depiction as 'primitive' and ill-suited for the purposes of a teaching order, which characterized reports by the American Providence Sisters in Kaifeng to the Motherhouse in Indiana (see previous chapter). As indicated in missionary sources on missionary work in various parts of China, such as in Hanyang, Hubei Province, *Virgines* also contributed to the establishment of schools and educational classes where religious knowledge as well as vocational skills were taught, actively supporting missionaries in the years prior to the arrival of foreign congregations (*Ibid*.: 41).

Against a background of active policies by the Vatican to accelerate the indigenization process of the Catholic Church in China, abolishing vicariates apostolic and instead strengthening the local Church through dioceses headed by Chinese bishops,[8] and under the uncertain conditions created by a widespread civil war (1945–49), the number of Catholics grew to an estimated total of 3,274,000 in 1948 (Bradshaw, 1982: 43). The number of *Virgines*, around 1,761, appears by this time to have decreased, whereas more women had entered religious congregations (4,494 Chinese Sisters) compared to the 2,147 foreign Sisters (*Ibid*.: 44). Although such numbers cannot be regarded as entirely reliable and accurate, the trend suggests a certain decline in the number of *Virgines* between the 1930s and 1940s. This may be open to various interpretations: the choice of single women during unstable times in favour of the relative security offered by a community (in turn supported by Church organization); the growing success on the part of foreign Sisters in incorporating *Virgines* into convents under their control; or the greater appeal of a growing number of native congregations to independent-minded *Virgines*. Alternatively, the trend could also have pointed to the widening gulf between the Church, including its native institutions, and the women excluded from the official indigenization policies who thus became invisible to chroniclers of Church history, further affirming their outsider status.

The lack of comprehensive sources on the history and survival into contemporary times of a status still shrouded in prejudice and ignorance (as discernible from missionary archival sources) or of women simply invisible to chroniclers of official Church history makes particularly crucial the importance of reconstructing the lives and choices of single Chinese Catholic women from the materials and information we were able to gather. Although our knowledge must be regarded as partial and incomplete, there is enough evidence to suggest the complexity entailed in reconstructing the lives of women known as 'the Chinese Virgins.' Indeed, our work brings to light different contexts, relations and political and cultural constellations in which individual women made choices that would lay them open to rejection by missionaries, hostility and often ridicule by members of their local communities. They were also vulnerable to concerted attempts by their own Church to discipline their bodies into institutionalized acquiescence. They came to haunt official Vatican communications as symbols of an 'untamed' Church ever in danger of being undermined from within by local 'heathenism.'

Our narrations are of the urban, educated Kaifeng *Shouzhen guniang* who confined themselves to religious activities in Kaifeng City and of *Shouzhen guniang* who were also active in counties adjacent to Kaifeng. A contrastive history comes from *Shouzhen guniang* in southern Henan, Jingang (Xingang), referred to locally as *Zhujia Guniang* of rural and often impoverished family background (see Chapter 8).

AMERICAN PROVIDENCE SISTERS IN KAIFENG AND THE TAMING OF CHINESE *VIRGINES*

The American historian of missionary women, Jane Hunter, talks about 'opportunity' as a major theme in American missionaries' ventures abroad: opportunity to widen their own sphere of activity into foreign lands, but also opportunity for many female converts to whom they offered education and possibilities of choice (Hunter, 1989). Such opportunities were grasped by the likes of Sister Agnes Joan, a Kaifeng woman whose admission into the Providence congregation facilitated her own education, vocation and expansion of her horizon through travel and residence abroad. There were other women, however, whose vocation and life's mission were diminished and who were defined as 'outside' the sacred congregations of dedicated religious women. One example was the women with whom Sister Agnes Joan's own sister, known as Josephine Li, came to identify: *Virgines* in the language of Western missionaries or, more colloquially, *Shouzhen guniang* (celibate women).

In the many reports, letters and diary entries written in Kaifeng by the Providence Sisters and in their numerous reports to the Motherhouse in Indiana, the 'Virgins' are nearly invisible. The Sisters, who could be very

perceptive observers and sympathetic to the effects on local women of material and educational as well as cultural deprivations, were less generous in their observations of 'the Virgins'. Indeed, assessments of the celibate women provide an insight into how fearful foreign missionaries were of religious women outside their sites of control. Scathing references to their inferior spirituality and dubious religious learning served to distinguish the *Virgines* from those trained by the Providence Sisters, indicating the perceived superiority of foreign-influenced religious life.

In 1930, Sister Marie Gratia tells the readers at home in an interpretation which appears to represent her co-religionists' views that 'The missionary has long realized his insufficiency with respect to the Christianizing of the Chinese woman. He has devised ways of instructing her; one has been through the lay catechist sometimes called the Chinese Virgin. *These Virgins are young girls or older women, reared, perhaps, from infancy in a rescue-home; often their lack of suitable instruction has resulted in failure*.' Her next paragraph offers an illuminating contrast in perception of celibate women: 'The Native Religious Catechist venture—an adventure for souls, we Sisters here in China call it—is the organization of a society of native women who will be given a thorough training in regular religious life, a training similar to that given the Missionary Catechist of Victory-Noll at Huntington, Indiana' (SPA, *The Bugle Call,* 9(4), 1930: 60; emphasis added). The assumption implicit in the above statement that the 'Chinese Virgins' were of humble background, mostly orphaned and raised in institutions and ill-equipped to tend to spiritual and religious tasks, seems to be questionable in its sweeping generality. Indeed, it would be difficult to conceive of women of such inferior calibre fulfilling the roles many of them were required to perform, roles which even the Providence Sisters admitted were too challenging for their own wards (see also Entenmann, 1996). The same Bishop Tacconi who had invited the Providence Sisters to Kaifeng, respected by them for his local knowledge and superior understanding of Henan society, is said—upon arriving in Kaifeng in 1916 to take responsibility for the newly established Kaifeng vicariate—to have been 'impressed by a group of Christian women who, though not constituting a religious congregation, consecrated their lives to the services of the Church and to charitable works, in a celibate life' (Lazzarotto, 2000: 67). These women proved to be capable teachers and Catechists.

When the countryside was considered out of bounds for the American Sisters of the Providence-trained Catechists, either because of hostility to Christians or the harshness of living conditions, the Virgins had their uses. Criticising priests' inappropriate expectations of Providence-trained Catechists, Sister Marie Gratia points out, 'In most cases it is not necessary at all [that the Catechists should be sent to difficult assignments] and should not be tolerated. There are Virgins in each place who can go to out-of-the-way places' (SPA, Providence Sister-Catechist Records, Sister Marie Gratia to Mother M. Raphael Slattery, 19 May 1936).[9]

Relations between the American mission and the Virgins seem to have varied over the years, from appreciation of the vital assistance the latter provided in times of need to an active policy designed to diminish their influence, even bringing about their exclusion from pastoral duties altogether. The role of the Virgins in supporting the mission station was acknowledged, although only in passing, when the Sisters returned to Kaifeng in 1929 after nearly two years' absence. The Sisters found their house almost undisturbed and their possessions intact, despite the military occupation of Kaifeng. 'By degrees, some of the dishes and kitchen utensils, that had been buried in the ground by one of the Virgins, were dug up' (SPA, *The Bugle Call*, XV(1), 1935: 20).

The Sisters' active denigration of the Virgins' accustomed sphere of responsibility finds frequent expression in letters and reports. The Liou (Liu) family had been Christian for over 300 years. Of certain social standing in Kaifeng society and considerable wealth, the Catholic Liou family were able to support two unmarried daughters, Anastasia and Anna Liou (Letter dated 26 May 1922, SPA, *The Bugle Call,* 2(1), 1922: 6). Anastasia was in charge of the catechumenate in Kaifeng when the Providence Sisters arrived in 1920. Within two years, she had been moved from Kaifeng to Luyi, a remote county, together with her sister Anna. The Providence Sisters had given Anastasia the task of religious instruction, while the latter ran a small orphanage. Their removal from positions of prominence in Kaifeng was an indication of their diminished consequence in the affairs of the Diocese.

A LOCAL TRADITION: KAIFENG *SHOUZHEN GUNIANG*

Given missionaries' tendency to hold forth at great length on all matters concerning native Catholics and religious development, the scant references in missionary reports on the lives of native celibate women is revealing of the complexities attending the historical, institutional, doctrinal and cultural factors that shaped the relationship between *Shouzhen guniang* and the formal Church. We have already sought to outline some of these implications. The repeated decrees issued by the Church to restrain the independent spirit of 'Chinese Virgins', however, also speak volumes about the women's very real impact on local Christian communities.

We have been able to reconstruct at least a partial picture of a barely known local native institution through the memory of an elderly *Shouzhen guniang*, Li De (died in 2008), the remembrances of older Catholics and the contribution of a most important informant, a Kaifeng-born *Shouzhen guniang* who at the time of our interviews and informal conversations was in her 40s. Chai Yuhuan's pride in what she calls 'the Kaifeng tradition of *Shouzhen guniang*', her personal and close relationships with her predecessors and her pride in the genealogy of Kaifeng *Shouzhen guniang* all inform her sense of self and her assertion of a rightful place within the local *Jiaohui* (Church congregation). Chai's own story resonates with the stories

of women excluded, or who chose to exclude themselves, from the site of the Providence Mission long before she was born. Her narrative has become the long-missing narrative of generations of local celibate women. It is due to her that we have an understanding, however subjective and often impressionistic, of a genealogy of religious women who came to define themselves through institutions that excluded them.[10]

According to Chai Yuhuan (Interview, 5 April 2006, Kaifeng), the perceptions by the Providence Sisters of 'Virgins' as 'primitive' and in need of instruction and discipline in order to realize meaningful religious aspirations simply did not apply to the tradition of *Kaifengde Shouzhen guniang* (the celibate women of Kaifeng) with which she identifies.

The origins of *Shouzhen guniang* were told to us by different narrators, who gave their own distinct emphasis to the emergence of such a tradition. The *Shouzhen guniang* Chai Yuhuan described were educated women, mostly from wealthy urban families, who made use of emerging opportunities during the Republican era in Kaifeng. Some of them had graduated from the *Furen daxue* (Furen University) or other institutions of higher education, institutions considered to have educated the female intelligentsia of that era. During the 'early years', as there was no possibility for local

Figure 7.1 Li De *Shouzhen guniang* and Chai Yuhuan *Shouzhen guniang*, Nanguan Convent chapel, Kaifeng [photo: Maria Jaschok]. By permission of Chai Yuhuan.

women to enter a convent, Chai said the sole choice was to dedicate their lives to their faith as unmarried women, supported by their families.

However, even after 1930 when the Providence Sisters had set up a first community of native Catechist Sisters, these women were unwilling to enter a convent. From Chai's point of view, their own privileged class background and educational standard and enlightened upbringing, mostly by progressive Christian parents with modern notions of female education, made convent life unacceptable to them. Convent life as imported by foreign missionaries appeared as too restrictive and not in tune with their own notions of spiritual yet independent and self-reliant Christian practices. Moreover, the women who entered convents at that time were on the whole rural, barely educated, thus too far removed from the standards of refined, educated spirituality to which the *Shouzhen guniang* aspired. Hand in hand with a lack of education, so Chai suggested, was a near total absence of *Xinyang* (spirituality)—by which she meant that those women who joined convent life were motivated by pragmatic rather than religious considerations (a complaint she also made about the contemporary situation). In her narrative, Chai juxtaposed women of education, faith and great personal motivation against women from impoverished families with few expectations as well as little religious inner life. In this narration, the women most ideally suited for the 'religious vocation' were excluded from its institution by its perceived lack of potential for spiritual growth.

To her interpretation of the situation, Chai added a conviction that women with *Geren xing* (individual personality, women who know their own minds) are not suited to the regimentation of local convent life. She thus posed the question (also applying it to herself) as to whether this meant they were any less 'devout' in their faith. This question, often reiterated, she said was answered for her in the years after the American Sisters left and Communist rule confronted religious organizations with demands for allegiance (Sister Wang Mingxiu's story will be described later). The *Shouzhen guniang* had been exemplary in their readiness to risk liberty and life rather than severe allegiance to Rome. Seen in this light, although the life of celibacy was a religious decision, their preference for a life outside the convent's discipline—regulated by the clock of another (American) time—resembles the yearning for a *widening* space for women's talents expressed by other women around them, a social space that the model of convent life from a foreign country could not provide.

A priest from the parish of Kaifeng (Interview, 8 September 2005) provided us with a different explanation for the enduring presence of *Shouzhen guniang*. According to him, the existence of *Shouzhen guniang* was the outcome of dysfunctional relations between the American Sisters (i.e. Providence Sisters) and some of the Italian priests in Kaifeng. These priests preferred well-educated, unmarried Catholic women with local knowledge to support their parish work, over the Catechist Sisters trained by the American Providence Sisters. In this elderly priest's mind,

it was the preference of the priests that led to the institution of *Shouzhen guniang*. He remembered that about 30 women of similar social background joined the group of dedicated *Lao guniang* in order to support the pastoral duties of the priests in Kaifeng. Four women were particularly famous 'before liberation', he said, acquiring great prominence in Kaifeng for their ability to communicate with ordinary believers and to convert people to the Catholic faith. He recalled their names: Shen Zaihua, Zhao Yanluan, Zhang Jiu and Li De, all of whom were highly educated women and had been most actively involved in teaching members of the local congregation on matters of religious doctrine and Catholic rites. They also taught very popular religious songs and assisted with special events in the religious calendar.

According to the priest, during the 1930s, there were many women, *Duode hen* (lots and lots), unwilling to marry, who wished to dedicate their lives to the religious community. They would choose to stay in their natal home, being provided for by their families through a portion of land or some family property. Such was the ubiquity of women's preference for celibate status that many informants characterized the period of the 1930s as 'the time when many girls inclined to remain unmarried.'

Neither Chai's nor the priest's accounts consider the longevity of the institution which predates the revival of the Catholic Church in Kaifeng during the Republican era. But they tell us of the choices educated women of Catholic belief made during a time when they could have been admitted into the convent as set up, for example, by the Providence Sisters, and how these reflected a spirit of independence which, as the elderly priest noted, reflected the spirit of the times. But it is also apparent that the women became pawns in a stand-off between the American Providence Sisters (Chapter 6) and the priests under Bishop Tacconi over approaches to missionizing. Condemned by the former, they proved useful to the latter (Lazzarotto, 2000). However, neither the negative reaction towards them by either party nor the more pragmatic opportunism displayed by the priests, takes away from the fact that a historical institution of dedicated and fearless single women in a patriarchal society, the *Virgines*, was re-vitalized by the reformist impulses of the Republic period. They would also demonstrate, in the 1950s, when religious organizations were forced into alignment with the new Communist Party rule in Kaifeng, that their lack of organization, of a spatial identity, made them both less pliable under Communist attacks on their religious devotion and yet also more vulnerable to societal ostracism.

REJECTING CONVENT LIFE, CHOOSING TO BECOME *SHOUZHEN GUNIANG*

For Chai, the uniquely high position of Kaifeng's celibate women goes back to the concern by the Italian priests in particular over the educational

deficiencies of native Sisters trained by the Providence Sisters. These priests were from a missionary society known as P.I.M.E. (formerly, the Seminario Lombardo per le Missioni Estere, or Milan Missionaries) which had assumed missionary control over Henan in 1865 (Lazzarotto, 2000: 55). According to Chai, they required women of standing in the

Figure 7.2 Catholic Cathedral in Kaifeng [photo: Maria Jaschok].

community, of a family background that would ensure them access to elite families—qualities apparently wanting among the women trained in the Providence Sisters' Nanguan Convent. Because of their class, relative wealth, independent spirit and willingness to work outside convent boundaries, the celibate women were considered ideal. Before the Italian priests (among them Bishop Caetano Pollio, 1946–1951) were forced to leave Kaifeng, they organized a meeting with these celibate women and entrusted them with ensuring the survival of the Catholic faith, the transmission of religious knowledge and faith and protecting the safety of the local clergy.

According to Chai, in exhorting the celibate women to become the guardians of faith, the priests unknowingly—and ignorant of developments and persecutions to come—sealed their fate and experiences of suffering under Communism. When the pressure to *Gaizao* (reform their thoughts and profess allegiance) came, they thus came under greater attack than other religious personnel. The *Shouzhen guniang*, according to Chai, were those least prepared to compromise, enter marriage or denounce their loyalty to the Vatican.

A *Shouzhen guniang*, now long dead, had told Chai how she and others like her were publicly humiliated (*Wuru*), dragged through the streets with their heads partially shaved to testify to their shame. These courageous women told her that their only fear was about compromising their faith. Chai remembers how they repeated the words they shouted at their interrogators: 'You can kill me but cannot destroy me' (*Ni keyi shasi wo, danshi bu neng wuru wo*). Such a spirit of defiance inspired Chai with the desire to emulate their valour. When before being forced to leave China in 1951 the priests gave *Shouzhen guniang* the task of preserving the faith, a historical pattern was repeated: in both Imperial times and under Communism, Western missionaries were forced to leave their sites of labour to local converts, among them, importantly, were celibate women.

Chai recounted that only the *Shouzhen guniang* stood up against persecution from the authorities, enduring imprisonment and the labour camps. None of the *Shouzhen guniang* turned against each other nor betrayed the Italian priests who had been in charge of the diocese in Kaifeng. Thus, Chai reiterates, 'Kaifeng's *Shouzhen guniang* are really not the same, they cannot be compared to others [nuns from local convents].'

Not only did these women follow in the footsteps of earlier generations of *Shouzhen guniang*, but Chai Yuhuan also in turn emulates her predecessors when she ponders the predicament of the Catholic community in Kaifeng. She consciously sees herself as following in the footsteps of the women she so admires: she is an heir to a genealogy of suffering, courage and unbroken loyalty, defined in relation to the legacy of the Providence Sisters and the Catechist Sisters and the fate of Wang Mingxiu, a Sister who came to be expelled from the Nanguan Convent.

WANG MINGXIU, FROM CATECHIST SISTER TO *SHOUZHEN GUNIANG* ROLE MODEL

Wang Mingxiu, an early member of the Providence Catechist Sisters, is to Chai a saint-like role model for any woman who wants to live her life fully in a modernizing China, and yet be dedicated to God. Wang displayed bleak courage and defiant stubbornness when during the 1960s, the early years of the Maoist cultural revolutionary movement, her ostracism was total. Society treated her as *Youpai* (a loose term of abuse directed at all considered 'behind time', i.e., behind Communist time) and she was also expelled from the convent by the Sisters.

Chai remembers how during the 1960s, when she was a small child in Kaifeng, there would be sudden voices in her maternal grandparents' home shouting *Xiunü laile*, the Sister has arrived. As the family was quite poor, her maternal grandmother organized each grandchild to queue up whenever eggs were available, rationed to 10 eggs per person, so that as many eggs as could be spared would be given to Wang Mingxiu to sell at the railway station. Wang lived from the money she received from selling eggs, each night returning to her small room near the railway station. She lived this way until she passed away in the same year that Mao Zedong died (1976). Whereas other former nuns had been assigned work and thus a productive role in the new society, Wang was without any income or support; no one ever came to her help.

The fate of Wang Mingxiu is a story Chai tells over and over again: 'Why? They [the nuns] have [had] no education, no humanity. I was so disappointed, you know, so disappointed, so disappointed. Such despicable action! When all these upheavals took place in the 1950s, and then again in the 1960s, that is when the Cultural Revolution started, when all of us were afflicted by a great catastrophe, this community of nuns turned against Wang Mingxiu *Xiansheng*. They justified this treatment saying that she was after all *Youpai* (a Rightist). What do you say to this, you know, what do you say!'

No other Sister had Wang's qualities. Only this Providence Catechist Sister, Chai exclaimed passionately, ever invited respect from all members of the wider Catholic community, including the celibate women, because of the strength of her *Gexing*, the incorruptibility of her commitment to the universal church, her refusal to betray co-believers during the years of investigation and criticism, her support of religious causes with which her local general superior did not agree, her refusal to accede to the Communist Party's demand of severance from Rome and obedience to the Chinese Party/State, and her stoicism in the face of suffering. She was expelled from her Providence Convent and refused help of any kind, even to the point of near starvation and homelessness. During frequently endured criticism sessions, she also endured the censure of her former *Jiemei* (her fellow-Sisters)

who joined in the 'struggle-sessions' against her with much fervour and indignation. She survived with the help and support of a very few, among them *Shouzhen guniang*. Chai Yuhua recounted Wang Mingxiu's suffering with barely suppressed emotion.

When asked about the legacy of the foreign Sisters in Kaifeng and the case for the continuation of the *Shouzhen guniang*, Chai would constantly return to the story of Wang Mingxiu. Such was Wang's piety, her dedication and readiness to sacrifice herself for her faith, and her learnedness and spiritual nature that she earned the title of *Xiansheng*.[11] Yet, during the 1950s, when she refused to deny her allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church (unlike the Sisters who stayed in the Convent), she was expelled by the Convent. Chai explained that Wang's *Gexing hen qiang* (her personality was too strong); in other words, her faith was not cowed by political pressures.

It is the local perception that when in 1948 the American Providence Sisters took 18 Chinese Catechist Sisters with them, they took the best, 'the most educated and most able', to Taiwan (see the previous chapter), leaving behind the most undistinguished Sisters. Chai concedes only few exceptions, one of the most notable being Wang *Xiansheng*. According to Chai, this Sister *chose* to stay in the home community to serve where she felt most needed. Others instead revealed themselves in their negative treatment of fellow nuns who refused to toe the Party line in the 1950s. This sense of betrayal, of a religious community of women not living up to their ideals who during years of political persecution even sank to levels of 'evil', still hangs over this particular community, said Chai, giving her feelings of *Fangan* (disgust). Accounts of daily rites of humiliation and of the debasing and de-humanisation of Sisters classified as 'rightist elements' were still vivid in her mind, such as throwing stale, leftover food to a nearly starved expelled nun because she was no longer 'fit' to be treated as 'human.'

Chai's analysis focuses on the congregation's failure to educate the 'moral character', *Renge*, of their Zhugu Sisters. She said of herself that although Public Security personnel may be unhappy with her stubborn refusal to cooperate, they ultimately respected her *Renge*, her moral integrity. Why then was such failure characteristic of this congregation? Why did the Sisters display such moral weaknesses? Was this intrinsic to their characters, or did this general deficiency, exacerbated by the departure of the more 'capable ones' in 1948, reflect on historical weaknesses in the missionary pedagogy of the Providence Sisters and the problems in their relationship with native Sisters? Chai insisted that this failure to grasp the important concept of *Renge* both lies at the root of historical conflicts between American and native Sisters and also continues to be a source of the Catholic leadership's compromised reputation today. Even today, she lamented, the most rudimentary familiarity on the part of Catholic nuns with basic religious norms and precepts are deemed sufficient as qualification for their admission into the congregation.

THE CONTINUED PREDICAMENT OF *SHOUZHEN GUNIANG*

What is keeping this choice to become *Shouzhen guniang* alive for women today, however few? Some answers come from conversations with Li De *Shouzhen guniang*[12] and Chai Yuhuan *Shouzhen guniang*, while some answers derive from the lingering legacy of the Republican era and the early years of Communist rule. Political and cultural environments which encouraged women to 'leave home' in order for them to demand rights and exercise choice—however self-serving a given political agenda and however entrenched the traditionalist assumptions—actually widened the intellectual and social spaces in which individual women could engage, and be different. Equally important, however, were factors of class, education and their family's standing in the community; these account for the frequent references by both Chai and Li De to *Shouzhen guniang*'s spiritual and moral superiority over the mostly rural women who became, and still become, Catholic nuns in Kaifeng today. It is such a social and cultural, as much as spiritual, gulf between the two groups of women which has led Chai to continue in the *Shouzhen guniang* tradition. Then and now, the fate of women when *Chu jiamen* (when leaving home) differ depending on the material and intellectual resources they could bring to new opportunities. They might simply continue an equally confined life—spiritually, intellectually and socially—in just another patriarchal location (as locally perceived of Catholic convents). The tragedy of Wang Mingxiu's fate and her betrayal by her fellow nuns illustrates these consequences. Conversely, a social space, however limited, might open up, as it did for some of the Kaifeng *Guniang,* to live in accordance with their convictions.

The choices made by the poor, rural women who constitute the majority of Catholic nuns and create a culture of impoverished spirituality so lamented by Chai Yuhuan also point to the patriarchal nature of the Catholic Church, which constrains the kind of reinvigorated growth we noticed in the Daoist and Muslim sites. Because of the more restrictive presence of the Catholic Church in Chinese society, compared to other religions, and the unyielding internal patriarchal control, Catholic convents in Henan (Kaifeng and Zhengzhou) give women of the calibre presiding over mosques and temples very little incentive to join. Instead, like Chai, they prefer to lead lives outside the Catholic institutions, thus, arguably, hastening the institutions' decline.

This story of the institution of *Shouzhen guniang* reveals ways in which its local history and transnational forces intersect, thus complicating further notions of 'the Catholic Virgin.' Together with our research in southern Henan, in Jingang, which we present in the next chapter, we see how the women there, together with the more urban fellow celibates in Kaifeng, demonstrate the ubiquity and persistence of a wide spectrum of indigenous traditions of religious devotion so castigated by the American Providence Sisters.

8 The Tradition of Catholic *Shouzhen Guniang* in Jingang

A present inheritor of the Kaifeng *Shouzhen guniang* tradition, Chai Yuhuan praises the tradition of female celibacy as an expression both of women's faith and engagement in religious affairs, as well as of women's aspirations for a spiritual life and educated understanding of society that would have raised them above the level of ordinary Catholic women. In this view, the women's strength of character (*Gerenxing*) compelled them to reject a space assigned to Catholic nuns that would only have provided a life diminished of such cherished characteristics. In Jingang, Nanyang, located like Kaifeng in the province of Henan, celibate women known colloquially as *Shouzhennü* or as *Zhujia guniang* or *Lao guniang*, look back on an equally rooted tradition of celibate women outside convent organization. In this chapter, we explore how local Jingang Catholics interpret the origin of this tradition, of the factors contributing to its endurance and of the celibate women's relationship with religious women who joined local, conventional convents. We compare the two Henan traditions in order to reveal the role of the Catholic Church in providing celibate role models as alternatives to mainstream society's gender roles. How did *Shouzhen guniang*, as well as convent Sisters, think about their decisions not to follow popular conceptions of women's fate—namely, that 'everyone should get married when coming of age'? We have sought to understand how women perceived the choices open to them and how they confronted the consequences of their choice on relations with their natal family and with the wider community.

THE TRADITION OF *SHOUZHEN GUNIANG* IN JINGANG

Jingang is a small village in Nanyang City, Henan Province, where a Catholic Church diocese has existed since 1844. Local Catholics familiar with the situation of Jingang believe that the tradition of *Shouzhen guniang* was formed about a hundred years ago. According to Zhang *Gugu* (a local term used to address celibate women), who was born in Jingang in 1930 but who now lives in Zhumadian in southeastern Henan, nearly all Jingang families had *Zhujia guniang*. According to her, these women chose to stay at home,

caring for parents because they were unwilling to marry non-Catholic men. In stark contrast with the situation in Kaifeng, it was lack of education that prevented their admission into convent life. Zhang *Gugu*'s aunts had all chosen to stay at home, while she and another celibate aunt followed an uncle, a Catholic priest, to support his pastoral work in Zhumadian. At the time of the interview, she was still taking care of the small Catholic Church nearby (Interview, Zhumadian, 2 September 2005). Zhang was unsure how the tradition had started, but in her aunt's generation (in the early Republican era) not marrying a non-Catholic man had been a widespread convention in Jingang.

The Catholic priest in Jingang, Father Jin, estimated that the tradition local people call *Shouzhennü* is about one hundred years old. He based this figure on the *Shouzhennü* tradition kept in his own family, as his aunt had also chosen a celibate life in her parents' home. Father Jin's explanation for such a choice was based on the women's faith: they chose to live chaste lives for the love of God. In terms of the preference of *Shouzhennü* status over convent life, the answer was less clear. In Father Jin's explanation, they were either unwilling or ineligible to become Sisters. On the other hand, the tradition of *Shouzhennü* still existed in Jingang in 2005, with about 20 *Shouzhennü* personally known to him (Interview, Jingang Catholic Church, 11 October 2005).

Further information was provided by Mr. Liu, who works for the local government and prides himself on a degree of familiarity with Jingang's social history. He too knew 'quite a number' of *Shouzhennü* when he went to school in Jingang in the 1970s. He talked of Gong *Guniang*, Miao *Guniang*, Ye *Guniang* and of others, after being prompted into reciting a long list of celibate women whose names he recalled without difficulty. He agreed with Father Jin that the tradition of *Shouzhen Guniang* was at least one hundred years old. Locally also known as *Nüergua* (widowed daughters), he recounted that they live with their families and parents and—as is true elsewhere in China where single women require support in old age and prayer for their afterlife—they commonly adopt a young male relation. Usually nephews take the role of a son. Family members on the whole are supportive, and Jingang villagers are used to this practice. The *Guniang* enjoy security in their old age, and the families benefit from an additional pair of hands in the household. Mr. Liu made a distinction between the older generation of *Guniang*, who have now all died, and the current *Guniang*. In his interpretation, today's generation of celibate women are either *Bu xinren* (lacking confidence) when it comes to marriage or are unhappy with the men introduced to them. He cited a number of *Guniang* who, after viewing the men available—that is, local Catholic men—chose a celibate life instead (Interview, Jingang Village, Nanyang, 12 October 2005).

In the estimation of villagers and of the older generation of Catholics, the most important reasons for perpetuating such a 'conservative' (*Baoshou*) tradition of female celibacy was related to women's unwillingness to

marry non-Catholics, to their lack of education making them ineligible to enter a convent, and to their lack of 'confidence' in the institution of marriage. On the positive side, the women wanted to live chaste lives in praise of the love of God. Whilst these responses do not enlighten us on how individual women might have exploited certain available social and religious resources in order to justify their choice to not marry, it is nevertheless important to understand the nature of support from family and villagers for the *Shouzhen guniang* status.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH EXPANDS ITS SPACE IN JINGANG

Jingang acquired its strategic importance to the Catholic Church in 1844, with the establishment of the Nanyang Diocese. From 1867 onwards, after the Zongli Yamen (the Qing Dynasty Government office responsible for foreign affairs) gave official permission for Jingang to be 'loaned' to the Catholic Church, an ambitious programme of expansion saw construction of the main religious buildings and the establishment of a complex organizational structure. Jingang thus became the administrative heart of the Catholic mission from which it was able to develop outward into other counties and provinces.[1] Only after the bishop's seat was moved to Kaifeng did the importance of Jingang diminish somewhat (*Nanyang minzu zongjiaozhi*, 1989: 328–36). With its large cathedral and a history of aggressive missionary expansion, however, Jingang never lost its reputation as the *Dongfang fandigang* (Oriental Vatican). From the official establishment of the Nanyang Diocese in 1844 to the early years of Communist rule in the 1950s, over a period of about 80 years, six bishops, more than 50 missionaries and 20 Sisters, all foreigners, had been active as missionaries. Additionally, local Catholics were trained to become Fathers and Sisters (*Ibid*.: 319–20; *Nanyang diquzhi*, 1994: 450). Catholicism developed in Jingang, protected within a unique enclave of privileges and rights.

As early as 1644, the Austrian Jesuit missionary Christian Herdtricht set up the first Catholic Church in Jingang (*Nanyang minzu zongjiaozhi*, 1989; *Nanyang diquzhi*, 1994; Liu Zhiqing, 2005). Even during the decades when all religious practice was banned, following the 1720 edict issued by the Qing Emperor Kangxi, religious activity continued and foreign priests were cautiously active in the area. This early history is often cited to illustrate the special place of Jingang in the Catholic Church in China. According to the *Nanyang minzu zongjiaozhi* (The Chronicle of Peoples and Religions of Nanyang), in the 1790s when Christianity was still outlawed, Jingang experienced an increase in the number of Catholic converts. This meant that when foreign missionaries were again entitled to engage openly in missionary activities after the Treaty of Nanjing had been signed in 1842 (forced on the weakened Qing Government), a Catholic culture already

existed in the area. To capitalize on this advantage, in 1843 the Roman Holy See instructed the French missionary Jean-Henri-Maximilian Baldus (1811–1869), from the Paris-based Congregation of the Mission, to go to Jingang in order to set up the Nanyang Diocese (Chai Junqing, 2006; *Nanyang minzu zongjiaozhi*, 1989). Growing rapidly, this Diocese covered an area extending beyond Henan Province to Catholic communities in Hebei, Anhui, Hubei, Shanxi and so on, rivalling other Chinese Catholic dioceses such as Beijing, Nanjing, Macau and Hong Kong ('Faguo chuanjiaoshi baidus dao jingang de shijian', reprinted 1994, 1989; Luo Yu, 2003).

For Bishop Baldus, known in China under the name of An Ruowang, the expansion of the Church required rapid consolidation of its infrastructure in Jingang as a stronghold of Catholicism. Local official frustration and popular anger were entirely disregarded. The aim was to nurture a native religious leadership by setting up of educational institutions, the selection of capable young candidates for priesthood and the establishment of missionary outposts wherever possible (*Nanyang minzu zongjiaozhi*, 1989: 339).

The consequences of this rapid expansionism were increased tensions and outright conflicts over land and property rights, with disputes and lawsuits involving parties beyond provincial borders such as the *Zongli Yamen* in the Chinese capital, Beijing. With the goal of ending the waves of disputations, the Qing Government took measures that also aimed to calm dangerous anti-foreigner sentiments that were being exacerbated by public anger over privileges extended to Chinese converts and their families. In 1866, an Ordinance paved the way for segregation of the Catholic from the non-Catholic population in Nanyang. In order to avoid future disputes, officials of the Nanyang Provincial Government, acting on the Ordinance, recommended *Jiegei* (loaning) Jingang to the Catholic Church. The submission to the Government Zongli Yamen states: 'People are extremely emotional now, so they would not allow the missionaries to preach their religion in the City [of Nanyang]. If we allow them to live in the City, it would be difficult for people to live in peace. To avoid conflict, Jingang which is located 12 kilometres away from the City, is to be on loan to the Catholic Church' (*Nanyang xianzhi*, 1904).

The transaction was made official in 1867. With permission from the *Zongli Yamen*, Jingang was now leased by the Catholic Church and outside the jurisdiction of Chinese authorities. The history of Jingang, under the early leadership of Bishop Baldus, is one of relentless pursuit of the greatest possible expansion. In the face of irate local officials and an outraged public, the Church took over land, constructed vast and visible landmarks of Catholic architecture (as in the case of the Cathedral of Jingang), placed under its protection an ever-growing community of converts and excluded from its privileges anyone, however vulnerable, who stood in the way of this expansion.

Apart from the Cathedral which was built in 1875 and seated 1,000 worshippers, the most salient symbol of the ensuing segregation between Catholics and non-Catholics was the *Jingang zhaiyuan* (Jingang Walls),

whose construction was paid out of the Henan Salt Taxes. Inside these walls, priests' dormitories, a theological seminary, a convent, an old people's home, an orphanage (Santa Casa da Misericórdia), and more rose up to proclaim a self-sufficient and sustainable civilization built on Catholicism.

In 1895, with the construction of the Jingang Walls completed, the Bishop demanded further improvements, adding a thick cement layer to the Walls and installing cannons. Later on, an electric wire fence was also put up, turning Jingang into an impenetrable, highly segregated Catholic fortress. When the young missionary Tacconi arrived in this walled-in Catholic enclave, his 'naïve' notions of missionizing in China received something of a shock (Lazzarotto, 2000). It is this history of Catholic expansion and concomitant segregation that allowed the Jingang tradition of *Shouzhennü* to flourish.

In the years of conflict during the late nineteenth century, mutual distrust and endless hostilities caused friction among the local population. Catholic converts became alienated from aggressive non-Catholic neighbours. Non-Catholics resented the physical and legal as well as cultural encroachment on their territory. Consequently, in a climate of hostility against foreign religions and their Western proselytizers, local Catholics and foreign missionaries became linked by a common interest. Marriage was one of the most important means by which to protect and safeguard the 'walls' that kept apart the populations. Catholic marriage was strictly endogamous. It

Figure 8.1 Jingang Catholic Mission Original Site, wall mural [photo: Shui Jingjun].

is therefore highly probable that the policy of strict segregation created a situation whereby women were not allowed, or were themselves unwilling, to marry non-Catholics. The volatile political history of Jingang Catholicism forms the context in which numerous Catholic women chose to stay unmarried and live with their natal family. Whilst local religious segregation would have constituted the most immediate circumstances under which women considered the status of *Shouzhen guniang*, Chinese cultural practices offered familiar traditions of celibate statuses (see Chapter 7). Because specific evidence is limited, interpretations of women's decisions to choose *Shouzhen guniang* status rather than marriage or convent life should be approached with caution.

RELIGIOUS AND SPATIAL GENDER SEGREGATION

Spatial segregation for churchgoers had been in place since Matteo Ricci's (1552–1610) time. During the late Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), French missionaries in Jingang ensured segregated spaces for women and men in order to avoid charges of immorality (see Chapter 6). It appears from the churches' location and architectural designs, as well as from informants' testimonies, that this practice of gender segregation influenced the religious architecture in Jingang after 1867. The Jingang Cathedral, built in the Romanesque style, strictly separated male and female followers. Because it was destroyed by fire in the 1960s, we only have the testimony of local people to tell us that the cathedral was very beautiful. Designed in the shape of a cross, the altar was located at one end, while seats were reserved for the clergy at the other end. At the two remaining ends of the cross, the female and male worshippers were seated, each section facing the altar, separate from and unable to see each other.

Zhang *Gugu* in Zhumadian has vivid memories of such a *Funü tang* (women's section), which nowadays she sees as 'conservative' and unnecessary (Interview with Zhang *Gugu,* Zhumadian, 2 September 2005). Such gender segregated seating was not uncommon for churches in the region. Hanzhaung Church near Zhumadian and other old churches had separate male and female sections (Luo Yu, 2003: 91–2). Neighbouring dioceses such as Xinyang and Zhumadian were probably developed under the influence of Nanyang Diocese as their churches were built in a similar architectural style.

A chapel at the back of Jingang Cathedral similarly featured segregated spheres. Serving the religious needs of Sisters and girl orphans, this chapel, built in 1881, was designed in an L-shape. Two auditoriums faced the altar so that people seated in one could not see those seated in the other. Men were prohibited from entering the courtyard. Even tradesmen would place their goods outside the gate to the courtyard. This rigid enforcement of gender segregation created a distinct female group called the *Houyuannü* (literally meaning backyard girls). The so-called *Houyuannü* were female orphans

cared for in an orphanage in which more than 80 percent of the children were girls. They were looked after by the Sisters, educated with Catholic doctrines and lived under strict discipline. Apart from learning the rudimentary principles and tenets of Catholic doctrine, they did physical exercise and acquired some practical skills. The younger orphans were instructed in hygiene and cleanliness, while the older girls learned such skills as working with printing presses, painting, weeding and planting vegetables. They were expected to leave the orphanage at the age of 20, ready to earn their own income. Their isolation and limited education were well known, and *Houyuannü* became a colloquial term and marker of identity in Jingang, suggesting 'ignorant girls' (although this was to change during the Republican era).

CREATING A CULTURE OF CATHOLICISM

Important for the consolidation and expansion of Catholicism in the population was the diversification of Catholic organizations within the Jingang Diocese. Organizations were set up and structured to target specific groups and identified needs. The highest Catholic authority in Jingang was the *Zhujiao canyiyuan* (Senate of Bishops), comprised of the most senior members of the clergy who oversaw numerous organizations. According to available documents, besides the Senate, 15 different departments were active within the Nanyang Diocese up to the 1940s, assigned activities within three main areas of work. In the first area of activity, for example, the Italian Canossian Daughters of Charity assisted foreign missionaries as needed and engaged in charitable activities such as teaching, housekeeping and caring for orphans. Initially, in 1892, the two most senior positions were occupied by foreign nuns, but later, two Chinese Sisters were appointed to take charge of this area of activity. The convent population rose to 10 at its height (*Henanshengzhi. zongjiaozhi*, 1994: 128; *Nanyang minzu zongjiaozhi*, 1989: 331–2, 340).

The second area of work related to the training of Chinese priests and nuns. The Chinese Sisters of the Immaculate Conception Convent, for example, established in 1920, had, in addition to its missionary work, to manage the subsidiary hospital. In order to train more Sisters, five courses were organized with 55 women enrolled. Candidates came from various towns in the Nanyang Diocese, the majority from Jingang.[2] Established in 1928, a new missionary school was designed to train both native priests and nuns. Candidates were selected from Catholic families from different provinces to take a one-year course studying such subjects as Church history and Catholic doctrines. More than 80 candidates were divided into three classes for men and two classes for women. Graduates were then sent to different dioceses to proselytize and oversee missionary outposts.

The participants of the third area targeted by organizations were ordinary lay-Catholics. Eleven religious groups welcomed both men and women

as did, for example, the *Lianyu hui* (Purgatory Association), the *Shengyi hui* (Carmelite), *Shengti hui* (Holy Communion Association), *Shengmu meigui hui* (Our Lady of the Rosary Assembly) and so on. Each served distinct groups of people. The *Funüshan hui* (Women's Righteousness Group), for example, targeted older women; *Shengmu nü'erhui* (Our Holy Mother's Daughters) targeted young girls; and *Shengti jun* (Holy Brigade) mobilized children and youths. The *Gongjiao qingnian jinxing hui* (Young Catholics Movement) was organized by young people, and those of strong faith could join the *Shengti hui* (Holy Assembly). These organizations used different ways to attract followers so as to broaden the appeal of Catholicism. The *Lianyu hui*, which accepted both male and female Catholics for a fee, was an organization to help prepare for life after death. There was no age restriction and even the deceased could be added to the membership list. Paid-up members could be buried in the cemetery belonging to the *Lianyu hui*, located outside the Jingang Wall.

The *Funüshan hui* (Women's Benevolence Society) was aimed at older women. They prayed together, did charitable work, provided support at bereavement and at funerals, set up hospices and gave palliative care. The *Shengmu nü'erhui* (Our Holy Mother's Daughters) was organized by young women with the main objective of deepening religious belief. Upon admission into the organization, every member was given a *Sheng pai* (Blessed Amulet) to wear around her neck on special holy days. The most important tasks consisted of prayer, service to the Church and taking the sacraments to purify their souls and strengthen their religious commitment. Care was taken to ensure the most appropriate approaches to such activities. Children were allowed to wear colourful costumes, adding to their pleasure but also to make them identify more strongly with the organization to which they belonged. Other organizations were given banners stating their spiritual accomplishments, and members of the *Shengti hui* (Holy Assembly) were permitted to assist during celebration of the Mass. The purpose of this active Catholic culture was to draw people closer into the Church and enable the institution to penetrate the daily rhythm of family life (*Henansheng zhi. zongjiao zhi,* 1994; *Nanyang minzu zongjiao zhi*, 1989).

In the Republican era, the relationship between local government, the local elite and the Catholic Church further improved to provide a congenial atmosphere for the work of Catholic organizations. This made Jingang the hub of Catholic proselytizing to which Bishop Baldus had aspired when he commanded the construction of the Jingang Wall. How effective this missionary drive was locally can be ascertained by reference to some (incomplete) statistics covering the period from the 1940s to the 1950s. Seven Jingang-born men were ordained as priests, although one left subsequently for the United States. Twenty-two women from Jingang (11 of whom were *Houyuannü*) received instruction from the Chinese Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (*Nanyang minzu zongjiaozhi*, 1989: 333–37). Altogether,

29 Jingang citizens were ordained as priests or entered holy orders as female missionaries (including *Houyuannü*), constituting about 3.6 percent of the total population of Jingang. Although drawn with a rough brush, this description conveys the pervasiveness of Catholicism both as a belief and as a way of life. It is in such a Catholic culture that certain women elected to follow the path of celibacy, supported by a local culture of religious piety and committed Christian practice.

LOCAL JINGANG CULTURE AND THE TRADITION OF *SHOUZHENNÜ*

As described in previous chapters, the political reformist impulses during the Republican era—coupled with an overall consensus among Chinese reformers that education was one of the most effective strategies for modernizing the nation, importantly including female education—created an atmosphere of competition among religious groups to provide effective services in this area. Particularly from the 1920s onwards, the Catholic Church in Jingang had, in tandem with rival religions, sought to increase its influence through greater institutional presence and by providing medical and educational services by way of elementary and middle schools for boys, though only elementary schools for girls.

Candidates for the priesthood or for convent life tended to come from more well-to-do families. Orphanages, by offering religious education, added to the pool of recruits for local convents and for missionary activities. The majority of female Catholics, however, were from poor families and unlikely to receive any education.[3] It is against such a cultural and religious background with its long history of segregation of Catholics and non-Catholics—reinforced by the conviction on the part of Catholic clergy and internalized by the majority of ordinary believers that a strict marriage policy was imperative—that the lives and options of ordinary women have to be seen. Additionally, whilst the presence of nuns offered ready-made role models for those inclined to choose celibacy, given their respected status as educators, bible teachers, nurses and the like, the local young women's lack of education and skills barred their admission into convents in Jingang. Their choice was therefore to become a *Shouzhennü,* living in their parents' home and contributing useful services to a brother's family. It appears that *Shouzhennü* did not participate in any other religious activities except attending Church services and taking the sacraments. Such a lack of institutional framework makes an accurate estimate of their numbers in Jingang an impossible task. According to Zhang *Gugu,* nearly every family in Jingang had as a member of their family a celibate woman residing with them. Mr. Liu Wencheng said that in the 1970s the many *Shouzhen guniang* he knew formed a sizable community in Jingang.

LOCAL EXPRESSIONS OF RELIGIOUS PIETY AND CHOICE OF NON-MARRIED LIVES

The history of the Providence Chinese Catechist Sisters and *Shouzhen guniang* in Kaifeng, as far as it is known to us, throws an ambiguous and contradictory light on the role played by organized religion in support of women. In Kaifeng, Catechist Sisters were frustrated by their limited opportunities compared to those open to the American Sisters. 'Nativization' of American convent culture appeared, at least to some local women, condescending and arrogant. On the other hand, the 'native' institution of *Shouzhen guniang* was rejected by the American Sisters because of its perceived lack of discipline and of the normative superiority of institutional convent culture. This attitude by the foreign missionaries, with their promise of progress and betterment, proved somewhat out of touch with the modernizing society. Although we lack comprehensive knowledge of the backgrounds of Kaifeng's celibate women, available accounts point to a level of education and religious knowledge which explains why the Italian missionaries entrusted the care of Catholicism to these women rather than to the Catechist Sisters from the Providence order. Local women of a given social and educational background had caught the breath of freedom which pervaded both elite and more popular discourses at that time, a freedom that was not easily satisfied under the restrictive discipline of convent life.

In the case of Jingang, the dual segregation of gender and religion that prevailed during the late Qing period added to the number of women who chose the local status of *Shouzhennü*. As discussed earlier, to this segregation of women and men was added the segregation of Catholics and non-Catholics, with the line of demarcation upheld both by Chinese official and popular hostility towards the Catholic Church and by the Church's militant and territorial approach to missionary activities. To prevent conflicts, Government officials adopted a policy of separation to keep Catholics and non-Catholics apart, giving rise to a trend, still in existence today, where marriage takes place within the community of faith, keeping out non-Catholics. Strong notions of propriety and limited physical mobility further compounded the distance felt by Catholic women from non-Catholic men, creating a strong and enduring tradition of female celibate culture in Catholic Jingang. This tradition of female celibacy continued unhindered as a familiar and widely accepted choice for women into the Republican era, when the relationship between Government officials and the Catholic Church grew more cordial, and beyond into the present era (Jaschok, 2003; Leung, 1992; Tong, 1999).

As pointed out earlier, foreign Sisters served as role models for local women, commanding respect for their strong faith and their level of education compared to the mostly illiterate Chinese women around them. The combination of the foreign Sisters' demonstrated religious devotion,

impressive knowledge in religious and more worldly matters (after all, they were widely travelled) and their seeming contentment in their single status introduced to local women a lifestyle that encouraged a notion of celibacy as desirable and a possibly preferable option to marriage. The respected position and seemingly refined life enjoyed by the Sisters encouraged families and society to acquiesce to and even actively support women's choice not to wed. And this choice might very well have been born of a desire to serve the Church unhindered by duties to the family; however, society's approval of the decision not to wed gave women also a legitimate opportunity to reject the demands made on them by society's strict gender code.

There is, however, also great ambiguity to be noted when we assess the impact of the Catholic Church on women's lives. Whilst it could be argued that their social space widened, increasing the repertoire of available female roles—for example, with female orphans given an institutional home, rudimentary schooling and religious careers; with women from families of means able to become paradigms of Catholic female piety—there are also less positive aspects that served to entrench constraints on physical and social mobility. Female education received far less attention, continuing in the most conservative tradition of Catholic missionizing also noted in Entenmann's (1996) description of late Imperial Catholicism in Sichuan. The status of *Shouzhen guniang* in Jingang, unlike in Kaifeng, was thus not so much a choice but the sole alternative to marriage. In Kaifeng, *Shouzhen guniang* could pride themselves on their courage to make unusual decisions, seeing themselves as superior to the ill-educated nuns in convents. In Jingang, however, only education and skills could bring admission to convents, with limited resources making 'choice' for women an abstract concept.

The Catholic Church in Jingang, enforced through the privilege of extraterritorial jurisdiction against a powerless Chinese Government, embarked on a remarkable expansion of Church power through institution-building and popular organizing. This expansion was accompanied by physical, symbolic and social walls and rules of exclusions. Whilst political authority was challenged, Church Catholic patriarchy actually reproduced the gender map of Confucian moral codes. Sacred and secular spaces were segregated, and education and work life were defined by gender as were social interaction and marriage policy. Whilst the Catholic Church overrode the authority of the Chinese state, it could be argued that it nevertheless incorporated its most conservative gender code—not dissimilar from the gender code upheld by the Catholic Church—to demarcate its very inner sanctum of power, the space of worship. Yet such an argument does not account for women's agency, their capacity to turn opportunity into choice and to turn to local cultural and social resources to justify these choices. While their choices were shaped by larger events, the indispensable legitimacy of their choices was negotiated by individual women in relation to familiar local

ideals that fused Confucian and Catholic notions of piety. Conventional norms, it might be argued, came to support unconventional, if not unprecedented, aspirations by women.

LOCAL IDEALS IN TIMES OF POLITICAL CHANGE

The situation addressed in this chapter was soon to be faced by new political challenges. The next chapter therefore temporarily shifts perspective from female religious traditions to the volatile socio-political environments which moulded their fates and the troubling uncertainty and shrinking legitimacy of their place. The early years of Communist Party rule, after assumption of power in 1949, brought political movements and campaigns of transformation that sought to translate a revolutionary Communist Party agenda into a Communist Party/State agenda at the most local level and in the most intimate spheres of society. The new Communist Party agenda of social and gender change appeared to effectively destabilize a Confucian-coded gender map which, it was contended, had been left more or less untouched by Nationalist Government policies of modernization. The letters, draft reports and memoranda accessible to researchers in the Henan Provincial Archive, can give only partial accounts of the difficult processes of such undoing of a gender map which had historically assigned women and men to their distinct segregated spheres of duty, life cycles, moralities, privileges and constraints. Current studies of these radical years of early Communist Party rule have replaced the earlier nostalgia for Maoist rule with much more nuanced analyses of the direct and varied consequences of the campaigns' successes and failures for women and men, whether they were the campaigns' authors, participants or targets (Hershatter, 2002; Gao Xiaoxian, 2007; Manning, 2007). Our interest turns to the implications of the revolution's failure, whether in its target or its proposed panacea; but in addressing those issues, we wish to take note of the long history of complex choices that allowed 'traditional' women to enter and develop a multi-faceted spectrum of institutions and lives between 'hearth' and temple.' Both the rhetoric of 'backwardness' of pre-Communist paradigmatic femininity and the proposed 'new' socialist paradigm of liberated womanhood exclude what had been part of the historically diverse cultural landscape of women's choices away from 'the hearth.' We are additionally interested in the nature of the obstacles and challenges to women's liberation from 'patriarchal fetters', as revealed in the words and experiences of those who were entrusted with the social and gender revolution. We explore what this may tell us about the opportunities religious women would have perceived as presented by 'the temple' as an alternative to mainstream domestic role, but also about what gender arrangements would constrain even the most seemingly autonomous female-led religious sites.

9 A Political Campaign to Re-map Gendered Space, 1949–1958

> *Xian nan, hou nü* ([Liberation must come] first to men, then to women) (Henansheng Danganguan [Henan Provincial Archive, HSD], 1949: 3).[1]
>
> *Bu chumen dao neng gongkaide canjia zhengzhi huodeng* (From not crossing the threshold to [women] publicly taking part in political movements) (HSD, 1952c: 5).

In the chapters which constitute the final part of the book we examine how the complex and volatile socio-political relationships that had unfolded during the Republican years between richly diverse cultures of female-led Daoist, Muslim and Catholic traditions and the ever expanding sphere of a centralizing Government, were affected by locally uneven, concerted attempts to modernize the nation, including its women, during the revolutionary era of the Communist Party/State between 1949 and 1958. In those years, gender relations, gendered spheres and women's social mobility were subjected to the most radical politicization. Conventions that had been stubbornly challenged by religious women for centuries in careful negotiations of the feasible, and which had come to be more openly defied by women intellectuals in the vibrant discourses of Republican society, were suddenly claimed in the political campaigns of the 1950s as exactly that—conventions. These campaigns urged women to *Chu men* (step over the domestic threshold into society), exhorting them to exercise their newly granted rights as equal citizens in a Communist society. How did they conceive of women's relationship with the institutions of Communist society? How did the possibilities of subjective choice and conduct, which had afforded opportunities for religious women to live outside the institutions of mainstream society even under the most repressive years of Late Imperial and Republican rule, fare under the gathering centralizing forces of Communist Party rule? What were the implications of wider societal transformations for the choices of actively believing women at the *Jiuku miao* and at the Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque, as well as for Catholic women in Kaifeng and in Jingang?

COMMUNIST PARTY/STATE POLITICS OF GENDER—COMING INSIDE 'MODERN TIMES'

In our previous chapters on Islamic, Daoist and Catholic women's sites outside the conventional inner sphere of women, we have sought to illustrate

the specificity of religious spaces that flourished because of the overriding religious commitment on the part of their members. We have argued that their significance to religious women, as well as the significance of women to these religious traditions, can only be understood when we connect their values and ways of doing things with the plurality of traditions and beliefs in which they were situated. The years between 1949 and 1958 swept aside this accustomed co-existence—however precarious—of diverse ways of life when the Communist Party targeted *all* women in terms of *all* those characteristics perceived to hold *all* women back from full participation of social life. Closer examination of texts—letters, reports, drafts, official communiqués—held in the provincial archives shed some light on the most direct social intervention by the Party/State to make a 'new society', which also entailed the making of the 'new woman.' The documentation to be found in the Henan Provincial Archive tells of debates, arguments and conflicts, frequently of violent collisions, which occurred when local women in the province were targeted for the part they played, symbolically, and were to play economically, in the making of the Communist Party State. In the course of this mobilization of female labour, traditions, conventions, familiar ways of doing things and plurality of choices gave way to the force of the Communist Party's paramount agenda to bring the nation, including its women, into the Communist era.

This chapter is not intended as a sociological or empirical study of the 'woman-question' during the marriage and land reforms on which there is already an abundance of excellent literature (Andors, 1983; Croll, 1978; Davin, 1976; Jacka, 1997; Stacey, 1983, among others). Instead, given our thematic preoccupations, we focus on the Communist Party's overriding project of nation building that called for women to 'leave home' and to participate in the public sphere, and how it unravelled so quickly when neither 'home' nor 'society' were amenable to shifts in gender relations. This Party project condemned religious women—who over many centuries, out of conviction and idealism, had left home to enter a religious community of their choice—to social marginality. Ambiguities in the term of *Chu jià/jiā*—of women moving between 'the hearth and the temple' (Zhou Yiqun, 2003)—were resolved by the State unambiguously. *Chu jiā*, or a woman's choice of a religious life over family life was assigned the label of *backwardness*. *Chu jià*, with its connotation of family prerogative to decide into which family a daughter was to marry was contested as 'feudal' and in need of legal and social policy reform. Instead, *Chu jiāmen* as women's freedom to exercise their own choice aimed to rupture the hold of family and patriline over her mind and body. In this contestation of power between Party/State, family and individual women, so the archival records tell us, the moment when women hovered on the threshold and all seemed still possible was brief. Not only did women not conquer their part of the public domain, but the process by which 'the new woman' was engendered and celebrated (Ko and Wang, 2007) excluded in subsequent years all those whose religious faith made them cling to their belief and to their community of belief.

This chapter also connects with our study of Feng Yuxiang's intervention and policy in the 1920s to bring women out of backwardness into modern times. In reference to Julia Kristeva's conceptualization of the genderedness of time as historical time (its linearity also suggestive of the drive of modernity and progress) and space/time associated with female subjectivity of '*repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time' (Kristeva, in Toril Moi, 1986: 187–213 emphasis added) it can be argued that, as in the 1920s, the political intervention of the Communist Party singularly failed women activists' demands to take their share of modernity as fully entitled participants of public life. On the contrary, and disastrously, State interventions for many years barred women from the familiar certainties of life-worlds that had provided options outside mainstream society's conceptual repertoires' of women's roles centred on 'the hearth' as the patriarchal anchor of social stability.

To explore these issues, we turned to documents in the Henan Provincial Archive which tell of the Maoist revolutionary period during the 1950s when the Chinese Communist State sought political legitimacy in continued social revolution. Specifically, we looked at documents from those years when concerted effort was made to dismantle the confinement of women to the domestic sphere, to bring women out of their homes in order to assume a productive role in Communist society. The gaps in information are considerable, and files were only open to access for the years up to 1958. Women as members of religious organizations and devotees of sites of worship are, for all intents and purposes, invisible. There is one explicit reference to religious women's partiality for their own kind when electing local leaders (this will be discussed next). But it is these silences, these absences of voices in official government archives that ask for new approaches to research and for the formulation of stubborn questions, however elusive their answers. Progress can only be made in investigation outside official archives, in personal conversations and private visits. Yet between the lines of carefully penned reports we can also discover the many less explicit, barely veiled references to women's religious loyalties and to the perversity of their stubborn attachment that holds out even as campaign after campaign slogan and cadre after Party cadre announce the arrival of a new era, the time of 'women's liberation.'

Thinking and theorizing about conceptions of women's space, as 'traditional' and as 'new' is to ask questions about how these challenges to 'liberation' were understood by those entrusted with changing the parameters of women's lives during the time of revolution.[2] The materials which cover the years between 1949 and 1958 start with frank discussions of the impact on women of unstable socio-economic conditions resulting from civil war and widespread rural poverty and their experience under Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Land Reform movement and the Marriage Law campaigns.[3] They end with professions of loyalty to CCP decrees when in a symbiotic interlocking of *Guojia* (state/nation), *She* (local commune)

and *Geren* (individual) women were firmly pressed into the service of a centralising State. Reports give an indication of the extent of Party/State penetration into all aspects of family and women's lives. Nothing was too mundane or too small a matter to escape the attention of watchful cadres and local activists, busy in organizations at all levels of society down to *Jie fulian* (street-level women's committees) (HSD, 1958a: 7). Concomitantly, the movement in the early 1950s to bring women into public life through adapting popular, local traditions of women's associations to the Communist strategies for social change—with *Dulixingde nüzuzhi*, independent women's organizations led by the Communist Party's women cadres taking the place of popular forms of female traditions, including religious groups—was itself soon called into question as we shall see next.

Thinking about long- and short-term strategies to revolutionise women's lives required both ideological and very pragmatic considerations of the different ways in which factors such as urban and rural environments, class, education, family economy and marital status, among others, would shape individual women's identity and position women in society in diverse ways. In the early years of social fluidity, not all women left home nor entered the male sphere of political life, but many did, with some dying in the process while others acquired unprecedented authority. It is the crossing of boundaries from inner to outer domain, of the emotion and political agendas invested in them, which is the subject under investigation. Only through this reappraisal of local patterns of female seclusion and mobility can the place of the religious life in women's lives be more fully understood. The documents reveal women as diverse, defined by different class, age, education, religious and ethnic memberships, but it is possible to differentiate between those whose voices we hear through their writing and who at times allow a glimpse into their own lives and the women whom they were writing about as the target of revolutionary endeavour. The materials thus provide an opportunity for a close reading of women exercising agency in circumstances of change and of their perceptions of the women who constituted the targets of social and political campaigns.

The *Gongzuo baogao*, work reports, some of which were submitted in the form of drafts of conference presentations, were in the main written by the women on whose shoulders rested the grassroots implementation of Party/State rewriting of relations between women and space. Their thinking, formulation and re-formulation of Party decrees for local consumption and of strategies to reach women and not alienate families and communities inform these pages. Although no names are attached to the files, we may assume that the authors of reports were members of leading core groups of activists who worked for Kaifeng women's organizations. We also may discern from the position taken by the authors in the early 1950s that they were local women, familiar with the complexity of revolutionising women's lives in the conservative provincial milieu of Henan. It is also apparent, however, that the women they sought to release from patriarchal fate, i.e.,

women they considered afflicted by *Fengjian sixiang*, a feudal mindset, came from backgrounds which differed in important respects from their own. Class, education, strategic access to membership of social and political networks and, importantly, attitude to religion and religious belief continued to underline the superiority of a few women over many, and the reports' authors appear most conscious of this ideological and social gulf.

WOMEN AS SUBJECTS AND OBJECTS OF REVOLUTION

What do the documents tell us about female subjectivities as sites of change and of attempted and failed revolution? Not all women are alike. Some, a very few women, acted as initiators of social movements and campaigns, and many more, the majority, constituted the targets of these campaigns. The women of relative privilege, education and authority, positioned within the political space to which they sought to bring other women still 'confined' in the female space, were writing reports on the progress, or lack thereof, in making women's suffering heard in the public arena. In the years immediately following commencement of organized women's work in Kaifeng, the personal voice of the reports' authors comes through strongly. They are often conflicted, clearly seeing themselves as working alongside men in Party and Government organizations, spreading knowledge of Land Reform and of the new Marriage Law in particular. Their anger is equally evident, as when they criticise those cadres who refuse to give women their due reward for the part played in the years of revolution, turning what should be presentation of a law giving unambiguous support to women into *Shenmide dongxi* (a mysterious thing), as stated with unmistakable frustration in the report written in 1950 (HSD, 1950: 2).

The tendency of cadres to 'mystify' women's proper legal rights was seemingly rooted in a widespread perception of ordinary women, particularly those in the rural areas, as irrational, likely to rush into divorce as soon they hear of ways to exercise choice, thus destabilising society and the new State's still fragile hold on power. Yet these 'maltreated' and oppressed women, persecuted by family to the point of death, were also depicted as entirely cowed by authority (and those who represented authority, such as cadres, village elders, committee director), gullible and, because lacking in even rudimentary education and literacy, easily swayed by public opinion. Many contradictory perceptions become apparent: the more conservative cadres worried about women rushing to divorce courts, whilst other writers saw these same women as passive, unable to grasp new opportunities and too weak to withstand pressures from mother-in-law and husband. Anger could erupt when injustice became too much. Young women at a public meeting in Zhengzhou to celebrate International Women's Day (8 March 1950) protested at the attention given to landlords killed by irate peasants, whereas *Funü sile meiyou ren guan, women laodong funü hai bu*

ru dizhu (when women die, no one cares; are our women workers of lesser value than [feudal] landlords). The report on this event does not say what the response to this outburst might have been (HSD, *Ibid*.: 12).

The important emphasis laid on consciousness-raising and on 'speak bitterness' meetings as tools of mobilising these rural women derived from activists' perceptions that the greatest obstacle they faced was women's inclination to submit to 'fate.' Women's fear of *Biantian* (restoration of old society) and *Xin mingyun* (believing in fate) were seen by activists as a major obstacle to radical reform (HSD, J017.1.38, 1952: 13). This acceptance of their personal fate, an activist reported to the Party Committee, undermined many a woman's spirit, though without such spirit, women could not rebel against feudal society as a major obstacle to radical reform (HSD, 1952c: 13). Nor could they develop the critical capacity needed to analyze the conditions which sustained feudal institutions that confined women's spirit. The writer of a report from the year 1952 remarked that too many women are inclined to believe that *Ziji shou zui, mingyun bu hao* (suffering comes from bad fate). In the months following this report, this ubiquitous female character trait was blamed for many a young woman's decision to select the husband of their family's choice rather than exercise her legal rights; dutiful sentiments were apparently overriding women's exercise of personal choice of marriage partner (HSD, 1952a: 37).

The early reports express concern over the sluggish pace of gender revolution and the obstacles in the way of women's emergence into public life and political authority. Women were exhorted again and again to join the tidal wave of revolutionary history instead of allowing old attachments to sway them into counter-revolutionary activity. The frequent urging of women by political leaders to forego their more familiar and preferred associations tells us that political cadres were aware of the continued strength of women's traditional associations in Kaifeng as well as in the surrounding countryside, and that they regarded such popular traditions of organizing, which included religious organizing, as a major hindrance to political progress. In other words, the 'new woman' could only emerge from the 'new' women's organizations. Anxiety over women's loyalty came to the fore when women cadres had to urge urban and rural women to choose local women's representatives for their 'progressive' viewpoint and closeness to the Party. All too often, the reports to Party headquarters warned, women were wont to choose the kind of political representatives to speak for them at county and provincial levels who shared their *Xinyang* (religious faith) and whom they were used to trust to advocate their interests. Party activists complained that Kaifeng's Muslim women were not joining the revolution in sufficient numbers. Commenting on the *Huimin wenti* (the 'Muslim issue'), activists complained about women bowing to 'fate', on their emotional subservience and on their perceived attachment to received assumptions and the force of habit. How could women be 'liberated' when they refused to let go of local ties which bound them to the membership of a

women's collective history, reaching back in certain cases many generations of women, including members of their own families (HSD, 1950: 9)?

This discussion helps us to understand how Party activists' often voiced concerns over the pace of women's liberation as part of the overall social revolution has to be seen also in the light of local women's preference for their familiar organizations, a preference which could not be easily undermined. Religion is an ever-present subtext. Whilst in the early years of the 1950s, religion is only obliquely mentioned in references to the difficulties activists experienced in extracting women from *Fengjian sixiang fengsu* (feudal mindset and customs) and the like (HSD, 1952a: 15), in later years attacks on persistent attachment to religious practices became more explicit.

Women 'not coming out' of their homes was the expression used to refer to what was regarded as the inadequacy of realising the 'women's movement as a movement for self realization, for women liberating themselves', as the failure in many ways to liberate the subjectivities of women (HSD, *Ibid*.: 10). Women's lack of self-confidence, so writers of various reports intimated, was inhibiting their entry into public participation (HSD, *Ibid*.: 11). Activists lamented women's dependence as a great obstacle to change, most particularly, their 'dependency on men' and 'the traditional relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law' (HSD, 1952a: 11). The articles proposed that whilst women were locked into 'feudal thought', what barred the way for many rural women to move into public roles was the maltreatment they suffered in their families, the brutality with which their confinement to the home would be enforced by family members.

It is evident from the amount of space devoted to writing about such issues that leading women activists realised how important values of independence and democracy were to women's development inside the family. Insistent complaints by the authors of reports over neglect of this site of women's struggle testify to the fact that there was a strong awareness of the importance of revolutionising family relations as necessary for the success of the campaigns to bring women into public life; but it also indicated the extent of opposition to the dismantling of norms and institutions that supported the traditional gender arrangement. Statistics interspersed in these reports on the local impact of the 1950 Marriage Law allow us to gain some understanding of the fear felt by many Party members when hearing of the high number of *Ziyou jiehun* (self-chosen marriages) and *Lihun* (divorce) in counties, districts and cities all over the country. Even given the approximate nature of these statistics, the partial information on a wider situation, and the lack of close knowledge of the circumstances leading to the women's decisions to go against received customs and pressure from family and the local community, these statistics tell of unprecedented conflicts and tensions at all levels of women's lives. Thus, on 27 September 1952, it was reported that in 130 villages in Hunan, within a period of 10 months, 38,879 non-arranged marriages and 31,866 divorces

were registered. In the same province, in the period of one year, Weiyang City registered 1,059 non-arranged marriages and 382 divorces. In Guangzhou City in Guangdong Province, within one year, 4,045 non-arranged marriages and 528 divorces were reported. In Yagui County, in Jiangxi Province, 3,119 non-arranged marriages and 1,380 divorces were recorded in a single year. Within the time period of one year, in the administrative region of Fuzhouzhuan, Jiangxi, 6,840 non-arranged marriages and 3,655 divorces took place (HSD, 1952a; 1952b: 28). And there was more.

The author of a report on rural women in the south of Henan remarked that most statistics are of a very general nature, and that many 'new' types of marriages and divorces never come to the attention of the authorities. Nevertheless, she commented that the numbers indicate trends signalling opportunities for change even in the most remote, countryside areas. It appears, she continued, that some 'Old women nowadays are saying that poor men can now marry without spending money,' that 'women do not [need to] suffer curses,' and that 'non-arranged marriages are good for production' (HSD, 1952a: 28). These citations of positive pronouncements, however, have to be placed alongside stories of murder, the suffocation to death of women seeking divorce, suicides, brutal mutilation and abuse of women. The same report gives evidence of the brutal consequences for women who went against tradition and against the will of their next-of-kin. In order to emphasize the ubiquity of violence inflicted on women and the extent to which the situation in Henan reflected a wider pattern of female vulnerability, findings from other provinces were used to buttress passionate pleas for public support for women in dire need. Citing investigations in Guangdong Province, in June 1952, 79 counties related more than 11,259 cases of violation of the Marriage Law, including violent abuse and murder. In each county, the author says, cases coming before the courts because of incidents of homicide and women's suicide were numbered in the hundreds. These are women who survived untold suffering in order to reach the courts, doing so in the main without support or representation and subject to bureaucratic procedures that were often sluggish and slow in responding to their desperate plight (HSD, 1952a: 30).

ORGANIZING INDEPENDENTLY, ORGANIZING IN SOLIDARITY

The anxiety to prevent domestic subservience shaping relations in the political sphere made writers emphasize, again and again, the need for women to organize themselves. During the time that Land Reform was affecting all members of society, activists concluded that women nevertheless had to protect a space of their own through collective organization. In a report in 1952 on basic problems confronting the rural women's movement, the author stated emphatically that women must have their own organizations

within the countrywide Land Reform movement. The notion, she commented that organizations such as the *Xiang funü daibiaohui* (County Women's Assembly) is redundant and should be subsumed under a general organization is patently, and dangerously, wrong. Women's feelings and minds had been dominated by patriarchal ideas for too long, making them vulnerable to male domination even in the most revolutionary organization. Women needed their own place and their own female leadership in order for the transformations to endure. The article indicates that the elements required for an enduring transformation were effective grassroots organizing with the majority of women, particularly in the conservative rural areas guided by a core group of leading women activists. Only in this way could participatory processes at all levels of the organization be ensured. Emphasis on *Dulixingde funü zuzhi* (women's organizations able to stand on their own) was at the core of women's transformation (HSD, 1952a: 17–8).

The creation of a new and 'liberated' culture of women's organization was accompanied by catchy slogans, popularized by grassroots dissemination of new values and much visual propaganda. Regular gatherings of women to listen to each other's personal story of oppression, to weep in unison at the accounts of women's hardship, and to sing in harmony of the dawn of a new era engendered a supportive atmosphere which attracted the young and old (HSD, *Ibid*.: 21). Ironically, these were characteristics not unlike those that distinguished the much maligned religious women's associations and institutions such as women's mosques which also had demanded the facilitation of women's self-determination through female leadership and segregated space.

The theme of independent women's organizations, *Dulixing,* as a condition of women's equal participation in the wider society runs as a common thread through all of the reports and letters. It is noteworthy that within only two years, a shift occurred from this spirited defense to a call for a united front with men. Criticism of the selfishness of women activists became louder, arguing that they placed women's concerns over the very survival of the new China which was still fighting the many enemies of Communism. Calls for solidarity of women with supportive men came to give way to justifications of the subordination of women's struggle to the national struggle and to the all-out suppression of the many remaining enemies of the People's Republic. Women were reminded that class struggle *Bu shi gulide gongzuo* (is not an isolated struggle). Independent women's organizations, women activists in 1954 intoned, were counterproductive, not only hurting men but also the cause of the revolution. The dismantling of the ideological and institutional barriers confining women on the inside of domestic thresholds that had once had been the target of revolutionary struggle, was now of secondary importance to a Party/State in the process of political consolidation. This required the domestication of independently minded women's organizations dedicated to the change

of moral codes and institutions that legitimized constraints on women's individual and collective mobility.

A discursive space that had been created by passionate debates over reconciling women's interests with the agenda of the State flattened and diminished under adverse political pressures. Public culture as political culture, the later archival documents suggest, became a sphere tightly controlled by the Party in which women's organizations were allocated specific roles and functions. A report of the Kaifeng City Women's Federation proclaimed in 1954 that it had to be clear to all cadres that 'the interests of the nation were to be recognised as at one with the interest of the individual' (HSD, 1954a: 52). Translated into the language of that time, women's organizations were to *Zuo hao dangweide zhushou*, be the 'good handmaidens of the Party Committee' (HSD, *Ibid*.). The structure of political authority and hierarchy was no longer a subject of debate but a certificate of loyalty to the new society, reinventing (discredited) domestic patriarchy as (sanctioned) revolutionary *Zhushou* (helping hand).

It was now incumbent upon women's organizations in this role of the Party's handmaiden to listen (instead of being listened to), to execute policy decisions efficiently and to bring to the attention of the Party any concerns related to the effective consolidation of socialist family policy (HSD, *Ibid*.: 64). The spirit of investigation into women's living conditions in different areas of the province, into the impact of policies on women's lives given the diversity of conditions, of status, age, class and education, was yielding to demands by the Party for women to prepare for their role in the new socialist society through proper socialist study, consciousness-raising, and devotion to the overall development goals of the country as enunciated by the Party.

In this same report, written in 1954 by the Zhengzhou City Democratic Women's Federation *Minzhu Funü Lianhehui Zhengzhoushi*, however, there is a sense of the human suffering engendered by radical policies, the radical measures dictated by incompetent and often aloof Party cadres at a time when women's organizations were losing their independent voice. Mention is made of women's conflict arising from unresolved tensions between continued primary roles at home and demand for increased work in the ideological and economic spheres of society. The legacies from the Marriage Law reforms remained unresolved, with its split families, abused and abandoned women, persecuted divorced women, those who had courageously remarried or, for that matter, had rejected offers of marriage. A muted subtext runs through the report which draws the critical reader's attention to the fragility of women's morale, the sense of abandonment felt by those who had only a few years earlier braved their family's hostility or worse. Where once an air of openness and mutual respect among all classes of women pervaded the writing of activists, increasing calls for centralisation of decisions and procedures reflect the strengthening political powers of the Party/State (HSD, 1954b: 12).

Women's organizations had become dedicated to bureaucratic attention to the implementation of Party decrees and policies. In the following years, the earlier generations with their passionate commitment to 'women's issues' began giving way to the nervously politically correct, nebulous rhetoric of Party speak (HSD, 1958d). Speeches were increasingly pervaded by anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, anti-Western and anti-individualist sentiment. Couched in the language of militant and self-sacrificial fervour, the earlier generations of earthy, factual observations about the messiness of developments at the local level were giving way to the aping of political correctness which bore little relation to local events and women's needs, or to the demands in earlier years for the fullest incorporation of women's voices into the public sphere of political culture (HSD, *Ibid*.).

Finally, how were women's exclusion from, or inclusion in, the public political sphere justified in the context of the early years of Party/State consolidation in Henan? Implementation of the 1950 Marriage Law, designed to grant women rights and recognition of these rights to remake their lives inside family and kinship organizations, was frequently reiterated in the emphatic claims of women activists for *Jiatingzhong shehuishangde minzhu* quanli: 'democratic rights in the family and in society' (HSD, 1952a: 19). These assertions, together with calls for women's equal participation in the public spheres of society, were met by a violent, at times deadly, backlash. Confronting these dangers in their own lives, although appalled and angry at the double victimisation of women, women cadres could only write helplessly about the renewed suffering of women for which there was no adequate back-up from Party and local community organizations. A cadre who contributed a report from Xuchang in Zhuang County, Henan Province, dated 5 October 1952, provides a rare glimpse into a small community's experience of the imminent arrival, and implementation, of the Marriage Law.

Although passed in 1950, news of this Law and its revolutionary implications for family life only reached cadres and villagers in Zhuang County in late 1951. To catch up with developments elsewhere, a fast-track popularization of the Marriage Law was decided on, with posters, plays and popular opera serving to convey news of new rights and the illegality of old prerogatives. This local-level report reflects the national drama where dutiful, if slightly confused, cadres executed vaguely comprehended duties in the face of much popular dismay and opposition and frequently with personal misgivings. The report, which details the many conflicts that ensued mostly between mothers- and daughters-in-law, speaks of the might of popular opinion when individuals sought to exercise their new right to choose a spouse, often in fear of public ridicule and sometimes outright abuse. Also clear is that local cadres were unprepared to face the public outcry and anger, anxiously seeking a balance between alleviating the anger, much of which they shared, and adhering to instructions from the government, uncertain over allegiance and future directions (HSD, *Ibid*.: 35–7).

Documents dated between 1954 to 1958 show evidence of the consolidation of two trends. First, the individual, small family holdings that had constituted the popular outcome of recent Land Reform campaigns were destroyed. These were to be replaced with larger communal structures needed most importantly 'to destroy the feudal mindset', *Fengjian sixiang*, that clung to individual and small family households. Only by dismantling the newly setup smaller holdings, reports written for the benefit of rural women's organizations emphasized, could the dream of a large 'Communist family' be accomplished. The second trend was an increasing tendency by government cadres to assign women roles and functions in this 'new socialist society' that made the public sphere not unlike the 'old society' they had supposedly left behind when the maligned 'feudal family structure' was overthrown by the Communist revolution.

By 1958 it had become apparent that the position accorded to women in public life fell far short of the early revolutionary objectives of women activists who had envisaged a much more radical transformation of society's segregation of norms and institutions. 'From not crossing the threshold to publicly taking part in political movements' (HSD, 1952c: 5), the early Party slogans proclaimed, women were to be free from dictates of family and society. Instead, the political sphere tightened its grip over domestic life. The writer of the summary report of 1958, remarking on the revolutionary spirit that had entered Kaifeng, duly recounted the tasks ahead for all women, 'in order for us to succeed in our daily lives, we must month after month plan ahead, we must day after day work to schedule, not allow domestic matter interfere with production' (HSD, 1958b: 16). As much as the domestic sphere was to be at the disposal of State planning, those women who did enter the public sphere were very quickly reduced to subservient positions.

A vivid model for the new, revolutionary public role to be played by women was provided by the story of Qiao, a lowly cadre who was thrust into the political lime-light when she became a revolutionary role model. It appears that Qiao, keen to get into public life, was rather contemptuous of women's work. The story of her transformation into a dedicated role model was told to large gatherings of cadres. The point it makes about women's proper place in public life, the admission of reluctance on the part of ambitious women to accept the domestic nature of their public role, and the jubilatory note with which the conversion is seen to have led to a committed, politically correct stance are worth pondering. The account, given under the title of *Juexin yao dan yige you hong you zhuande xiang fulian zhuren Qiao Suhua* (Qiao Suhua, resolutely being both a red and expert director of the District Women's Association), is as follows:

> Naoli District Women's Association director Qiao was formerly the secretary of the District Administrative Branch. At first she was not content with doing women's work, considering women's work to have

> no future in it and without glory, considering women backwards, nothing as good as [men who were responsible for] doing district work. In particular, given the circumstances of the Party's slogan to forcefully develop the raising of pigs, she had even less confidence in organizing and mobilising women. She thought that women cannot get things done, firstly because they are uneducated, and secondly because they have no skills. But since she heard the women's association cadre both describe the raising of pigs as suited to the strength of women, *Shihe funü liliang*, as well as it qualifying as an important work, she became very moved, *Hen da gandong*. Afterwards, she grasped the two big responsibilities of women: be thrifty in running her home, and raise pigs. Furthermore, she wrote in her notebook which she kept close by her side even when she went to bed: "What are the two great responsibilities of women?" This was in order to remind herself continuously and unceasingly of her duties (HSD, 1958c).

It appears from this account that the initially sceptical villagers, thinking her young and inexperienced, were in the end brought around by her persuasive powers. Under her dedicated leadership, pig production spiralled upwards and livestock production brought prosperity to the whole county.

The revolutionary woman was successfully domesticated; the context had changed but the patriarchal claims to women's body and mind, and hence the traditional hierarchy of relations, had after all stayed the same. It is ironic that the very women ignored by Party cadres, who, as the archival documents show struggled valiantly, but all too often in vain, to support rural and urban women to 'leave home' in order to 'liberate themselves', were the women of religious faith. Indeed, religious women were most viciously attacked for having 'crossed the threshold' to follow their vocation. From the point of view of women of religious belief, the failure of what was to be a revolutionary campaign to redraw the ground rules of a patriarchal gender map would have appeared unsurprising, particularly given their own much-maligned traditions of organization into 'substitute families' outside patrilineal allegiances—a practice which the Communist Party, no less than the Confucian literati of 'old', could not possibly tolerate. This was the lesson of the campaign in the 1950s.

The failure did not simply reflect the onset of political pragmatism and fear of patriarchal backlash, or of economic imperatives taking precedence over social reforms as the Communist Party, struggling to consolidate its rule, rescinded on its 'promissory notes' (Young *et al.*, 1983). It was the fact that the makers of the new socialist paradigm of womanhood could not imagine, and therefore condone, women whose choices took them outside the patriarchal family, either in its most enduring legacy centred on the domestic hearth, or in its reconstituted form, in the patriarchal domain of work life. In the years following the campaigns, even the social space that had been historically available to marginal groups and beliefs shrank

until during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) all activities unsanctioned by the State ceased. Yet what the next chapters will reveal is how women were refusing to let go of their past and faced with stubborn determination threats to its survival, despite the unprecedented severity of Government control over all forms of social and cultural life.

After the late 1970s, the Chinese government under Deng Xiaoping loosened its strictures to allow for the opening of hitherto sealed religious and cultural spaces. Confronted in various ways with the complex challenges of negotiating legitimacy between ideological marginality, as the abiding anti-thesis of modernity, and cultural rejuvenation, religious women and their organizations took up the challenge of insisting on the relevance of lives motivated by religious faith to a self-proclaimed secular society. They took up the challenge of asserting their voices in a State project of carefully steered multicultural harmony, predicated on tight government regimentation and control of religious sites, ever bargaining for a widening space of legitimacy as a unique religious and entirely Chinese women's culture relevant and appropriate to the needs of a simultaneously indigenous and global State-sponsored modernity.

Part III

Communist China, and Beyond

Women, Religion and Space in Contemporary Chinese Society

10 The Zhengzhou Beida Women's Mosque
Tradition, Modernity and Identity

> Religions provide myths, symbols, and narratives that express desires for transcendence, redemption, salvation, liberation, and wholeness, but which also enforce inequalities, oppression, separation, and hierarchies. *The relations between profoundly transformative and deeply conservative aspects of any religion play themselves out at the local level*, but often with references to values that are perceived as unchanging and divinely ordained (Wiesner-Hanks, 2005: 9, emphasis added).

In our earlier chapters we describe how women within the three religious traditions have come to appropriate and re-appropriate (as in the case of the *Jiuku miao*) their traditional sites to make themselves legitimate and visible as members of their tradition and, more specifically, as heirs to the history of the institution they seek to adapt to contemporary times. We have presented contrasting histories and contrasting relationships between religious organizations and the community and between organizations and the State.

The religious communities we study share certain features in the ways their institutions have, over time, absorbed and reconfigured local translations of broader developments in the socio-political gender arrangements of modern China. All share an existence under the tightly choreographed omnipresence of the Party/State in a field of tension between autonomy, of the locus of communal religious identity and expression, and loyalty, in adherence to the multifarious controls of religion by the State (Jaschok, 2003; Leung, 1992; MacInnis, 1989; Madsen, 1998; Potter, 2003).

In the following final accounts, we are interested in local constellations of creative individual leadership, the state of female organizations and the causes around which they organize themselves, as well as the relationship between leader and community and how women religious leaders bargain with secular and religious patriarchies. There are notable differences to be explored in each community, in the way that women's agency, individual or as a collective force, may balance the structures of government power, administrative control and religious patriarchal authority. In the spectrum of local activisms we describe two themes emerge as central to our interpretations: *Duiying*, an understanding of gender relations in terms of a non-adversarial approach to the other; and the continuity of *Nei/Wai*, the gender-based conceptual/political dichotomy problematizing women's aspirations for autonomy.

In considering in our final chapters the prospects of Muslim, Daoist and Catholic women's own spaces in contemporary times, we are foregrounding what appear two seemingly irreconcilable approaches to change and continuity as interchangeable strategies utilized by vulnerable women to ensure their survival and enhancement of influence. Such traditions of spatial-social occupation have given rise to new roles and reinforced historical identities which transcend geographical locations—as is the case with the Beida Women's Mosque in Zhengzhou, the provincial capital of Henan, considered the most successful in influence.

THE ZHENGZHOU BEIDA *NÜSI* (WOMEN'S MOSQUE)

The Zhengzhou Beida Women's Mosque continues to build on the tradition of independence which has grown out of a history of segregated space, and indeed the *Ahong* at the Beida Mosque is herself from a Kaifeng family, educated in part at the Kaifeng Wangjia Hutong Mosque. Under the inspiring leadership of Du Shuzhen *Lao ahong*, the Beida Women's Mosque takes strength, pride and legitimacy from such a continuity of tradition.

Feminist geographers have demonstrated the insights to be gained from close readings of archaeological signs left by the material history of women. They have shown how architectural maps of cultural and social codes may reveal 'a social history nuanced by the workings of power and

Figure 10.1 Yao *Ahong*, Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque, Kaifeng [photo: Maria Jaschok]. By permission of Yao *Ahong*.

exclusion' (Stanbury and Chieffo Raguin, 2005: 4) and how practices of gender may be uncovered encoded in buildings.[1] In the words of Pierre Bourdieu: 'All aspects of culture, high or low, participate in the process of legitimizing structures of power in a process that simultaneously renders those structures invisible' (quoted in Stanbury and Chieffo Raguin, *Ibid*). Women's mosques, as part of Islam as an officially sanctioned religion, have in their evolution from assigned space moved from being dependent on men's management to achieving *Duli* (independent) status, historically and again in contemporary times. This change has intersected in decisive ways with developments within China's mainstream political and gender culture.[2] Such developments have arguably benefited the case made by Muslim women and their female leaders for the equal status of women's mosques in the legal, economic and religious spheres.

Figure 10.2 Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque, Kaifeng. Outside the Women's Prayer Hall [photo: Maria Jaschok]. By permission of Yao *Ahong*.

Figure 10.3 Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque, Kaifeng. Inside the Women's Prayer Hall, [photo: Maria Jaschok]. By permission of Yao *Ahong*.

Figure 10.4 Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque, Kaifeng. Women's Prayer Mat [photo: Maria Jaschok]. By permission of Yao *Ahong*.

LOCATION, ORIGIN AND RELATIONS

The Beida Women's Mosque is located in *Qingzhensi jie* (Mosque Street) close to the offices of the *Quzhengfu dayuan* (District Government compound), in what was once the old Hui Quarter in Zhengzhou. A signboard hangs above the gate carrying four Chinese characters, *Qingzhen nüsi* (Women's Mosque). Located next to it is the *Beida nansi* (Men's Mosque), known as *Beidasi*. The two mosques are separated only by a wall, but to get from one to the other one has to walk via Mosque Street. These two mosques are surrounded by their respective communities (*Fang*) in the newly re-named residential area of *Xingyue shequ* (Moon and Star Residential Area).[3]

Zhengzhou began its contemporary rise to a vital political, commercial and transport hub in 1954, just five years after the establishment of the

Figure 10.5 Beida Women's Mosque, Zhengzhou, Henan [photo: Maria Jaschok].

People's Republic of China, when the Communist Party offices and the Henan provincial government with all their military and department offices were moved from Kaifeng to Zhengzhou. Up to that point, Zhengzhou had seen much slower reforms than had been experienced in Kaifeng during the Republican period. In the fields of women's education, trade unionism or organizations, the relative conservatism of Zhengzhou's local culture made for slower developments of reforms than we noted in Kaifeng. The campaign against footbinding, for example, did not take off in Zhengzhou until late into the Republican era. It was reported in the 1930s that as far as Zheng County was concerned, 'the trend of footbinding is still flourishing with more than 75 per cent of women the County still adhering to the custom' (*Minguo shiqi henansheng tongjiziliao* 2, 1987: 370). The women's movement experienced its most active time after the outbreak of the War of Resistance against Japan. Recorded as a milestone in the chronicle of women's history in Henan, on 8 March 1938, women in Zhengzhou gathered to celebrate International Women's Day. More than a thousand women gathered at the Longhai Assembly Hall including workers of the Yufeng Cotton Factory, secondary school teachers and students, staff members of various primary schools and members of local women's groups, as well as housewives, prostitutes and women refugees. The gathering condemned the invasion of China by the Japanese army and expressed a strong determination to resist. The huge demonstration and the establishment of a *Funü jiuwang xiehui* (Women's National Salvation Society) to oppose Japanese aggression constituted the first occasion that women's activities aroused public awareness (*Zhengzhoushi zhi*, 1998(2): 400–4). There is no mention of Muslim women taking part in this demonstration, but it occurred close to the old Hui Quarter. At that time, Hui Muslim women did not wear religious clothing, so they would not have been easily distinguished by outside observers. References by informants, however, about the involvement of female relatives in patriotic assemblies during that time suggest their participation was highly likely.

During this time, Zhengzhou experienced a rapid increase in the arrival of Muslim immigrants, taking advantage of a growing economy and the local railway construction boom. Most Muslims came from Kaifeng, Xingyang, Xinzheng, Luoyang and Jiaozuo in northern Henan.

These workers brought with them familiarity with women's mosques since the first such mosques had been built in Kaifeng and Jiaozuo. Records indicate that in the first year of the Republican era, in 1912, the first women's mosque was finally established in Zhengzhou. Before the completion of the railway in the late Qing period there was only one mosque (Beida Mosque) in the City and one outside the City (Duizhou Mosque). By 1935, there were eight men's mosques and three women's mosques. The New Islamic Cultural Movement (see Chapter 3) also became active in Zhengzhou, popularizing Islamic education to make Islam more accessible and its provisions more appropriate to local conditions. Under the auspices of the *Huijiao jujinhui zhengzhou zhibu* (Zhengzhou Branch for Advancement

of Islam in Keeping with [the New] Era), women's religious education was also promoted (Feng, 2002: 233).

At the end of 1948, about 20,000 Muslims, nine men's mosques and four women's mosques existed in Zhengzhou.[4] In October 1948, when the People's Democratic Government of Zhengzhou City was established, it reaffirmed support for its ethnic and religious minorities, as did the establishment in 1950 of the *Huilian* , the Democratic Hui Muslims Union, responsible for all matters concerning people of Hui nationality. It was formally recognized in March 1953 on the occasion of the first Hui National Representative meeting. Also in January 1953, the *Huizu zizhiqu* (Self-governing Hui District or Quarter) was established, with the City Government's Committee of Ethnic Affairs allotting funds to renovate mosques and assuring the Muslim community of their support (*Zhengzhoushi zhi*, 1999(1): 97).

In these early years, women's mosques also benefited from the availability of financial resources and from the revitalisation of Muslim practice. It is recorded that in 1953, more than 3,000 people joined the festival of Eid al-Fitr, breaking a record for numbers of participants. In 1958, however, all organized religions were subject to reorganization and tighter control and surveillance. The Democratic Hui Muslims Union was dissolved in the same year. By 1966, at the commencement of the Cultural Revolution, religious sites were entirely closed and outward expressions of religious faith prohibited. After mosques were dissolved, whatever prayer there was took place in private homes, concealed from outside view.

RE-BUILDING A SPACE OF FEMALE WORSHIP— THE BEIDA WOMEN'S MOSQUE

The First Mosque, 1912

Lack of historical documentation makes establishing the history of the Beida Women's Mosque very difficult. Only from the 1930s onwards do we have any record of a mosque built for the use of women. A stone tablet located in the courtyard of the Mosque reading, 'The Memorial of Reconstruction of the Beida Women's Mosque in Zhengzhou' was erected by the Mosque Democratic Management Committee in 1995. This record of only one line indicates it was built in the Republican era, which means that if it was built in 1912, the planning would have taken place even before the Republic came into being. So who suggested building the women's mosque? Who supported the project? How long did it take to construct? Who provided the means for such an expense? No certain answers to these questions can be given.

Some clues can be gained, nevertheless, from the memory of Mrs. Gu, a woman in her 60s who lives near Mosque Street (Interview, summer of 2008). Her great-grandmother (who if still alive would have been about

150 years old) had taken part in the planning of the Women's Mosque and was middle-aged when she went to Muslim Hui communities such as in Zhongmou, together with even older women, to raise *nieti* (*waqf* or donations). Nothing is known about the difficulties they encountered in raising such large funds given the poverty of the majority of Muslims at that time, around 1910 or so. We can only imagine the dedication and commitment of women like Great-Grandmother Gu and her fellow-campaigners.

Did the Kaifeng tradition where women's mosques existed inspire female Muslims to put forward the plan of building a women's mosque in Zhengzhou? Was it related to the New Cultural Movement initiated by the renowned Muslim Scholar Wang Haoran (also known as Wang Kuan), an advocate of educational reform and female education? Or did the influence come from secular currents of new ideas of gender equality and modern womanhood? In the absence of written documents, the following reasons might have accounted for the activism of female Muslims at that time. First, as stated previously, migrant workers from places where women's mosques were known would have inspired women in Zhengzhou to follow their example. Secondly, the presence of the New Islamic Cultural Movement under the leadership of Wang Haoran (1848–1919), a famous Islamic scholar, was a source of motivation for setting up madrassas and reforming the educational curriculum, as happened elsewhere. As in Kaifeng, Muslim women in Zhengzhou would have been encouraged to actively participate in the strengthening of Islam and the country's drive for modernization (Li and Feng, 1985(1): 725–28). Educational reforms and requirements for strengthening female education under the late Qing Imperial Government, already discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, would have been an additional motivating factor to build a women's mosque. With such support behind them, women like Great-Grandmother Gu would have felt that the time for the Beida Women's Mosque had come. What is also clear is that only with the material assistance of all women and men in the Muslim community could such an undertaking have succeeded. In the tradition of Islam, giving donations to such a project would have been regarded as a pious deed.

Although we have no record of the earliest mosque, because renovation was necessary in 1930 after only 18 years, it implies that the scale of construction was small and the quality of building material poor. Who was the first *Ahong*? Where was she trained? How many *Hailifan* (students training to become *Ahong*) did she instruct? All we can surmise is that in view of the strength of Kaifeng's tradition of female religious education and of the subsequent tradition in Zhengzhou to hire female *Ahong* from Kaifeng, the first *Ahong* may well have been from Kaifeng. She would have brought with her traditions of female education and a culture modelled closely on Kaifeng's Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque. This is likely to have brought modern ideas and encouraged families to send their daughters to be educated there as a matter of course. *Ahong* from Kaifeng also brought traditions of collective leadership to Zhengzhou, with *Shetou* as administrators,

also entitled to appoint an *Ahong* and working closely with the *Ahong* to manage all the Mosque's affairs.

The Reconstruction of Beida Women's Mosque and the Development of Female Religious Education, 1930

In 1930, 18 years after the first Beida Women's Mosque was built, major renovation was imperative. This second milestone in the history of the Mosque was undertaken by Xiao Zheng *Ahong* and Li *Shetou*. The resources available must have been considerable given that the Memorial Stone Tablet of Beida Women's Mosque tells us of a site with a circumference of 930 square metres. The Mosque complex itself covered an area of 198 square metres according to the Zhengzhou Beida Women's Mosque Memorial Stone Tablet inscription. Given such extensive facilities, and a reputation going back nearly 20 years, the Women's Mosque became a vibrant centre of female religious education. With the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War, in addition to providing education to growing numbers of girls and women, the Mosque also offered itself as a refuge for Muslims fleeing the advancing Japanese army. We can assume that contact was only with believers who sought out the Mosque, reflecting the nature of the responsibilities of *Ahong* and *Shetou*. Their conduct had to be in line with the Islamic principle of *Bid'ah* (by which innovation must never violate Islamic teaching), which circumscribed female Muslim religious authority, and with the Confucian moral code of gender segregation. On the whole, contact with the outside world was strictly curtailed.

The situation changed drastically after 1949 when the Government assumed control over the numbers, organization and leadership of mosques. The early policies had given hope to Islamic leaders for cordial co-existence with the Communist State (Gladney, 2003), but erosion of religious legitimacy in public life began even before the most repressive policies were initiated. Religious classes diminished in size as fewer students enrolled, and some students switched from Islamic subjects to 'modern' secular subjects at government schools. Very few students remained loyal when the Mosque, along with all other religious sites, was closed. In 1958, prior to the dissolution of religious organizations, a policy was implemented that would have lasting impact. It abolished the old system of running mosques and replaced the leadership under the sole authority of an *Ahong* and a *Shetou* with leadership by the Democratic Management Committee System (*Henansheng zhi. zongjiao zhi*, 1994(9): 78).

THE OPENING POLICY AND THE EXPANSION OF RELIGIOUS SPACE FOR WOMEN

When the Cultural Revolution came to an official end, for the first time in a decade the Ramadan of 1976 attracted female Muslims to pray at the

Mosque. This was a turning point in the history of the current Mosque. It raised the challenge of how the spirit of the Women's Mosque was to be revived after 10 years of silence, fear, official repression and personal suffering. During the Cultural Revolution it was generally known in Zhengzhou's Muslim circles that Sha Aiju and Cao Yuying, both of whom had been *Shetou* under the old mosque system, never ceased to be practicing Muslims even during the years of political persecution and terror. Although they had never been part of the new management committee system, women believers elected them as *Shetou* on the grounds of their piety and integrity. This occurred when the Open Door Policy instigated by Deng Xiaoping's Government in 1978 allowed cautious revival of religious life. To rebuild the morale of the Women's Mosque membership and recover its reputation among believers, it was felt that only a highly respected and reputable leader could restore the Mosque to its former standing. And so it happened that Sha *Shetou* and Cao *Shetou* conveyed a respectful invitation to Du Shuzhen *Ahong* to become *Ahong* of the Beida Women's Mosque.

The competition for Du *Ahong* was fierce, because of the rarity of such a high calibre of leadership. In the early 1980s, Muslim communities in Kaifeng, Zhengzhou, Xian and Wuzhi all sought her out, trying various approaches to make her decide in their favour. At the Beida Women's

Figure 10.6 Du *Lao Ahong* with her Congregation, Zhengzhou [photo: Bai Xueyi]. By permission of Bai Xueyi.

Mosque, Du *Ahong*'s impact after serving for one year before returning to Kaifeng resulted in a relentless campaign to attract her back to Zhengzhou. This involved an ailing, elderly Sha *Shetou* begging tearfully for Du *Ahong* on her sickbed and the forceful, and ultimately successful, powers of persuasion by the younger generations of administrators. In this campaign, male *Shetou* from the adjacent Men's Mosque and the Religious Affairs Department gave support for Du *Ahong*'s permanent transfer to Zhengzhou. Zhang Fengying *Shetou*, Dan Ye *Shetou* and the *Shetou* of the Beida (Men's) Mosque went east to Kaifeng three times and went west to Xian twice in order to negotiate with local Muslim leadership and religious departments. Success came in 1982 when Du *Ahong* returned to Zhengzhou for good.

What this history of Du *Ahong*'s appointment shows is, firstly, the nature of the intricate and complex negotiations that such an appointment entails, bringing in religious practitioners as well as government officials and ordinary Muslim believers across several *Fang* (mosque congregations) and Government administrative departments. It also illustrates the power that a charismatic individual with Du *Ahong*'s qualities can exercise over believers, regardless of the official abolition of such a system of authority in 1958. It is since then that Du *Ahong*'s leadership, supported by a strong committee of female administrators, has made Beida Women's Mosque into an outstanding institution of female spirituality, collective worship and education, as well as of a powerful social congregation.

CREATING AND EXPANDING THE WOMEN'S MOSQUE: A SPACE FOR WOMEN

Du *Ahong*'s appointment was followed by 10 years of ambitious expansion. Between 1983 and the winter of 1995, the *Libai dadian* (prayer hall), *Jiangtang* (teaching rooms), *Shuifang* (ablution rooms), *Keting* (residence) of the *Ahong* and *Sushe* (dormitories) of the *Hailifan* (students), offices of the Democratic Management Committee of the Mosque, and more, were systematically restored or built anew. A total of 66 rooms, altogether covering 1,334 square metres, now constituted the Beida Women's Mosque. The list of donors needed to bring about such a project demonstrates the social power and resources of the members of the Mosque and of the *Fang*.[5] Nineteen mosques, including 10 men's and nine women's mosques, in Xian, Kaifeng and Zhengzhou contributed to the costs of the reconstruction. Contributions also came from the local government and from Xishilipu Village (a Hui Muslim village). A total of 279 donors gave money; women made up 8 percent of the donors. The total amount raised came to 280,000 *Renminbi* (about US$ 41,000 in today's terms).

This account is not only the narrative of a remarkable project of reconstruction but also of the power and authority associated with Du *Ahong*.

Donations were made because of the history and important location of the Women's Mosque, but more importantly, it is agreed, it was the character, piety and erudition of Du *Ahong* that persuaded many to donate. With the success of the project, tensions between male and female members of the Management Committee grew. The Committee overseeing reconstruction was dominated by men who sought to take a leading role in all important decisions, including those related to Beida Women's Mosque. However, the Women's Mosque prided itself on a tradition of self-reliance and self-administration and additionally its members had proven their capability in raising funds for the building project. The conflict became so intense that resolution was required. Eventually, female members successfully negotiated their right to manage the entire project and decide over the disposal of donations. In this way, the Beida Women's Mosque gained complete independence; though the Management Committee of the two mosques was never formally abolished, it exists only on paper. The *Ahong* and administrators of the Women's Mosque are now fully in charge, able to expand the space under their control to suit women's needs, subject to the limits imposed on physical expansion of all religious sites by the Government.

Figure 10.7 Eid al-Fitr (Festival of Fast-breaking), Henan Province leaders pay visit to Beida Women's Mosque [photo: Bai Xueyi]. By permission of Bai Xueyi.

A further important milestone came in 1993, when all religious venues were required to re-register with the Government in accordance with the Ordinance of the *Zhengfu zongjiao guanli bumen* (Government Department for Management of Religions). The Beida Women's Mosque took this opportunity to register as a legitimate, independent female religious venue. It allowed the Democratic Management Committee to become officially established as a Government-approved body, thus in effect gaining the status of an independent women's organization.

Factors that can be said to have contributed to the independence of the Mosque are, first, the official policy supporting gender equality which Government departments are expected to underwrite. The role of Government officials, mostly female, in implementing policies to support the tradition of women's mosques as independent sites has also been instrumental. Li Lanying, a female Government official with responsibility for the Zhengzhou Hui Muslim community, intervened forcefully when the Mosque was threatened with closure. In the late 1980s, a petition was put forward by members of the Beida (male) Management Committee to close the Women's Mosque. Li Lanying threw out the motion by arguing that gender equality was the national policy and the Women's Mosque was a legitimate, Government-approved, independent women's organization. The petition failed. The cooperation between the *Ahong*, backed by administrators and Muslim women from her *Fang*, and local Government officials has been a stabilizing factor in allowing the continued smooth development of the Women's Mosque.

THE EXPANSION OF FEMALE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SPACE BEYOND THE MOSQUE GATES

If the architectural reconstruction had been difficult, the expansion of the social and cultural space of the Women's Mosque was even more challenging. How was this achieved?

In contrast to earlier years, the scope and functions of the Women's Mosque were extended *beyond* its gate into the *Fang* and even into mainstream society. The Mosque leadership became active and assertive, both succeeding in protecting its boundaries (against, in particular, challenges from more patriarchal and orthodox factions of Islam) and pushing the boundaries that traditionally confine *Ahong*. Relationships within the *Gedimu* Islamic tradition, the oldest Islamic tradition in China of which Beida Mosque is a part, and relationships with other Islamic traditions, including *Yihewani* (the so-called 'new' tradition that arrived in Henan in the late nineteenth century, see Gladney, 1991, 2003; Jaschok and Shui, 2000a), as well as with local Government officials, have all developed out of a conscious pride in the Women's Mosque's legitimate place within the community. This has given rise to an imaginative and creative implementation

of functions that demonstrate the institution's public status in the Muslim community and in mainstream society.

When the Women's Mosque offers modern Arabic, men are welcome to join in, although the classes are tailored for the needs of women. Regular excursions take women to visit Muslim communities elsewhere, expanding the horizons of those who have never had opportunities to travel beyond their home communities. On special occasions or religious feast days, care is taken to invite not only members of the Muslim communities but also Government officials from the local authorities who deal with ethnic and religious affairs as well as representatives from the Islamic Association and other government units. In winter 2002, the Men's and Women's Mosques in Zhengzhou sent out cotton flags as a mark of appreciation to thank the Police Security Bureau and Department of Transport for waiving charges for using and parking the funeral vehicles required by Muslims. This was an initiative by the Women's Mosque.

Through such actions, the Beida Women's Mosque has acquired a reputation and set an example for the skills displayed by its leadership when engaging in religious, social and political networking. Thus the terms *Kanfang* or *Zoufang* (when *Ahong* and *Shetou* pay visits to mosques prior to special gatherings on feast days) have entered the local Muslim vocabulary. More than any other institution, Beida Women's Mosque has, over these last years, established itself at the heart of a regional Muslim network, based on principles of mutual-help and solidarity. In the course of this period of social expansion it has become ever more influential.

Of particular interest is the intelligent, subtle but persistent (and so far successful) approach taken by the Mosque leadership to any threat, however slight, to its status as an independent women's organization. This approach is exemplified by the events just mentioned, when patriarchally minded male *Shetou* who sought to do away with women's mosques altogether were successfully countered. Another anecdote has already acquired legendary character, a story told with a certain satisfaction by the most senior *Shetou*, Dan Ye. In 1998, the Women's Mosque was given an award in the *Wuhao* (Five Excellent Points) Religious Sites competition held in Zhengzhou—a certificate for most excellent performance. Dan *Shetou* returned the certificate, however, asking the government official to check the name of the winning organization. The name printed was *Beidajie qingzhensi (nűsi)* (Beidajie Mosque [Women's Mosque]), and Dan Ye pointed out that such subordination of what was after all an independent organization could not be accepted by Muslim women at the Beida Women's Mosque. The head of the relevant government department apologized for the mistake and the certificate was duly reprinted, acknowledging the independent status of the Women's Mosque.

Traditional conceptual dichotomies of *Nei* (inside) and *Wai* (outside) which Muslim society shares with Confucian mainstream society had reinforced the interpretation of the Islamic principle of *Bid'ah* (an innovation

in Islam to ensure its preservation) in the way that women's mosques and female *Ahong* had been functioning for centuries, demarcating physical mobility and arranging a gendered religious division of labour (see Jaschok and Shui, 2000a). In many ways, the relationship between women's and men's mosques was characterized by gender relations as experienced inside families. Du *Ahong* and the women with her have redrawn the boundaries to make women solely responsible for their institutions, to ensure fuller control over their spheres of duties, and to give recognition to the rights of women to equal access to resources.

In one important respect, however, the Beida Women's Mosque has not challenged tradition. Whereas other independent women's mosques have gone further by adding to the religious authority of their *Ahong* ritual functions hitherto exclusively within the male preserve, Du *Ahong* considers women's voices to constitute *Xiuti* (to be concealed as 'shameful' and thus not to be heard in public). This means that at religious ceremonies in the Women's Mosque, male *Ahong* recite the Qurān. As a consequence, at funeral or other rites male *Ahong* perform the ritual blessings. The Women's Mosque prepares the rites, but Du *Ahong*'s voice is never heard.

About 4,000 to 5,000 Muslims live in the *Xingyue shequ* (Moon and Star Community) where Beida Women's Mosque is situated and in adjacent communities, though only a few hundred female Muslims have close

Figure 10.8 Du Shuzhen *Lao Ahong* (front-row, in the centre), Ordination of *Ahong* at the Beida (Men's) Mosque, Zhengzhou [photo: Maria Jaschok]. By permission of Du *Lao Ahong*.

relations with the Women's Mosque. About 60 to 70 women attend prayer on a daily basis, about 100 worshippers congregate on *Zhuma* (Friday prayer) and about 150 to 200 women can be expected to attend festive activities and join in the prayers at the Women's Mosque during Ramadan. Predominantly older women come to pray since younger women often lack the time to worship and wait for the time when they shall prepare for life after death.

Daily Life and Festive Activities in a Women's Mosque

The architectural design, interior furnishings and daily and festive occasions share many similarities with the adjacent Men's Mosque, but there are also some differences. With respect to the responsibilities of male and female *Ahong*, the functions of men's and women's mosques and the ritual and form of ceremonies, whether a wedding, funeral or other event, are all laid down and followed closely. Men attend both male and female funeral ceremonies over which a male *Ahong* presides. Funeral ceremonies are held in the men's mosques for both male and female Muslims. Some women's mosques have changed this tradition, and women can be observed reciting prayers at gatherings. The Beida Women's Mosque under Du *Ahong*'s leadership, however, continues in the strict Hanafi tradition of the Sunni school to which the Mosque belongs.

Daily life at the Mosque is determined by the Islamic calendar and duties of prayer. The day begins with *Fajr* (Dawn prayer), attended mostly by middle-aged and older worshippers.

This is followed by Du *Ahong*'s instruction of *Hailifan*. In recent years, at any given time about 10 or so female Muslims, mostly from the local *Fang*, receive training. After breakfast and a period of silence, daily chores are performed when visitors do not interrupt the work routine. Later, men and women arrive to ask for advice, invite Du *Ahong* to preside over a family event, donate *Nieti* (alms), report on a birth or death in a family, extend invitations to meetings, and so on. The alms box is emptied by two or more *Shetou*, never by Du *Ahong*, to pay for daily expenses while the remainder is deposited in a bank account.

Afternoons and evenings are still busier. Women come to pray, often spending some time before and afterwards to exchange news on family and community concerns. During Ramadan, or on other feast days, the Mosque compound is abuzz with conversation and private exchanges, all carried on in a quiet voice. Feast days are organized differently for women and men, especially on the occasions of Eid al-Fitr and Eid ul-Adha. For women, prayer is as usual. Although they hang up colourful flags and a red banner above the Mosque entrance and place a table for *Maiziqian* (Sadaqah al-Fitr, money for wheat) in the Mosque courtyard,[6] the scale of celebration pales when compared to the Beida Men's Mosque. Apart from the giving of *Maiziqian* and of alms, there may also be visits from representatives of

local Government departments to pay their respects to the *Ahong*, which is also an expression of respect for the equality of status enjoyed by women's mosques. The Beida Women's Mosque has no other activities; although women may participate in the ceremonies in the Men's Mosque.

For the Women's Mosque the celebration of *Shengji* (*Dhikr*, remembrance) is, by comparison, of central significance. Invitations are issued to members of both religious and secular communities, including officials and entrepreneurs who are generous benefactors. All, including Government officials, bring alms. Readings from the Qurān and the *Woer'ci* (sermon) are given by the *Ahong* from the adjacent Men's Mosque. A feast concludes the *Shengji* celebrations. Tables are placed in all rooms of the Mosque and in the courtyard. Careful segregation of women and men is observed: the women eat indoors, while male guests eat at tables in the courtyard.

DU SHUZHEN *AHONG*: PORTRAIT OF A MODERN, TRANSFORMATIVE LEADER

Du Shuzhen was born into a well-known Muslim family in Kaifeng (Jaschok and Shui, 2000a: 307–8). Both her grandfather and father were famous *Ahong* renowned for their erudition; they acquired reputations beyond the borders of Henan.[7] Du Shuzhen studied at a women's mosque in Kaifeng, learning basic Islamic knowledge from her father and grandfather. Married at the age of 15 (thus complying with her father's instruction), she was widowed at the age of 18 and went back to Kaifeng in 1942. As her brief marriage had been unhappy, she refused to remarry and instead studied Islamic texts at the Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque. In addition, she studied the Persian language and scriptures under the Kaifeng scholar, Ma Guangqing, who was a student and disciple of the founder of the *Yihewani* school, Ma Wanfu from Gansu Province. Ma Guangqing was responsible for introducing the more austere interpretation of Islam into Henan. In 1948, when she was 24, Du Shuzhen accepted the appointment as a female *Ahong* at the Shifu Mosque in Zhengzhou. Since that first appointment, she has presided over women's mosques in Zhengzhou, Kaifeng, Xingyang, Xian and elsewhere.

Du Shuzhen is famous for her religious integrity, knowledge, independent character and spirit of self-reliance. At the age of 18, she had chosen to become an *Ahong* and prepared herself through assiduous study. Her father, however, disagreed with her choice, afraid that she could not bear the hardship at such a young age. To show her determination, she rejected all family subsidies. It is this spirit of independence that makes her stand out among women, let alone among her contemporaries.

Du Shuzhen is first and foremost judged by her performance as an *Ahong*, which also determines the reputation of the mosque over which she has religious authority. Here, her extensive and profound understanding of Arabic

and Persian Islamic scriptures,[8] as well as her familiarity with *Xiaoerjing* and Chinese, make her status unequalled among women *Ahong*.[9]

Her length of commitment as an *Ahong* for over 60 years is also a key to her reputation. Except for the period of the Cultural Revolution, Du Shuzhen taught Islamic knowledge and accepted *Hailifan* whenever possible. She is at the heart of the spiritual culture associated with the Beida Women's Mosque. Kind to all and respectful to young and old, humble and learned alike, she is sought out for counsel by everyone and respected not least by Government officials for her qualities of leadership and moral integrity. Before old age slowed her down, Du *Ahong* was a member of various committees which further extended the reach of her authority. She was a committee member, and in certain cases a leading member, of the *Zhongguo yisilanjiao xiehui* (Chinese Islam Association), *Henansheng yisilanjiao xiehui* (Henan Provincial Islam Association), *Zhengzhoushi yisilanjiao xiehui* (Zhengzhou City Islam Association) and *Guancheng huizuqu zhengxie* (Guancheng Hui Quarter Administrative Association). The female space created in the Beida Women's Mosque as an independent women's organization is sustained by the collaborative relationship that evolved over time between Du *Ahong* and the women who identify proudly with the *Fang* as a symbol of status equality in both the religious and secular spheres.

11 The *Jiuku Miao*
From Marginality to Legitimacy

Marginalized, frequently persecuted to the point of near-extinction, but always sustained by the faith of its religious—the *Jiuku miao* is experiencing a resurgence of its historical prominence in the local community at a time when the religious leadership and ordinary Daoist believers reach back into the past to claim rightful autonomy. In current negotiations with local Government authorities, it is this inheritance of a longstanding female tradition and women's pride in their historical institution that outweighs both its much diminished lack of space and a ruined architectural grandeur. Inspiring leadership, support from a community of faithful believers and a cautious but courageous re-connection with the main precepts of the Daoist *Quanzhen* tradition all mark the development of the *Jiuku miao*. This proudly self-governed female organization takes pride in its history as it evolves towards a more stable future by using 'fluid' strategies to adapt to political and social conditions without compromising its re-emerging identity. As is true of mosque organization and culture, gender is central here, whether as a marker of identity within the *Quanzhen* tradition, as instrumental in developing an independent status within the 'postdenominational' community in Kaifeng set up under the auspices of the State (MacInnis, 1989; Tong, 1999), or as cementing solidarity within the 'sisterhood' of the *Jiuku miao* community.

When the Communist Party/State brought women in Kaifeng 'out' into 'the new society' and insisted all women should have the right to 'leave home', a not inconsiderable group of women from religious organizations of all traditions were included in this group even though they had already chosen of their own volition to *Chu jiā* (leave their natal home to join their family of faith). The lives these female religious had led were no longer deemed 'productive', their beliefs were seen as backward and their way of life *Fengjian* (feudal). Instead, they were to be 'liberated' through 'productive labour' and returned to family life. It is not known what happened to all of the nuns at the *Jiuku miao*. We were told that some returned home to take up labour in the fields, whereas others were assigned work in a factory. Those nuns considered too infirm or elderly were placed in welfare institutions. The main focus of the political campaigns, however, was to

relocate young and able women away from the Temple and into family life. Those who were either too old or unable to adapt to the new environment were trapped in despair. It is said that an elderly nun named Liu was forced to enter a secular old people's home against her will. Another nun, called Chen, already in her 70s, chose another way out: after she was driven out of the *Jiuku miao*, she jumped into the river and drowned herself. The action taken by two homeless nuns, Chang Shanhua and Ding Shanlian, however, would prove to be of special significance to the subsequent fate of the Temple. In 1950, they occupied, or re-appropriated, part of a small side building of the Temple, turning 15 square metres into a place of worship, with the remaining space used as their living quarters. This amalgamated site of prayer and living space became the site credited with the survival of the *Jiuku miao*.

The history of religious women during the 1950s is one of marginalization, ostracism and daily attacks on their most cherished beliefs and their identity. A report based on a survey of religions carried out in 1951 in some of the local townships and counties by the Henan Provincial United Front, suggests that authorities wished to bring about a complete and utter revolution in the values, beliefs and ways of life to which religious women had been committed. Whilst a number of women appeared willing to 'modernize' their backward and feudal beliefs, others reluctantly submitted, with undoubted suffering over surrendering their most deeply held convictions. That relatively few were prepared to follow the elderly nun, Chen, into a watery death (although we have no statistics of such suicides) does not indicate the absence of individual torment.

THE *JIUKU MIAO*

The institutional identity of the *Jiuku miao* had again become invisible, its collective identity erased. The history of the Temple in the following years therefore became the history of a few courageous women who continued their religious practice and celibate lives when religion was declared an official anathema. As in 1927, the Daoist community was forced into retreat. Individuals carried on when the institution ceased to function and continued to live within the maelstrom of political and gender changes, awaiting the opening of opportunities to resume a legitimate collective religious life.

The first expelled nuns returned after 1977 and collective religious activity was resumed from the 1980s onwards. This was made possible because of the two elderly nuns who had remained, never foregoing the community's claim to legitimate occupation. With their passing, two middle-aged nuns, Shi Huajin (Yongqing) and Xu Zanying (Yongshen), took over responsibility. They had returned to the Temple in the 1970s, after years of manual labour, in order to not allow their claim on the Temple grounds to lapse.

Figure 11.1 Keepers of Faith, *Jiuku Miao* [photo: Maria Jaschok]. By permission of Kang *Daozhang*.

Figure 11.2 Kang *Daozhang*, *Jiuku Miao* [photo: Maria Jaschok]. By permission of Kang *Daozhang*

In 1977, they were joined by a 15-year-old middle-school student begging to be accepted as a disciple of Shi and Xu. The girl was Kang Yuanhui, the present-day *Daozhang* (abbess or senior nun in charge of the Temple). She is the major influence behind the recent emergence of the *Jiuku miao* from near invisibility.

The 1980s saw many religious organizations engage in active strategies of rehabilitation, reclaiming land and property and reconstructing their institutions. This happened, for example, in the case of the Buddhist nunnery, the historical *Nűzhonglin*, situated not far from the *Jiuku miao*. The *Nűzhonglin* was able to rely on vital networks of important connections and allies in the various Government-established religious and consultative organizations, many of whom had never entirely severed relations with these historically significant religious sites.[1]

Nuns and supporters of the *Jiuku miao* decided that they too needed to embark on this difficult journey of legal and social rehabilitation in order to regain their Temple. In this challenging task, the individual capabilities of the two nuns who had taken over the leadership were crucial. Their religious devotion, which inspired respect in the community of believers, and importantly, their experience of society through the many years of forced labour proved useful in the struggle to claim their right to their traditional site.

THE STORY OF XU ZANYING

The two elderly nuns who returned had lived through many years of work experience in the highly politically charged culture of Maoist China. In 2004, when we paid a visit to the *Jiuku miao*, we listened to Xu Zanying's remembrances. Born in Kaifeng in 1917, Xu Zanying entered religious life at the age of nine. Soon after her admission into the *Jiuku miao*, she experienced Feng Yuxiang's regime of destruction of all that stood in the way of 'modernizing' society. She saw how soldiers under Feng's command hacked into pieces the statues of the Daoist deities in the Temple. Xu said she could not remember many things due to her young age at the time, but she recollected the exact year when it happened: the sixteenth year of the Republican era (1927). Her subsequent life reflected the downward spiral of the fortunes of the community of religious women at the *Jiuku miao*. The scene of Feng's soldiers mutilating the statues of the deities amid the chaos of ransacked halls and the wailing of nuns was so deeply imprinted on her mind that when the People's Liberation Army (PLA) arrived in Kaifeng in October 1948, Xu feared for her life and decided to assume a false identity.

She first worked for a number of years as a *Baomu* (domestic helper) in Zhengzhou under an assumed name, and then supported herself by working in a street factory in Kaifeng until her retirement. Two factors had decided the harshness of her fate: she was religious, and she was born into a landlord family. No matter what happened, however, she never gave up

her chosen life of celibacy. After retirement, Xu returned to the *Jiuku miao* to look after the old nuns who had stayed in the Temple. In 1977, the young girl Kang Yuanhui arrived to receive instruction in Daoist doctrine from Xu and became her disciple. Together with Shi Huajin, Xu took over the responsibility for resurrecting *Jiuku miao* after the deaths of the two old nuns who had squatted in the Temple throughout the Cultural Revolution.

WORKING FOR A LEGITIMATE SPACE

The community of men and women believers attached to the *Jiuku miao* unwaveringly supported the nuns and joined in the work in reconstructing the Temple. These lay Daoists and ordinary believers included married

Figure 11.3 'Place for Pious Donations' in *Jiuku Miao* [photo: Shui Jingjun]. By permission of Kang *Daozhang*.

women with families who had been forced in the early 1950s to leave the *Jiuku miao* to get married. Support also was given by ordinary believers in the neighbourhood, many from families who had taken part in religious activities organized at the *Jiuku miao* before 1949.

Whilst fundraising faced difficulties, given the poverty of the people, work immediately commenced on refurbishing the tiny building that had served as a site of worship and as a connection with the past. During the 1980s, the first phase of a nationwide Daoist revival was focused on the repair of temples and recruitment of members (Lai, 2003). In 1992, with very little money, the *Jiuku miao* congregation in Kaifeng succeeded in building a hall of worship, and statues of deities were also commissioned with donations from Daoist believers. Although small, the Temple nevertheless provided a space for its believers to organize larger public ceremonies of worship. This in turn began to attract pilgrims, giving the Temple some income through incense money.

In the course of the 1990s, having successfully re-established its right to legitimacy and no longer needing to fear for its survival, the Daoists shifted focus to implementing management rules and regulations for temples and temple residents.[2] During this time that submissions were made to relevant government bodies in Kaifeng for legal recognition and registration of the *Jiuku miao* as a legitimate site of worship, a dispute nearly ruined all chances of a successful outcome. According to the Statutes regulating registration of religious organizations only five religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism) are recognized. Any site wishing to register has to comply with the regulations and rules set out in the Statutes. In order to obtain an official registration, the *Nǚ daozhang* had to establish the genealogy of Daoist practice at the *Jiuku miao* within a recognized major tradition. This created disagreements, and eventually conflicts, among the *Jiuku miao*'s lay followers over questions of identity and belonging.

Crisis

The split was caused by the believers' different and contrasting interpretations of the relationship between Buddhism and Daoism and their practices in the local environment in and around Kaifeng. From the Ming Dynasty onwards, Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism had intermingled to allow for ever-more fluid boundaries. As far as local believers were concerned, distinctions mattered less than the efficacy of their prayers and the responsiveness of the deity worshipped. The Buddhist deity Guanyin Bodhisattva was worshipped in the Daoist incarnation of the deity Puhang Zhenren. Such a syncretistic belief system enhanced the impression among local believers that Buddhism and Daoism 'were as one.'

When the *Jiuku miao* community was compelled to identify itself with one of the main traditions, declaring the Temple either as Buddhist or Daoist, the community became divided. One strong faction, led by a woman

who had once been a disciple of the returned nun Shi Huajin, argued in favour of Buddhism. She formally identified herself as a Buddhist and, together with her numerous supporters, sought to transform the *Jiuku miao* into a major site of Buddhist worship and education. The majority of lay Daoists, led by Shi and Xu, however, insisted on preserving the identity of the Temple as a site belonging to the *Kundao,* or the Female Way of the Daoist *Quanzhen* order. Confronted with such a challenge, the older generation of nuns, in spite of their work and life experience in the lay world, found themselves unequal to the task of bringing about a consensus in the community. Because the dispute was not resolved within the granted time, in 1999 the *Zongjiao shiwuju* (Religious Affairs Bureau) closed the Temple, concerned that the discord might get out of hand. This once again threw *Jiuku miao* into a social and legal limbo, leading many Daoists to fear that this was the end for their beloved Temple.

Opportunity

It was Kang Yuanhui *Daozhang*, however, together with Yang *Daozhang,* another young ordained nun, and their supporters, who changed the current of events. Of a different generation than their predecessors, they no longer conducted themselves as members of a disadvantaged and marginalized group, passive in the face of crisis. Importantly, before entering the *Jiuku miao* at 15 and joining as a young disciple and later during her years of instruction, Kang Yuanhui had accumulated useful social and networking skills. She also acquired an unerring grasp of the importance of political allies and good public relations. These skills and experience had not been within the ken of the nuns of the earlier generations. Furthermore, the young *Daozhang*, who had graduated from middle school, was able to use her solid education and her many years of instruction in Daoist liturgy and scriptures to confront unsympathetic local Government authorities. She made the case for the significance of the *Jiuku miao* not only to local Daoists but also to all Kaifeng City residents.

Kang *Daozhang* and a group of laywomen, close supporters of the Daoist history of the Temple, set up a Preparatory Committee. Judging from their accounts, they worked tirelessly to gain official recognition for a classification of the *Jiuku miao* as a site belonging to Daoism. They were eager to see the reopening of the Temple, particularly when close neighbours, the (Buddhist) *Baozhu* Temple and the women's mosques, were revitalizing traditional functions and refurbishing faded interiors. The Preparatory Committee was composed of five *Nǚ daozhang*, or senior nuns, and three lay religious women. They sought out officials from relevant Government departments and consulted historical documents in the Kaifeng Archives. They also went to seek out Government officials in the provincial capital Zhengzhou and in Beijing and asked for assistance from the Henan Daoist Association and from the National Daoist Association. They reported

their problems to the Religious Affairs Bureau in Henan and to the State Council, persuading officials to support their case. Both the Daoist Association of Henan and the National Daoist Association proved responsive and granted them much-needed assistance.

Among supporters could be counted the great Daoist Master Min Zhiting,[3] who was then Chairman of the National Daoist Association. He offered support for the *Jiuku miao* to resume its activities as a Daoist Temple. The Henan Daoist Association sent a *Nű daozhang*, well trained in Daoist scriptures, to strengthen their religious claim. This *Nű daozhang* proved instrumental in drafting an effective recommendation asking for recognition to be given to the *Kundao* (Female Principle, or Female Way), with which the *Jiuku miao* was so closely associated, as an integral and acknowledged part of the Daoist *Quanzhen* order.

Finally, after hard weeks of preparation by the Kang *Daozhang* and lay believers, the Government authority in charge of managing religious sites in Kaifeng's Longting District, where the *Jiuku miao* is located, gave support for their application to be registered as a female-led Daoist site within the *Quanzhen* order. On 4 April 2002, a gate-reopening ceremony of the

Figure 11.4 At the Gate of the *Jiuku Miao*, Kaifeng [photo: Maria Jaschok]. By permission of Kang *Daozhang*.

Jiuku miao was held, and Min Zhiting, Chairman of the National Daoist Association, wrote the calligraphy for the gate signboard. On 6 November 2002, a Certificate of Registration issued by the Longting District government arrived; finally, the *Jiuku miao* again became a legitimate place of worship of the Female Way.

SOCIAL ADAPTATION AND CHANGES WITHIN THE CULTURE OF THE *JIUKU MIAO*

The volatile fate of the *Jiuku miao* historically reflects the intersections of diverse political, social and economic forces with changes within the Temple's organization and leadership. Since the 1980s, the raised educational level among both leadership and the young generation of believers, together with support from older generations of believers who continue to participate in social, economic and political life, have helped to bring about much success as well as a palpable sense of solidarity. In the process of adapting to a changing social environment and striving for a space to survive as a legitimate women's organization, the Temple itself has also changed. Recent years have seen an ever-more ambitious expansion project. Following 2002, when legal recognition was granted, a systematic process of property purchase began as the land and property contracts of the original Temple have never been found. In 2004, an old nearby building and the land on which it stands were bought. A new temple gate and an enlarged courtyard were added. All these developments took place despite the poverty of believers in Kaifeng which makes raising funds a never ending struggle.

The short account, *Jiuku miao de youlai yu jiankuang* (The Origins and a Brief Account of *Jiuku Miao*), written by the Temple community in the form of a petition to the Kaifeng Government (see Chapter 4), gives an illuminating description of the expansion of the Temple, its internal rhythm of religious life and the external environment and delicate nature of its relationship with the Kaifeng City authorities:

> Backed up by the [Kaifeng] City and district leaders and helped by people in all social circles, the nuns and the lay believers of the Temple are united as one and have overcome all kinds of difficulties under the guidance of the National Daoist Association and the Henan Daoist Association. In a short period of time, the Temple has developed from the original six rooms at its reopening in 2002 to 15 rooms and a Temple Gate has also been built. There are now seven permanent residents in the Temple, and the believers who chant *Sutras* show up in the main hall regularly in the morning and at night. The morning bell ringing and the nightly drum striking intermingle with the daily rhythm of the Temple. Every year two large-scale religious events are

> organized here, one is the Temple Fair held on 3 March of the Lunar Year, celebrating the *Pantao hui* (Feast of the Peach) of the *Wangmu Niangniang* (Lady Queen Mother), and the birth of *Zhenwu*, a popular and influential deity in Daoism. The other event is the birthday celebration held in honour of the *Taiyi jiuku tianzun* (Supreme Deity of Salvation). In addition, a Daoist rite of prayer is held on any deity's birthday. And Daoist rites for the atonement of the dead are held on *Qingming*, the Pure Brightness Day (also known as the Tomb-sweeping day), on the *Zhongyuan* Day on 15 July, as well as on the *Mingyinjie* or the Ghosts' Day, on 1 November. These religious gatherings have satisfied the needs of ordinary believers, bringing new life to the ancient Temple. These events contribute to Kaifeng's tourism, to the construction of spiritual civilization, and to social stability (*Jiuku miao de youlai yu jiankuang*, n.d.).

The generally meagre size of donations have made the hoped-for expansion slower than anticipated. Yet when we paid a visit to the *Jiuku Miao* in August 2006, we were surprised by the changes that have taken place. Kang *Daozhang* told us:

Figure 11.5 Temple Fair, 11 April 2005 [photo: Shui Jingjun]. By permission of Kang *Daozhang*

> It has not been an easy task to get the *Jiuku miao* developed to its present-day scale. In about three years, it has grown from 6 rooms to 17 rooms with a cost of more than 300,000 *Renminbi*. Though the incense money is not much, the biggest difficulty we are facing now is not our lack of income. What we are most anxious about is continued society's understanding and government support.

Vital for the growth of the Temple has therefore been 'society's understanding', an indispensable condition for the social space the Temple requires for its expansion. Also vital is the community of women who are working closely with the *Daozhang*. The daily discipline of religious exercise makes for a natural and closely knit group, modelled on previous generations of women believers congregating around a senior or charismatic *Daozhang*. The current two *Daozhang* are revered by believers as *Gaogong* (Daoist Master),[4] admired for having undergone ordination, for their educational standard and for their much respected, and much commented upon, concentration in the performance of religious exercise. This has inspired a new culture of trust and optimism in the future of the *Jiuku miao,* placing the *Daozhang* at the

Figure 11.6 Pilgrims' Offering at the *Jiuku Miao* [photo: Maria Jaschok]. By permission of Kang *Daozhang*.

core of an enthusiastic and active group of women believers. The group that works closest with the *Daozhang* is in turn supported by a second circle of *Jushi* or *Shanjia* and *Shanjushi* (lay Daoists) whose family background and piety are well known; these render general support to the Temple whenever and in whatever way required. A drum-performing team, for example, in the community where the *Jiuku miao* is located, consists entirely of lay people. Whenever there is a festival the drum team will give free performances in welcoming the Daoist masters and guests from other temples and religious traditions arriving in procession at the festively decorated Temple.

A third circle of support comes from *Xinshi* (believers) and *Xiangke* (incense burning pilgrims), most of whom live further away, who will gather on feast days to burn joss sticks. Many organize themselves in small *Xiangshe* (groups of pilgrims making offerings). The head of a pilgrim group will walk at the front of her group, carrying a yellow banner. With only a few exceptions, most of these groups are composed of women. Their contact with the Temple is confined to these frequent pilgrimages.

The religious organization of the *Jiuku miao* is made up of three circles: the *Nű daozhang* or senior nuns, the *Jushi* or lay Daoists, and the *Xinshi* or the ordinary believers whose faith is more often than not an admixture of Buddhism and Daoism. Members of this last religious group come from the poorer, rural areas, with very few educated women among them. Only a smattering of men can be seen at the Temple fairs, women forming the majority. Despite having few resources, the cohesion brought about by belief and a shared purpose is impressive. The *Nű daozhang* and the *Jushi* are the nucleus of a group that is developing an ever-stronger Daoist religious space primarily by and for women.

In previous chapters we have described the historical inner/outer division of labour at the *Jiuku miao* of old reflecting gender relations more generally prevalent in the past. Nowadays, the entire administration is the responsibility of the *Nű daozhang* who makes sure that all rules and regulations pertaining to a registered site are adhered to. A much younger leadership understands the importance of an efficient administration. Thus, a Preparatory Committee composed of the *Nű daozhang* and *Jushi* was transformed into a Democratic Administrative Committee with new rules and guidelines.[5] All affairs, internal and external, are managed by the Committee. Kang *Nű daozhang* represents the Daoist community in her role as a member of the Longting District Political Consultative Conference of Kaifeng.

Daoist Discipline

The criteria given in the *Daojiao huodong changsuo guanli zhidu* (The Administrative System for Sites of Daoist Activities) outline what constitute 'legal' and 'illegal' religious activities. Burning incense, worshiping deities, chanting and preaching *Sutras*, discoursing on Daoist doctrines, observing Daoist festivals and practicing Daoist rites, are all considered normal

religious activities. Accepting donations from home and overseas believers and admitting overseas believers to stay in the Temple for religious instruction are also classified as legal conduct and under legal protection. However, trance dancing, exorcism of evil spirits and planchette writing are defined as 'feudal superstitions' and strictly banned. Illegal acts also include exploiting believers' gullibility to make money, while foreign believers are banned from interfering with Temple affairs and from distributing illegal 'propaganda' materials. Nuns living in the Temple must observe the Regulations for 'Permanent Resident Daoist Nuns.' The Regulations include requirements in three aspects: the first is political, requiring all nuns to study relevant religious policies, abide by the law and love their motherland as well as their religion; the second is the requirement to promote Daoist attainment, and the nuns are asked to spare no effort in acquiring Daoist knowledge and refining their virtues; and the third regulation relates to individual behaviour where a nun has to place collective interest over individual interest and is not allowed to purchase private property. She must be obedient in all aspects of her life, dress neatly and complete religious assignments on schedule. This discipline is reinforced by rules that define worship based on Daoist principles inclining to serenity, peace and seclusion. Furthermore, rules cover the neatness and tidiness of all halls of worship and even the state of religious implements used in rituals. Smoking, drinking, blasphemous language, squatting and such other coarse behaviour are outlawed as not in keeping with sites of worship. The Three Regulations concerning *Dao* (The Way), *Jing* (*Sutra*) and *Shi* (Master) and the Five Commandments (not to take away a life, not to steal or rob, not to tell lies, not to eat meat or drink liquor, and not to tempt evil) of the Daoist *Quanzhen* Tradition must be strictly observed. Any violation will be condemned or will invite *Cuidan* (expulsion from the religious community).

The *Jiuku miao* carries on with the tradition of discipleship. Each *Nű daozhang* has studied under the guidance of a *Nű daozhang* from the *Quanzhen* Tradition and participated in rigorous instruction in a number of Daoist institutions. *Nű daozhang* are also addressed as *Shifu* (master) to express reverence and respect for their learning. Both *Nű daozhang* and ordinary believers now convey a new confidence, enabling them to give outward expression to their religious identity. With this goes a readiness to engage in social and political life as part of the proper affairs of women. Such a change is most visible in the matter of dress. Unlike the old system which kept nuns inside the Temple, leaving all else for men to take care of, the leadership of the *Jiuku miao* today is active on behalf of their institution in the commercial, public and political spheres. Some of the younger nuns have even spent years as workers before entering the religious community.

Their confidence creates a self-belief unlike the generations that faced political repression after 1958 and again during the years of the Cultural Revolution (1967–77). The nuns of the *Jiuku miao* in the early days after the Cultural Revolution were commonly dressed in a style similar to that

of ordinary women around them. The only difference was in the colour of their dress, as they would predominantly wear blue, white or black, the distinguishing colours of Daoism. This enabled them to merge with other women, becoming undistinguishable to outsiders. A remarkable change has occurred however. The young generation of nuns comb their hair into a distinctive topknot and wear the traditional plain robes for everyday wear, with more splendid vestments left for ceremonial wear. Kang *Daozhang* explained the changing practices in dress as follows:

> Conditions were tough for nuns of the older generations, so they wore black-, blue- and white-coloured (dresses), and their hair was coiled in a bun at the back in order to be more like other women in mainstream society. Now we choose to wear our hair in a topknot, in this way showing our real identity to the world. This is not counter to our wish to adhere to the ways of society. Now that the nuns are living in a more stable society and under good social conditions, their security is guaranteed. Those who enter the Male Way of the Daoist All-Truth Sect usually choose to become a monk at a somewhat older age, but those who enter the Female Way become nuns when young. The latter are more respected and approved of by society because of their [qualities of] *Chunzhen* (purity) and *Chunzheng* (uprightness) (Interview, Kaifeng, August 2005).

Kang gives expression to her religious identity in a society where many are still convinced of the backwardness of all religions. Not only is she willing to put up with ridicule, but she also asserts her right to be part of society and to be able to promote her faith through wearing the distinct Daoist garments. In this way, she and other members of the *Jiuku miao* are reconnecting with the importance in Daoist tradition of expressing through ordinary and ritual garments their particular 'status among both gods and people' (Kohn, 2003:157). Kang's choice is also an assertion of confidence in her chosen community of faith, the Female Way, as well as in the society in which the *Jiuku miao* negotiates its survival. This strong sense of religious identification is coupled with a strong conviction that developing the religious culture of the *Jiuku miao* and indeed of Daoism as the 'National Religion' of China is making a contribution to indigenous Chinese culture. By wearing the Daoist robe, Kang maintains that they are promoting Daoist religion as well as Chinese civilization (Interview, August 2005).

A FESTIVE OCCASION: THE WANGMU *NIANGNIANG* (LADY QUEEN MOTHER'S) FEAST OF THE PEACH

It was the Lady Queen Mother's *Pantao hui* (Feast of the Peach) on 11 April 2005 that gave us a chance to observe the festivities held in the Temple. It

was a well-organized and joyous occasion. The two presiding *Nű daozhang* donned the red and yellow robes specially designed for *Sutra* chanting and for performing the Auspicious Prayer of the Daoist rite. At the same time, the female and male lay Daoists, wearing the yellow name tags of those welcoming guests, took it upon themselves to take care of things at the Temple fair. One or two volunteers took charge of receiving the pilgrims' donations at two strategically placed *Gongdechu* (donation boxes): one box stood in front of the Temple Gate, and the other one in front of the effigy of the Lady Queen Mother's fairy ship. The sum of money received was then carefully noted down, together with the name of the donor, by another volunteer. Other Temple volunteers assumed responsibility for selling joss sticks or serving peach-shaped steamed bread. They were also in charge of keeping order in the inner courtyard where most pilgrims milled around, burning incense amidst clouds of smoke rising from the incense burners.

The organization of these festive days, when hundreds of individual pilgrims and pilgrim groups arrive not only to pray, and burn joss sticks, but also to eat and drink, mark the organizing capacities and the influence of the *Nű daozhang* and the lay Daoists. When the invited guests come to celebrate the festival, they bring with them gifts like joss sticks bound in

Figure 11.7 Women's Devotion, *Jiuku Miao* [photo: Maria Jaschok]. By permission of Kang *Daozhang*.

the shape of a tower, paper folded in the shape of coloured pagodas, and oblations or donations (called *Suiqian*). In Kang *Daozhang*'s words: 'It's as if everyone is visiting their families or relatives.' But the Temple also demonstrates the resurgence of social networks and the rising position of the Temple in the local and wider communities of believers. In addition to the Daoist rites performed at the festivals, the *Nǚ daozhang* will at the invitation of the *Shanjia* or believers perform rituals for guiding the soul of the deceased. Usually, the soul-guiding rites are done in the Temple, but sometimes the rites are performed outside, or at other Temples.

COMPETING WITH OTHER RELIGIOUS SITES

Traditionally, it is mainly Buddhism which has had a competitive relationship with the *Jiuku miao*. The fact that ordinary believers have never distinguished between Buddhism and Daoism and that Buddhist temples usually possess greater wealth and are more assertive in publicizing their doctrines have placed Daoism in a comparatively disadvantaged position. Faced with such a situation, members of the *Jiuku miao* community have been considering positive ways of highlighting differences between the two religions. Kang *Daozhang* and her fellow nuns nevertheless refuse to engage in any competition with other religious sites. She explained, 'Anyone who enters the religious profession makes a choice to be good. There is nothing for us that would be intolerable therefore . . . entering into religious life means to give up desires and stand above worldly affairs. It is meaningless for a monk or a nun to strive for anything. Whoever fights for anything is debasing himself, or herself.'

Such an attitude, however, does not mean that Kang *Daozhang* and others do not strategize and work for the continuity and development of the Temple, for the survival of the Daoist religion they have entered into, and for the space that enables the community to maintain the independent and ascetic way of life they have chosen for themselves. Kang *Daozhang* at times wistfully ponders the days of the older generations of nuns who could focus on spiritual cultivation without caring about affairs outside the Temple's gate. Now they are faced with the need to interact more directly with a complex society, where plans have to be made and implemented for the Temple's future development. In a description of the present state of Daoism and of the *Jiuku miao*, Liu *Daozhang* said,

> Now things are getting better. The government policies are reasonable and implemented satisfactorily, and we see this as favourable to the development of Daoism. But in my opinion, Daoism is not so well developed as Buddhism. We should focus more on training Daoist talents and think about promoting ourselves. We need to run more classes to instruct in Daoist doctrines and to raise people's awareness.

> And, to a degree, we could expand the [Daoist] influence (Interview, August 2005).

Kang *Daozhang* added that previously only specialists of religion could distinguish between Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist beliefs. From her point of view, Buddhism talks about the miseries of life—aging, illness and death—while Daoism focuses on longevity, the importance of life and the care which must be exercised to prolong a good life. In order to promote greater distinctiveness, a site of their own was vital; this success has in turn created further developments. Able to take advantage of having their own space for holding Daoist rituals, the nuns have gone a step further, now wearing distinctive Daoist attire when they chant *Sutras*, publicizing these events throughout the entire district. It is felt that in this way their influence will spread to the whole region. Networking with other female Daoist sites has also started in order to promote Daoism more assertively. In some areas, nuns have begun leaving the compound of the Temple to spread the doctrine in the wider society.

In current society, Daoist leadership has had to accept the need for political patronage and thus the imperative that the Temple be positioned close to government and other spheres of influence. On the wall of the reception room in the *Jiuku miao* hangs a set of photos of the late Min Zhiting, chairman of the National Daoist Association, who passed away in January 2004, and of Jiang Zemin, former President of the People's Republic of China. There are also photos of the *Nű Daozhang* attending Daoist ceremonial gatherings. At the Temple gate hangs the signboard displaying the calligraphy of Min Zhiting *Daozhang*. These symbolic markers, with their import fully understood by the local community, display the place of the *Jiuku miao* in society, its religious allegiance as well as its legitimate position within the Daoist Association.

MAKING A CHOICE: ENTERING RELIGIOUS LIFE IS TAKING CONTROL OF ONE'S LIFE (*ZIYOU ZHUYI*)

The relationship between the *Nű daozhang* and the communities of believers plays a critical role in the survival and growth of the *Jiuku miao*. So too does the religious fervour of the seven female religious who make up the community of nuns in the *Jiuku miao*. They believe that they have the *Shangen* (literally, good roots) or *Shanji* (good foundation) for their vocation. The meaning conveyed here is that it is their destiny to enter such a profession. The seven *Nű daozhang* come from either pious Daoist families or families where a female relative had chosen such a life. Kang Yuanhui *Daozhang* said that her family has pursued religious cultivation for generations, with one of her aunts having entered into a Daoist nunnery and never marrying. Kang thought of such a choice for herself at a young age. She

became a nun before finishing middle school at the age of 15. What follows is a description, in her own words, of her experience of entering the *Jiuku miao*:

> I was born in 1962 into a peasant family, and my hometown is in Lankao County. There are six children in my family, and I have sisters and brothers who are younger and older than me. My grandparents and parents were Daoists. They were vegetarians and would burn joss sticks regularly. At the time when my great-grandpa was alive, he donated to the Temple all that the family had. He was a man with *Shangen* (Daoist good roots). My father had one sister; she never married. She just spent her life burning incense and praying. When I was a child, I really liked chanting *Sutras*. It seemed noble and mysterious. When my mother told me that my aunt had been a nun, I was only a schoolgirl. But I said I, too, would enter into religious life and spend my life chanting *Sutras*. I started the ascetic life when I was a young girl, and I refused to eat meat. I did not even eat onions, ginger or garlic. From earliest times, I heard a higher calling in my soul. In 1977, I came to Kaifeng before finishing high school and started to learn chanting the *Sutras* from Xu Zanying. She never got married and was residing in the Temple at the time. From then on, I have been leading a life of utmost serenity. When I first came here, the Temple was not open to the public. So I quietly helped to offer sacrifices and engage in religious activities as best as I could.
>
> In 1983, when they [the religious institutions] were opened up, some Daoist religious living in other places asked me if I chose to enter into religious life due to frustrations in life as had happened to so many others. My answer was 'no.' The fact is I became a nun under the influence of my family.
>
> I didn't run into any opposition [in my family]. What made me uncomfortable was the social pressure. They were talking behind my back when I chose to enter religious life. My family knew it was good to become a nun, but worried about me as it was considered not in keeping with the times. I just turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to the neighbours' remarks. Some of our neighbours advised me to get married and have a family while I was young. But I was decided. All these *Nǚ daozhang* of the *Jiuku miao* have had similar experiences. They entered into the life at the age of 18 or 19, a little bit older than me. They did so naturally when finishing middle school. I don't believe it suits everyone to lead an ascetic life. In our words, [to become a nun] one needs to have good spiritual foundation) and *Yuanfen* (fate). Only when you are fated can you walk this road.
>
> I have visited a number of Daoist temples and participated in training classes. In 1997, I spent over a year studying the *Sutra* in a training course organized by the Nanyang Daoist Association; in the following

year, I went to Wuhan and studied the *Sutra* for 40 days. In 2002, I went to the Wulonggong Temple in Liaoning and studied there for one month. I went to other places to study, but there the instruction I attended would last only a couple of days or so.

Thirty years have passed by, just like a dream.[6] What is on my mind? There are two things important for human beings, one is religion or faith, and the other is freedom. I was born to take this road. I feel it is very good to live a celibate life when I see the complexity and great pressures there are in marital life. To me, the meaning of *Ziyou zhuyi*[7] is to persist in one's own way and stay unfettered, to have control of one's life.

While in the Temple, one can concentrate on inner self-cultivation without the distractions of family affairs, just submitting to prayer and whole-hearted self-cultivation. When there are no distracting thoughts, there will be no anguish. So you always feel good. These people [referring to a number of lay Daoists who were present at the *Jiuku miao* then] are in their 50s and 60s. They come to help with folding paper money. It is a spiritual appeasing of the soul. When getting upset at home, they will come to pray in the Temple, and they then can regain their peace of mind.

Kang and the nuns around her consciously and deliberately chose a life of celibacy, cultivating themselves according to the precepts of the Daoist doctrine. In all their conversations with us, they were emphatic as to how much they cherish the serenity and spiritual discipline of their lives. Such is true liberation, so they would point out to us on repeated occasions. Their collective strength, they say, is a source of courage when facing the complexities of government regulations and the difficulties of working through the legal challenges of expansion. Ties of affection among the nuns are not unlike the ties that characterized the sisterhoods of non-marrying women mentioned elsewhere which existed in southern China (Rubie Watson, 1991, 1994.) The principles of equality and mutual assistance guide their daily performance of chores as well as of administration. Everyone helps where and when work is to be done. According to Kang *Daozhang*, even the division of labour associated with positions of director, deputy director, bookkeeper and cashier is not clear cut. All help out wherever needed.

Kang *Daozhang* said:

Everyone should be equal. All those who have entered into religious life are trying to cultivate inner virtues and goodness, there is nothing they cannot tolerate. We nuns here are getting along with one another; there is no distinction between various duties. We'll talk it over when there appears some problem, and we are able to confront [and deal with] any difficulties.

EXEMPLARY LIVES AS A SOURCE OF RESPECT

The Daoist *Quanzhen* tradition requires much of its disciples: opening one's heart for revelations of Nature; removing all passion and desire; self-abnegation for the good of others; and cultivating the Self by constant exercise of one's inner refinement (Tang Dachao, 2005: 6–7). What gives these nuns the standing and respect and thus legitimacy of high office inside the Daoist organization, however, is the quality of leading women who reject all worldly desires in a society increasingly propelled by worldly consumption together with the steadfast celibacy of the two *Daozhang*, their spiritual depth and religious scholarship. In a society where so many, regardless of belief, bemoan the ubiquity of corruption and shallow morality, these nuns are given, if sometimes begrudgingly, respect for leading an unblemished life lived for spiritual purpose and the care of others. It is thus ironic that only by engaging with secular society and worldly concerns and in managing a carefully choreographed pattern of political compliance, can this female space hope to survive.[8] Attainment of the status of a *Duli* (independently registered) organization has satisfied principles of fairness and equality for the nuns; conversely, it has also created closer links with the world of bureaucracy and officialdom which, as Kang *Daozhang* reiterates, frequently and wistfully, they thought they had left behind for good. Instead, they have discovered that survival of the religious community depends on full, if circumscribed, participation in a highly complex society.

12 Being Female, Being Celibate, Being Catholic

The history and current situation of the Catholic Church in China, nationally and locally, present female religious with challenges different from those experienced by followers of Islam and Daoism. While Islam is 'foreign' in origin, in the case of Hui Muslims in central China, over the centuries it has become incorporated into, and a part of, a mainstream Chinese identity. Daoism is considered 'indigenous' and intimately interwoven with Chinese high civilization and popular culture alike. In contrast, Catholic history in China contends with its troubling associations of opportunistic Catholic missionizing among impoverished populations. In the ever-present subtexts of contemporary political discourse, the historical entry of Catholicism into Chinese society remains tainted in the national memory by superimposed unequal treaties which sustained an enforced economy of addiction and by Western military encroachments into the sovereignty of a weakened Imperial China. Charges of unpatriotic or disloyal conduct, however unspoken, still weigh heavily on the Catholic institutions in Kaifeng and Jingang in the intensifying patriotism accompanying China's emergence as a confident superpower. So does the 'complex game of co-operation and conflict that is evolving in uncertain directions' between the Vatican and the Chinese Party/State over the allegiance of Chinese Catholics (Madsen, 2003: 487).[1] Complex transnational and local factors alike are shaping the multifaceted nature of Chinese Catholic identity. They impinge on women's choices of a religious vocation or religious life as Catholic nuns and *Shouzhen guniang*.

Within this context, the diversity of individual women's biographies allows us to understand the complex ways by which female subjectivities are constructed. We learn how women choose to exercise their agency as an expression of preference, identity or conviction which may be seen to run counter to the dominant Government ideology of a Communist Party-infused secularizing modernity and against their varied institutionalization in the norms and practices of mainstream society. That female collective religiosity continues to endure also serves to complicate other interpretative templates: such as the Communist Party's original vision of China's road to progress via the historically inexorable unilinearity of secularist modernity, or assumptions of a Chinese mainstream society that is either trapped in

Figure 12.1 Official Brochure, distributed by the Catholic Diocese of Kaifeng in Henan—Jesus Floating Above Catholic and Islamic Sites of Worship. Calligraphy reads: *Tian zhu shi ai* (God is Love) and *Zhu ci ping an* (May the Lord Bless Us with His Protection).

'an ideological vacuum' or steeped in ideological conformity (Goldman, 2007). On the contrary, diversity of belief and practices have endured and developed in strategic accommodation with ideological and political fluctuations. In this quest for a means by which to localize, and familiarize, a universal meaning system, these believing women also form part of a wider regional discursive context. Examining the superiority Christianity assumed as part of its mission, one that was also predominantly to spread 'Western' values (equated with Christian values) in Asian colonies, the postcolonial critic Wai-Ching Wong (2002) notes the 'perpetual tutelage' that characterizes the relationship of native Christians with the Western Church. In such a dependency on alien liturgy, ritual and pedagogy, 'foreign' spirituality and knowledge are somehow superior to Asian native spirituality; this is no less the case in China where a wary Government imposed strict controls on foreign influence in local churches. 'The project of indigenization and contextualization of theology in Asia', so Wong holds, 'reflects an urgent search for ways of appropriating Christianity in a culture and people entirely different from the Western world' (*Ibid*.: 132).

CONVENTS IN KAIFENG: CHINESE PROVIDENCE CATECHISTS AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF THE MISSIONARIES

After the departure in 1948 of the American Sisters for Taiwan, the local Sisters were forced to come to terms, individually and collectively, with a newly circumscribed place in Communist society. The Taiwan-based Missionary Society of Providence Sisters, with its own motherhouse independent from the Providence Sisters' Motherhouse in Indiana since 1991, continues to have close relations with the Providence Sisters in the United States but has no formal institutional links. Nor does the Missionary Society acknowledge a formal link with the Zhugu *Xiunühui* (the Kaifeng convent, successor of the Chinese Sister Catechists founded in 1929 by the American Providence Sisters). The relationship is informal, consisting of infrequent visits to advise and support to the Kaifeng Sisters where possible, but material and religious support are limited.

During the years immediately after 1948, the American Providence Sisters were able to receive letters from the Catechist Sisters indicating the mounting political pressure on their right to religious expression and on their ability to engage in educational and social work (SPA, Providence Sister-Catechist Society, Sister Marie Gratia Luking to Mother Marie Helene Franey). From 1951 onwards, the religious and social space created by the American Sisters continued to diminish, contrary to their expectation that, even after their departure, this space would expand. Mass was no longer allowed during school hours (*Ibid*., 15 January 1950), nor were the Catechist Sisters allowed to wear religious dress (*Ibid*., 25 February 1951). The Nanguan (Nankuan) Compound, where the Catechist Sisters had been placed

was occupied by Communist troops, leaving only the small infirmary for use by the Catechists and one dying Sister (*Ibid*., 26 May 1951). The pressure was growing for Chinese religious to leave the faith; as Sister Marie Gratia noted: 'the policy of the Communists is not that of making martyrs, but that of making apostates' (*Ibid*., 16 October 1951). This pressure was further reinforced by an initiative in support of the official 'New Church Movement', led by the local priest in charge of the mission and by a number of members of the Church congregation. They were joined by an un-named Sister Catechist. Their signatures vowed disconnection from the Vatican and loyalty to the new Chinese Government (*Ibid*., 8 December 1951; see Joseph Tong, 1999). Only a short time later, news reached the Providence Sisters in Indiana that all who had joined the 'New Church Movement' had on 'December 10th [1951] in public before the Tabernacle and in presence of the assembled faithful abjured their error, and asked pardon for the bad example they had given. A new wave of fervor prevailed' (28 January 1952, Taichung, Taiwan). In 1954, news from Kaifeng told of the deportation of the last foreign missionaries from the Milan Mission. Father Brambilla, one of the two deported priests, wrote a report as he passed through Hong Kong. 'He [Father Brambilla] said no one knows what the Sisters have gone through. They have been marvels of strength and courage. They need much prayer. Every day they are summoned to the Communist Courts. Sister Clare, the Superior and her loyal assistants, seem to be inspired during these trials. Their example has been an inspiration to the Christians, many of whom have retracted their default in leaving the True Church, and have made the reparation called for' (SPA, Sister Marie Gratia Luking to Mother Mary Raphael Slattery, 5 March 1954).

THE LIFE OF A KAIFENG *SHOUZHEN GUNIANG*: TRAPPED BY THE PAST

We turned to the life of Chai Yuhuan to gain insights into the evolving traditions of an under-documented history of local Catholic women. Her personal biography has helped to enlighten us on the often perfunctory and biased remarks in historical sources on 'Chinese Virgins'. Through her own narration of experiences inside the institutions of the Catholic Church, she evokes the lives of different generations of Catholic religious but also reveals her own highly individualist spirit as someone 'who cannot work if under others' will.'[2]

Chai Yuhuan was born into a traditional Kaifeng family converted to Catholicism in the late eighteenth century. She believes, however, that family influence was not critical to her decision to become a *Shouzhen guniang*. When she was 12 years old in 1971, right in the middle of the Cultural Revolution which would last another five years, she first met Mary Wang Yizhi, a *Shouzhen guniang* who was to have a decisive influence over her

(Interview, 8 September 2005, Kaifeng). Whilst it is not clear to her why Wang had rejected convent life in her youth, she thinks it was not unlike her own situation: an unwillingness to suffer the 'stifling lack of spirituality' of convent life. Wang had trained as a doctor to ensure her own economic independence. As Chai's maternal grandmother knew Wang Yizhi, through this connection she came to know and to admire Wang. Because she was so busy at school, Wang came to Chai's home to teach her understanding of the Bible, Catholic prayers and religious songs. Inspiration became *Qimeng* (awakening), upon which she decided to follow in Wang's footsteps.

Although her family were pious Catholics, their influence on her decision was less significant as all throughout childhood Chai Yuhuan had been 'protected' from contact with Catholicism. The family had feared for her safety during the years of active suppression of religious life. Whenever Catholic visitors arrived in her grandparents' home, they were introduced to her as 'friends' rather than as 'priests.' However, she says, she was surprised to see her grandmother handing over bread to strange visitors when everyone else would go hungry. The family never had enough to eat in those 'years of hunger', but they shared the little *Mantou* (steamed bread) they had with visiting 'uncles' and 'aunts'; only later did she understand the significance of these acts. Wang's spirituality so inspired her that she never forgot how indebted she was to her; in old age, she would look after Wang like her own mother. Chai's commitment was further strengthened when, around 1981, she met a priest famed for his piety and his suffering. Then in her early 20s, she had decided to make her faith central to a life in which marriage and motherhood would have no place. Her decision, once arrived at, appears to have created a fearless belief. She placed herself in the position of assistant to a priest who was largely active in the underground Church. When he was arrested in 1981, she and her grandparents and younger brother were also arrested. Two months of imprisonment strengthened both her and her brother's conviction in the righteousness of their choice to enter a religious vocation. Her brother became a priest.

After this ordeal, another period of painful and dangerous work awaited her. One month after release from prison, she was given news by the nephew of the priest she supported that he was imprisoned in a remote part of the Henan Province.[3] To gain access to the prisoner, she changed her identity and appearance, turning herself into a country girl and taking a dangerous risk. During the years of his imprisonment in 1980 to 1991, when the elderly priest was transferred to a stricter prison for those charged with 'political crimes', Chai undertook difficult and tiring journeys in order to visit him during the very limited visiting hours. Always risking being found out, she faced the perils alone and unaccompanied. At times, suspicious prison staff would interrogate her over the priest's family, their background and economic and political circumstances, and her travel from the 'family' village to the prison. On several occasions she only narrowly avoided being trapped in the web of deception she had spun around her assumed identity.

She still remembers the conversations with the priest about 'family members' in the presence of the prison guard as other conversations were not possible. Only on occasion did the priest whisper into her ear to take care. She says that if he had been a murderer, someone might have been prepared to help her free him. But no help was forthcoming for a priest. She regularly visited him once a month despite the danger and the hopelessness of his case, up to the time of his release in 1993.

Chai took over the mantle of responsibility from those *Shouzhen guniang* who had promised the Italian missionaries in 1954, before their return to Milan, to 'look after Church and priests.' She continued to care for the priest upon his release, bearing the relentless grind of providing for his daily needs and ensuring his safety in a politically volatile environment. Subsequent years brought little relief as she became subject to a great many pressures in her own work and living environments. In her youth, family and the hospital staff where she worked as a nurse inflicted a daily inquisition over her marital status. She was approached with offers of marriage, despite her family background and markedly different (that is, single) lifestyle. She says that she felt lonely in an *E'lie* (morally corrupt) environment. In the many conversations concerning her attitude towards family and marriage, love and motherhood, so central to the conservative milieu in which she lives, Chai admitted that she whole-heartedly approves of marriage. She thinks she could have been a *Xianqi liangmu* (a traditional Confucian paradigm of idealized wife and motherhood) and would have been happy in a loving marriage. She said, 'I was willing to make this sacrifice for my faith . . . But I myself consider this, until today, yes, I consider this to be my sacrifice.'

SHOUZHEN GUNIANG AND CONVENT CULTURE

It was the difficulty of establishing a single, separate life in an unstable society, especially within the politically charged and culturally conservative culture of Kaifeng City—nearly equally hostile to the Catholic faith as to the unmarried status—that prompted Chai Yuhuan to enter the local Zhugu Convent. For four years she stayed in the Zhugu Convent in Nanguan District, where the American Sisters had historically set up the convent for 'native' Catechist Sisters. She says she left because it was not suited to her needs. Intellectually, educationally and in religious terms, she was unable to fit into the environment, and there were many occasions of conflict. Eventually, the conflict in the community became intolerable, and she left to follow in the footsteps of generations of *Shouzhen guniang* before her, serving the *Jiaohui* (her local Church) as a single, celibate woman.

Since 1981, when the Nanguan Convent reopened, there have been few nuns; in 2008, six nuns made up the community. The lack of spirituality

and a culture of common religious purpose mean that growth has been sluggish. The educational level of the *Xiunü* (nuns) is 'extremely low', according to Chai. Equally important to her, they lack a religious calling as well as an understanding of the core tenets of Catholic belief. It is not always apparent to her what their motivation for entry into the Convent might have been. Given the rural background of these Sisters, she speculated how much their choice might have had to do with the relatively easier life of a nun compared to the hard and grinding labour that would have awaited them in their home village. When she sought spiritual progress in the community of Sisters, it was impossible to find. Instead she discovered obstacles wherever she turned. The elderly nun in charge of the community, then in her 70s, only had a rudimentary understanding of the responsibility entailed in her position, giving more attention to her natal family rather than to her religious family. Chai's arguments and criticisms were most importantly with the *Yuanzhang* (head of community, or Mother Superior) whose spiritual deficiency and pragmatic approach to convent life, according to Chai, affected all those around her.

A lack of participatory decision making, deferential relations in regard to senior persons as well as a low standard of education and low self-image all hinder the growth of a more open and spiritual family as a genuine alternative to mainstream society. With an ever-more shallow performance of convent life, presided over by undemocratic superiors who cannot lead on either a spiritual or political level, how is growth of the Catholic Church possible, asked a despairing Chai (Interviews, September 2006–April 2007). In Chai's interpretation, the absence of a vital spiritual culture is not so much to be blamed on lack of goodwill; the root problem is the lack of even the most basic education of too many young women who enter convent life, thus not only obstructing the development of the Zhugu Convent but also of the Catholic congregation as a whole.

DUTIES OF A *SHOUZHEN GUNIANG*

Chai gives all the free time she can spare from her work at the hospital, and much of her income, to provide the *Jiaohui* with the kind of religious instruction she feels is sadly lacking. Very much in the historical tradition of *Virgines* who took responsibility for the transmission of religious doctrines, Catholic rites and prayers when the institution of the Church lay dormant, Chai considers it her duty to revitalize spirituality and informed faith wherever religious clergy have become biddable servants of a tamed Church bureaucracy. Until recently, she took it upon herself to look after the older generation of *Shouzhen guniang*, ensuring that proper care was provided when they fell ill and paying them frequent visits in their final days. She treated them like a 'filial' daughter, she said. Li De, the last *Shouzhen guniang* of the generation who had given the Italian

missionaries their promise to dedicate their lives to the Church, returned to be looked after by Chai in the Zhugu convent and died in 2008 in a nursing home in Kaifeng.

Chai sees education as the only panacea with which to stem religious indifference, corruption, ignorance and injustice. Chai devotes herself to teaching anyone who might contribute to the future of the Church, whether they be entrepreneurs, self-employed artisans or preferably somewhat more educated members of the professional classes, and anyone she can inspire to join her daily classes. For the growth of Catholicism, recruitment of *Zhishi fenzi* (educated persons) is particularly vital as the great Christian rival, the Protestant Church, she complains, has been able to make much greater inroads into the class of young educated urban professionals.

Traditionally, Catholic converts have come from the rural population and lower-income groups. Having lived with some of these women who entered the Zhugu Convent and whose 'shallow understanding' of Catholicism she abhors, Chai takes it upon herself to journey to villages and outlying communities to *Chuanjiao* (spread the faith). As the majority of girls she assembles around her are uneducated, some entirely illiterate, she teaches them through song and through stories taken from the New Testament. She concedes that most village girls and women find it difficult to absorb important religious concepts, let alone gain a more spiritual understanding. More able missionaries are needed, she says, who are capable of popularizing what are often abstract and opaque concepts of *Tianzhu* (God) and make a Catholic life relevant to local conditions. Again, historical similarities emerge between Chai's views with the *Virgines* of the past. This time it is the state of the Church that comes under particular attack. This *Shouzhen guniang* does not hold back with her criticism of 'superstition' creeping into the 'pure faith' because priests are too preoccupied with affairs internal to the Church organization to engage where both spiritual and practical support are needed. It is important to her to be seen to lead an exemplary Christian life, to be a role model. She is sought out by *Jiaoyou* (Catholic believers) for her unshakable faith but is also respected, maybe sometimes feared, for the uncompromising severity of her criticism of a prevailing moral lassitude in the Catholic clergy. What earns her respect is that unlike other religious in the local community, she has never been known to concede to political pressure. This makes her one of the few local Catholics openly refusing to break with the Vatican.

Chai is aware of the conditionality of the future of Catholicism, dependent on believers capable of filling leadership positions. The regeneration of the Catholic Church requires organization driven by people with knowledge, spirituality and a missionary zeal, says Chai. Only thus can she hope to attack the tepidness of belief that for her marks, and tarnishes, mainstream Catholicism. As Catholic rules of celibacy impose

ever greater strain on one-child Catholic families, it will be in the rural communities where family planning has either allowed for certain exceptions to the rule or been applied more flexibly than in urban areas that the Catholic Church will continue to find recruits for the priesthood and convents. With that the dilemma of old continues, not dissimilar from the laments of the Providence Sisters in the 1930s. Chai Yuhuan is critical of the ways that ignorance and lethargy undermine the radical social message of the Scriptures. By attracting in the main the rural poor and unemployable members of the younger generation, in Chai's view, the Catholic institutions which she has done so much to support are being compromised. Losing credibility, the Catholic Church is losing ground in urban areas to the Protestant Church, where women are particularly active, filling the houses of worship to breaking-point (Kipnis, 2001: 32–46). Chai Yuhuan is the last of a long line of *Shouzhen guniang* in Kaifeng. She lacks the support of other like-minded women or that of the *Jiaohui* which, moreover, prefers to rely on the services of the convent. She is thus increasingly a woman without purpose. Single women are no longer the anomaly they once were, but a celibate religious without legitimacy of institutional affiliation is as ever a woman out of place.

Figure 12.2 Bible Class, Catholic Cathedral, Henan [photo: Maria Jaschok].

NEW FORMS OF ORGANIZING AND MORAL LEADERSHIP

Unlike other contemporary *Shouzhen guniang* in Henan, Chai feels that her choice to live a celibate religious life required separation from the family, enabling her to pursue a single-minded dedication of body and soul to God. Economic independence through her work as a nurse made possible her celibate life and her independence. She needed neither support from her family, nor, because of her status of *Shouzhen guniang*, a traditional religious organization such as a convent to enable her to develop her ideal of a religiously focused spiritual life.

Chai nevertheless feels that new forms of organizing are needed to bring about change. Disenchanted with the institutional Church's many compromises and the compromised clerics whose price for survival has been a diluted piety, she believes she must help to set up a new form of *Tuanti* (small group) organization that would be more responsive to challenges posed by a modernizing non-Christian society, and nurture a more deeply felt spiritual culture. They would also be more suited to contemporary society (as explained later in relation to Jingang *Shouzhen guniang*). She believes that the moral leadership of more people like herself is needed to take the initiative, unafraid of sacrifice. Thus, Chai says, 'I want to live in a community of like-minded women.' She lacks the support required to intervene in the affairs of the Church and in the challenges faced almost daily by believers: 'If problems arise in society, there must be right at the centre [of society] a strong response.' Religious leadership must provide the solution to moral and other issues. She adds, however, that this spirit of much-needed moral renewal requires a spirit of independence which, she has come to realize, is most safely nurtured in a social space created together with others, with women like herself.

Chai's analysis of the woes of Catholic practice in her own environment pinpoint the lack of inspiration and a lack of role models, as older religious practitioners and believers are compromised, often broken in spirit, by too many persecutions, while the young generation does not have the guidance nor any outstanding believers to serve as models. An illustration of the lack of sensitivity on the part of Church leadership to political inroads into religious culture is the dress code for nuns and priests which for many years has been the tunic with a *Zhongshan* (or Maoist) collar. So *E'xin* (loathsome) was the association with Maoist persecutions of religion that Chai refused to wear such a dress, insisting on plain, black-white clothing instead. Thus she intends to demand for her proposed *Tuanti* an appropriate dress code, differing subtly from women around them, yet not so different at work or in everyday situations from others that they might be subjected to the 'ridicule of society.'

Chai is concerned over the state of the Catholic Church in her community. She sees the hierarchical, misogynistic nature of the Church and the rudimentary qualifications brought to convent life by the Sisters as stunting the growth of the Church. With so little opportunity for self-knowledge and so little sense of self and understanding of humanity around them, she asks

how can the spiritual culture develop? Without this spirituality, how can the Church in China extricate itself from moral mire and spiritual amnesia? She fears that the moral authority the Catholic Church might have had is being squandered when it can least afford to do so. Chai observes that at a time when many people look for guidance to make sense of their lives, it is *other* religious institutions, whether Protestant, Buddhist or Islamic, which rise to the challenge and gather a growing number of converts. In the Catholic Church, she complains, *Tanwu tai lihaile* (greed has spread too wide). Changes, where they are instituted, come too slowly.

Chai Yuhuan does not share the fear of many Catholics that straying beyond the rules and regulations of local authorities or the surveillance of the Public Security apparatus might lead to arrest or worse. She does share many of the convictions of the Daoist *Daozhang* at the nearby *Jiuku miao* that being 'called' into a religious life is to give oneself over to all that befalls one on this road. She would also agree with Kang *Daozhang* that only in grasping opportunities granted by public visibility can change be effected. Chai cites changing relations with officials from the Public Security, with whom relations have become cautiously cordial. Even these officials, aware of her activities, are respectful of her, she says. They may fail to understand her religious convictions but she says they respect her for her integrity and moral character. Therefore, she confided that 'one need not fear the fact that we all are of different faiths, but we must depend on each other's moral calibre! That is why I am so proud of the generations of *Shouzhen guniang* before me' (Interview, in Kaifeng, 5 April 2006).

NEW FORMS OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS—THE LIVES OF *XIUNÜ* AND *SHOUZHENNÜ* IN JINGANG

The current situation of two religious women's organizations in Jingang, most importantly, the *Shengmu wuranyuanzui xiunühui* (Sisters of the Immaculate Conception Convent) and a new women's association, *Shengmu weiyou fengxian shenghuo hui,* or *Weiyouhui* (Association of Our Lady of Mercy and Pious Submission), set up by a number of the *Shouzhennü,* exemplify the survival of the Catholic community in Jingang. They help to illustrate what factors might have contributed to the more dynamic state of local organizing there, grounding our understanding of the link between religion, gender and space in the local specificities of the relationship between these two different female communities and the changing nature of their respective place in society.

The changes that have occurred in Jingang society, reflecting the wider socio-political and economic changes in Chinese society, have meant that Catholicism is no longer as overwhelmingly dominant in local society as it once was. Young women and men in Jingang since 1949 have joined the Army, entered local government, taken on professions, served on political committees, joined the Communist Party and Communist Youth League

Figure 12.3 Catholic Church, Jingang [photo: Shui Jingjun].

and been elected as 'model workers.'[4] Even now, however, a majority of Jingang people are still Catholic. In 2005, one interviewee estimated that more than 2,000 people (80 percent) consider themselves Catholics. Others speculated that it might be over 90 percent. Thus for the majority of Jingang inhabitants, the date 15 August 1980, when formal religious activities were allowed and familiar practices could again resume, brought relief from the hard line anti-religion government campaigns of the last decades.

THE SISTERS' STORY OF *SHENGMU WURANYUANZUI XIUNÜHUI* (SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CONVENT)

This Convent of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception is situated in the courtyard at the back of Jingang Church. The four Sisters who make up the community of the Convent thus live in relative isolation. All still in their 20s, they come from neighbouring cities, from Nanzhao, Sheqi and Zhengzhou. Sister Li arrived from her home town eight years ago when she was about 10 years old. She says:

> All my family members are Catholics but to be a Sister was a personal choice. It was the call of God which gave me power and courage to become a Sister. My heart belongs to God. Jesus Christ lives in our hearts. Sisters need an inner calling in our hearts, the voice of God. But the process of time it takes to become a Sister, before making the vows, is long. There are two kinds of vows: the temporary vows and perpetual vows. The period for temporary vows usually lasts three to six years but cannot last for more than nine years. After nine years, Sisters can request to take their perpetual vows or leave the convent. According to Catholic doctrine, it is an aspiration for all women to become a Sister. God calls upon each person to aspire to the highest state of being, but even parents cannot force their daughters to become Sisters.

Sister Li was emphatic on having herself chosen convent life. She was conscious of the legacy left by previous generations of nuns whose charitable work had been indispensable to the missionary effectiveness of the Church:

> There are not so many Sisters now but we still need to contribute to society. When the old Sisters were still here, schools, old peoples' homes, orphanages, facilities for the disabled and more were all managed by them. During the time of the Cultural Revolution, convents and clergy were done away with and some nuns and priests were forced to get married. Even though some kept their religious status, it was difficult for them to survive. There was an old Sister who went to work at the medical school in the daytime and was criticised publicly in the evening. What we could see then is not only their tragic experiences but also how to live your faith. The Church is so developed nowadays because that generation of Sisters stayed true to their faith.
>
> Our work is visiting the elderly, whenever time allows. We also visit members of the congregation to listen to their family problems. We are trying to model ourselves on the older generations, learning more medical knowledge, for example. We now own a small clinic: an ophthalmology clinic.

The nuns' relationship with the *Shouzhen guniang* is cordial, friendly, but there are no formal meetings (Interview, Jingang Cathedral, 12 October 2005). Members of each organization are busy, it appears, with their own affairs. However, there is no hostility or prejudice either.

THE *SHOUZHENNÜ* STORY: *WEIYOU HUI* (ASSOCIATION OF OUR LADY OF MERCY AND PIOUS SUBMISSION)

Turning to the story of the Association of Our Lady of Mercy and Pious Submission, we see an organization that in 2005 was known to have about

20 *Shouzhennü,* all members of a new generation of *Shouzhennü*. Unlike the older generation, this new generation of celibate women whilst living at home, work collectively and are more actively involved in caring for vulnerable members of the local community. Local people refer to their Association as a *Shisuhui* (secular association) to distinguish it from the traditional convent organization. The elderly Zhang *Gugu*, herself a celibate woman, confirmed that the new generation—to whom she referred under the colloquial name of *Xiaolao guniang* (Little Old Women)—are more actively involved in missionary work (Interview in Zhumadian, September2, 2005). This marks them as greatly different from earlier generations when *Shouzhen guniang* rarely ventured out of their parents' home.

The *Shouzhen guniang* conceive of their organization as a new type of convent, *Xiudaoyuan*, which differs from the neighbouring (traditional) convent in important respects. They no longer see themselves as merely continuing the legacy of *Shouzhen guniang* but also as expanding its role and thus adding to a reinvented status of *Xiunü* or *Xiudao* (Sister). According to Dr. Shi Zhen, the Mother Superior in charge of the Association of Our Lady of Mercy and Pious Submission:

Figure 12.4 Dr. Shi Zhen, *Shouzhen Guniang*, Jingang, in her Pharmacy [photo: Shui Jingjun]. By permission of Shi Zhen.

> It is all the same, whether we are called *Shouzhen guniang* or *Xiudao* or *Xiunü*. After all, we are all *Lao guniang* (unmarried women).
>
> There is still an old celibate woman in Jingang, now 90 years old. The total number of *Shouzhen guniang* of the new generation is more than 30. Our *Weiyouhui* (Association of Our Lady of Mercy and Pious Submission) was established in 1975. Whoever wishes to live in celibacy can join us. The oldest member is 55 and the youngest is about 20.

The *Weiyouhui* has made use of old houses belonging to the Church to set up a welfare centre for care of the elderly, called *Jingang Jiaotang weilaoyuan* (Jingang Church Centre for the Comfort of the Elderly). Six *Shouzhen guniang* are working in the Centre. In 2005, the Centre cared for 43 old persons and 20 disabled children. The living cost per month for caring for an old person amounts to 150 *Renminbi*, paid by her or his family, and daily expenses and medical costs arising from the care of disabled children rely on donations. According to Dr. Shi Zhen, who is also the director of the Church Centre, the children were found abandoned on the outskirts of the village where the old orphanage used to be in Jingang. No other institution takes in disabled children. Although no *Shouzhen guniang* was trained for such work, they all acquired the necessary skills to prolong the lives of the children as much as possible.

Shouzhen guniang pride themselves on the qualities of selflessness and quiet charity; none gets paid for their work at the Centre and all see such devotion as the best preparation for life after death:

> We have devoted ourselves to God; we are filled with faith and with love. We work to look after the old and after children. Our love comes from Jesus Christ. Our work brings inner peace. We get up at four every morning. Then we pray until five when we cook. We work until 10 every day. We do not feel tired but fulfilled.
>
> The power of women is extraordinary and boundless. You see, the houses here were all built by women. Women are more emotional than men . . . the love of women is all-embracing because of our capacity to sympathize. Women are more willing to do charity work and sacrifice themselves when necessary (Interview, Shi Zhen *Shouzhen guniang*).

Women's 'natural' qualities of compassion, selflessness, self-abnegation and readiness to sacrifice are here raised to a level of heroism which propels social change in a way, so Shi Zhen makes clear, that men cannot achieve. Qualities traditionally associated with the concept of *Nei* as belonging inside or within domestic walls here invite action ('building houses') and participation in public life rather than withdrawal. Feminine and religious qualities merge, mutually reinforcing a process of feminizing religious institutions and of legitimizing (through religion) the public enactment of women's 'boundless' potential.

As in the cases of Du *Ahong*, Kang *Daozhang* and Chai Yuhuan *Shouzhen guniang*, the influence of a forceful leading religious on surrounding women is instrumental in mobilizing people for action. The middle-aged Shi Zhen did not come from a Catholic background but was born into a family steeped in intellectual and cultural history: 'My grandfather was a doctor and he knew a lot about the meaning of *Yin Yang* and the Eight Divinatory Trigrams.' During the political campaigns and the Cultural Revolution, she was sent to do factory work. Nevertheless, she succeeded in getting into medical school, from which she graduated in 1995 at the age of 39. She familiarized herself with all the major religious traditions (and once worked in a mosque) but was not persuaded by any of her encounters with religious leaders. When she met Catholics and read the Scriptures, her life was changed: 'Celibacy is the call of God. I have never had contact with members of the opposite sex and have had no desire for it. I have never regretted being celibate, and I feel young in my mind.'

It is clear that life and work experiences have shaped in Shi a strong and self-confident character. When Shi Zhen was 20, she had together with other *Shouzhen guniang* already decided that power to improve the situation of others could only come from collective action. It is the sense that individually none of the women would have made an impact on society that led them to establish the Association of Our Lady of Mercy and Pious Submission. As she put it, 'we keep our independence at home (*Dulizizhu*), have our freedom and depend on ourselves to earn our living (*Yanghuo ziji*), and once we organized ourselves (*Zuzhi qilai hou*), we then started proselytizing our religion [in the wider society].'

Again, the theme of *Duli*, of the value to women of self-reliance and independence, resonates through all of her statements. Indeed, as we have previously noted, it is the concept which frequently comes into the narrations of women from other religious traditions. It might refer to the journey undertaken by Muslim women to register their own independent women's mosque, it might be the arduous negotiations entailed in leading an independent Daoist temple of the Female Way, or it might involve building on a traditional local institution of Catholic female celibacy to accommodate greater pressures from society to provide proof of relevance of the Catholic doctrine to the needs of local communities.

Shi Zhen equates Catholicism with 'love' and Buddhism with 'benevolence.' Important to her is what she perceives to be the central message of Catholicism: equality and tolerance. Her belief also inspires her engagement with society to assist the most vulnerable: women and children. Confidence in their actions is clearly expressed in Shi Zhen's interpretation of the relationship of the *Shouzhen guniang* with the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception Convent. Shi's own Association is seen as suiting the needs of women who want to combine the economic independence, not allowed under rigid convent rules, and a certain autonomy of life-style and a religious purpose that enables collective engagement on behalf of the vulnerable

in society. Such an evaluation of the changes that *Shouzhen guniang* have wrought in their lives not only distinguishes them from the lives of nuns in the adjacent Convent, but their level of education and work experience also distinguishes them from older generations of *Shouzhennü*. Indeed, the Kaifeng *Shouzhen guniang*, Chai Yuhua, welcomes such a development as the most intelligent way for religious women to go forward and for religious organizations to adapt to more enlightened and progressive strategies in order to persuade society of their relevance (Interview, September 2007).

LEGACIES OF THE PAST AND CLAIMS TO A FUTURE

We have explored how Catholic female organizations both in Kaifeng and Jingang survive in a fusion of selective 'feminine' Catholic values of compassion, self-abnegation and sacrifice within familiar forms of celibate sisterhoods. This practice helps to diminish associations (and any political sensitivity) related to the aggressive insertion of the Catholic Church into local society, with its harsh expansionist project still inscribed in the symbolic architectural landscape of Jingang.

Whereas in the case of the Muslim and Daoist religious the past can be more readily re-embedded into (some might argue, re-appropriated by) the State project of a pluralistic modernity to exemplify multiculturalism,[5] Catholicism is still wedged into a difficult relationship between the Vatican and the Communist Party State. The convents in Kaifeng and Jingang, as well as the 'new convent' set up by the Jingang *Shouzhen guniang*, are not dissimilar as far as the current course of their development is concerned from the *Virgines*. The *Virgines*' instrumental role in converting local communities during the 'long century' of prohibition of Christianity (1724–1840) also became a controversial process of indigenization in the history of Catholicism in China (Entenmann, 1996; Laamann, 2006). The relationship between the *Jiaohui* (Church parish) and the convent in Kaifeng is modelled on traditional family relations, the latter in its passive dependency is unable to grow and ambivalent about its history. Furthermore, the Kaifeng convent excludes the remaining *Shouzhen guniang* as wilful and undisciplined, resonating in this respect with past accusations by American Providence Sisters about the 'deficiency' of 'the Virgins.' In Jingang, however, the *Shouzhen guniang* have set up what one of its senior members calls a 'new convent.' Here, tradition (both religious and secular)[6] and modernity intersect to create a Catholic women's organization that aspires to be democratic and egalitarian in its constitution and is composed of celibate women, female-led and engaged in social causes benefiting all members of local society.

We went back to Kaifeng and Jingang to understand the impact of changes on Catholic women resulting from Chinese Government policies on religious sites and, in particular, on women's traditions of worship.

Tighter government administration of all religious sites have both created constraints and a certain standardization across religions and also enabled women to claim equal status, as is evident in the leadership of the Beida Women's Mosque in Zhengzhou. It has also lent a certain degree of legitimacy and protection as accomplished by the *Jiuku miao* led by the capable Kang *Daozhang*. Here it might be argued that whereas all religious traditions continue to be tightly regimented, even if not as rigidly suppressed as in the first decades of Communist rule, women also have been able to turn their multiply constructed identity into an important resource for themselves, claiming entitlements—of assigned space to worship—as believing *Chinese* women into entitlements to use the assigned space as equal with male co-religionists. As religious organizations are increasingly demanding the return of confiscated land and property, the search for historical sources—with land deeds and photographs of original buildings and of earlier generations of leading religious (see Figure 11.1) appearing in convents and temples—has resulted in a heightened consciousness of women's own traditions.

Conclusion

Women, Religion and Space: Freedom, Dependency and Inter-Dependence

> What are my ideas? There are two things important for human beings, one is religion or faith, and the other is freedom. I was born to take this road. I feel it is very good to live a celibate life when I see the complexity and great pressures there are in marital life. To me, the meaning of *Ziyou zhuy*i is to persist in one's own way and stay unfettered, to have control of one's life (Kang *Daozhang*, see Chapter 11).

The anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2003), discussing feminist discourse in Islamic contexts, criticizes what she holds to be the specious reasoning underlying many an anthropologist's assumption that women are 'naturally' inclined or predisposed to particular freedoms and that the nature of 'female desire' is constructed in a way that accords with feminist assumptions about 'natural drives for progress.' But 'desire' is socially constructed and, so Mahmood argues, we also need to take into account those desires that reach into structures of subordination and acquiescence. We should not assume that women are predisposed in certain directions and men in other directions.

> Rather, such an approach requires that the anthropologist pay attention to specific kinds of investments, understanding of the self and its relationship to social authority, as well as structures of hierarchy that bind women to the very forces that subordinate them (Mahmood, 2003: 311).

Mahmood sees as a key challenge the need to develop 'a conceptual language that analyzes different kinds of commitments that are not necessarily attributable to a culture at large, but attend to different kinds of discursive and political formations that simultaneously inhabit a single cultural space' (*Ibid*.: 312). We argue that the distinctiveness of a women's tradition of organizing—which resonates across China's religious traditions and into contemporary political culture—and the characteristic fluid strategy adopted by women to advance particular interests in society without destabilizing its integrity are intimately related to the indigenous concept of *Duiying*. This concept, which we interpret as signifying complementarity, or interrelatedness, of all social phenomena, helps to translate both certain core aspects of women's past engagement in society and the intrinsic, if still under-recognized, relationship between religious and secular strands of the women's history to this very day.

The *Jiuku miao,* the Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque in Kaifeng and the Beida Women's Mosque in Zhengzhou, the Providence Sisters's convents in Kaifeng, and the *Shouzhen guniang* in Kaifeng and in Jingang, all serve as an illustration of the varied applications of *Duiying* as strategy of coping and survival. At its heart lies a philosophy of social change through recognition of social interdependency as a core principle of social conduct. Clearly evident in our case studies were the fluidity of alternating 'soft' and 'hard' approaches by which women pursued individual and collective causes, always intent on preserving as far as possible the core beliefs of faith and social allegiances to the family of faith.

At the heart of our study are age-old practices of religious women's strategies for survival and social engagement in 'the march of [official] time.' Whilst the 'unruly spaces' (Schaffer and Song, 2007) occupied were located in what were most often socially marginal sites of religious organizations, women's flights from 'hearth' to 'temple' were regarded by Confucian apologists as undermining the very legitimacy of a patriarchal society's symbolic order. Different in their doctrines and philosophies, in their organizations and applications of faith to daily life, the spaces that Daoist, Muslim and Catholic women created and shared with their female fellow believers show important commonalities. All-pervasive and enduring codes of gender segregation have shaped traditions of religious female-led sites, impacting their internal cultures and organizations as well as their public presence. The 'single cultural space' shared by the three religious traditions codified the interrelatedness of all social life as predicated on the exclusion of women from public affairs. Such paradigmatic femininity came to be conceptualized as *Sancong* (proper dependences on male kin) and *Side* (proper feminine conduct within the inner sanctum of the hearth). These gender codes rendered women the 'hidden actor' (Handrahan, 2002: 5) in the public political/social constructs of society which justified their social exclusion. Women's perceived lack of rational qualities was further compounded by the prominence of women in all religions. Accusations such as the ubiquity of 'naturally' feminine characteristics of 'gullibility' and 'superstition' that supposedly rendered women the ready victims of religion were levelled at the followers of the *Jiuku miao* in the 1920s, as much as at women of faith during the political campaigns of the 1950s.

The histories of religious women's organizations, however, tell of imaginative strategies through which they emerged as a highly visible part of the symbolic landscapes, simultaneously expressing the gendered nature of public space and appropriating space to create for their members a new *public* and a new *private* sphere. How gender segregation alternated between its codification by state ideology and its rigid enforcement by government agencies during the late Imperial, Republican and Communist eras or, as in the 1950s, by a (temporary) revolutionary overthrow of its underlying gender arrangements, says as much about the political use-value of women to the national project as about women's capacities to exercise collective,

and frequently dissenting agency. The dual function of women's organizations as *public* (demonstrating the presence of groups of women dedicating their lives to religious faith) and as *private* (functioning as a surrogate family which nurtured and sustained religious identity beyond class, family background and marital status) shaped women's participation in the wider society, allowing for new openings for societal contacts and networks. The stories of women from both the *Jiuku miao* and the Beida Women's Mosque demonstrate how a private sense of belonging is fostered through personal ties, offers of personal support and opportunities for alleviating, even challenging, the disadvantages brought on by poverty and gender discrimination. By their very presence such female religious communities enriched the local repertoire of available female roles and allowed women to make positive choices. Entering a women's mosque or a Daoist temple dedicated to the Female Way afforded women historical opportunities to learn new things, to socialize and network, when they would otherwise have shared with the women around them the confinement of paradigmatic domesticity.

Women who pledged their faith and support to their religious family were able to preserve their allegiance to the universal values of their religion through indigenizing, or localizing, these values in the constant intermingling of local cultural traditions and shifting political expediencies. We hold that in this way marginalized women came to play a not insignificant part in the (re)making of history (in the process also challenging the patriarchal investments in history predicated on the exclusion of women). Individual life testimonies, such as those of Du Shuzhen *Lao ahong*, Guan *Shanren*, Kang *Daozhang* or Wang *Xiunü* (*Xiansheng*), demonstrate how women in the historical margins of master narratives were able, time and again, to disrupt the apparently inexorable fates which tied them to 'the hearth' (Zhou Yiqun, 2003) and to the reproduction of 'father's time' (Kristeva, in Moi, 1986: 190).

The female religious whose status as *Luohou* (backwardness, being behind the times) was the antithesis of paradigmatic modernity both in Republican and Communist eras, and who in the latter period were relegated to 'the time before liberation [of women]' ([*Funü*] *jiefang yiqian*) were nevertheless, and as a matter of historical record, capable of disrupting contingencies of patriarchal privileges. This is what makes their contributions to the history of Chinese women more significant than is commonly acknowledged. In Chinese scholarship, individual biographies of religious women and studies of religious organizations are rarely, if ever, tied into the feminist discourse of women's history.[1] Yet they represent the most illuminating testimonies of the historically and locally contingent nature of *Nei-* and *Wai*-anchored gender arrangements. Guan *Shanren* broke through the symbolic chain that tied her to the 'hearth' and acquired potent public resources and influence. We have presented evidence concerning the interdependence of religious and secular spaces for women and the significance of the former to gender change in general. When, as happened in the

process of political transformations during the Republican era, religious spaces for women were shrinking, the public space available to *all* women was diminished.

Conversely, it must be acknowledged that while Guan *Shanren* broke barriers to women's public influence, she also reproduced in the organization of the *Jiuku miao* the mirror image of gender segregation in the wider society. This suggests the limitations of marginal groups to affect gender change. Additionally, considering aspects internal to the culture of women's organizations, the impact of being 'outside time' could render their traditions invisible (as happened with the *Jingge* traditions of women's mosques in central China's Muslim communities), or taint the memories of the very women who once cherished their part in the transmission of women's traditions.

Yet history and modern gender politics intermingle to help strengthen the claims made for the legitimacy of women's own space and entitlement to a recognized place in society. In response to increasingly assertive declarations by religious leaders to the rights of women in their own organizations and institutions, and despite the continued grip of the Communist Party State on organized political life, a marked, if always qualified, degree of diversity peculiar to women's organizations and associations may be noted (Howell, 2006, 2008; Hsiung *et al*, 2001; Milwertz, 2002; Wesoky, 2001). Researchers of secular women's organizations characterize the relationship between the State and the women's movements as precariously balanced between independence and repression. Thus Sharon Wesoky (2001) refers to the 'velvet prison' of the Chinese State's desire to demonstrate its steadfast adherence to, and promotion of, gender equality, which she argues has enabled the women's organizations to gently raise certain issues that previously were taboo, while still appearing cooperative rather than confrontational. In this way, a *symbiotic* women's movement has come to exist that, at least to some extent, is reflective of an enhanced participatory ethic in the evolution of Chinese State-society relations, as well as of the continuing power and authority of the Chinese Communist Party-State (*Ibid*.).

However slow and recalcitrant the process of reconnection with the expressive cultural traditions of the past, it also thus allows for a certain legitimacy for those women's sites that once formed part of the minor traditions of women's houses, sisterhoods and maiden cults. The institution of *Shouzhen guniang* has, arguably, made the most radical adjustment. Diminishing in impact, no longer guarding the faith on behalf of a banished foreign Church as was historically the case, nor easily accommodated into social life as single women, they have—as in Jingang—devised strategies to acquire social respectability and legitimacy through organizing themselves into new social groups. Yet in doing so, they are following in the path of many generations of celibate women who found in apparently marginal religious traditions the legitimacy and justification to create alternatives to lives lived in subservience to 'the hearth.'

In the course of their existence, these women's spaces have developed their own stories of proud traditions and narratives of suffering. These traditions have served women who came to these places to find consolation and comfort, and not infrequently a refuge, often in defiance of government policies and prevalent standards of approved (female) conduct. It can be argued that whilst recent scholarship pursues with some vigour the 'translation of Chinese feminism' across and beyond the Orientalizing tendency of early Chinese women's studies by Western feminists (Ko and Wang, 2007; Schaffer and Song, 2007) religious women's exercise of agency (Pang Keng-Fong, 1997) has yet to enter the secular feminist narrative. Its historical significance has thus far not been fully recognized. We have, however, illustrated the spatial and institutional continuity of traditions arising from religious choices right into the twenty-first century, arising both through the ways that women have been reconnecting with their history and also by restating their relevance to contemporary society. Even in this reinvention, reform and constraints are part of an old pattern that characterizes the history of women's spaces in their interaction with patriarchal morality, institutions and gender regimes.

We have wanted to add to the studies of mainstream Chinese women's movements and organizations the important historical traditions that infused so much of the *culture of women organizing* and *sources of authority*, driven by the belief in divine justice by which worldly injustice could be challenged—a belief that mobilized (and still mobilizes) women around collective causes vital to themselves and their surroundings. We therefore looked at a broad time span of political transformations during the Republican and Communist eras, reaching also back into the Late Imperial roots of women's traditions. We examined the local religious sites and institutions of three major religions in Kaifeng and Zhengzhou, in Henan Province. They have historically attracted women but also remain in the twenty-first century, the symbolic, spiritual and social locations where local women congregate, mobilize and develope strategies for renewal and relevance, in the course widening their space of engagement.

We refer to these traditional approaches at the most local level of social engagement as *Duiying*. This concept does not signify an 'indigenous' tradition as applied to a spatially defined social identity. Instead, its application in the religious organizations we studied is the particular expression of preferences, ideals and yearnings which—in order to be realized—required women to engage in the world around them. Families, local communities and authorities, social and cultural institutions, none have been left without traces of women's faith, providing rich testimony to religious women's capacity to make a difference. In this way, we argue that religious women may have contributed to, and be part of, a prototype of 'an indigenous Chinese feminism' for women far beyond the religious sphere and the impact of which endures—even if its authorship is not often acknowledged—into the present day.

Glossary

Ahong	阿訇	generic title used for men and women, tantamount to Imam status; combines functions of teacher, religious leader, and community representative
Beida nansi	北大男寺	Beida Men's Mosque
Beida nüsi	北大女寺	Beida Women's Mosque
Chujià	出嫁	(woman) marrying out
Chujiā	出家	leaving home to follow religious vocation
Daopo	道婆	Daoist nun
Daozhang	道長	senior nun or abbess
Duiying Kongjian	對應空間	social inter-dependence
Fudao	婦道	moral code shaping the conduct of women
Gupowu	姑婆屋	unmarried girls' houses
Houyuannü	後院女	lit., Backyard Girls, local Jingang term for female orphans
Huishou	會首	(male) administrators
Jiadao	家道	family morality
Jiemeihui	姐妹會	tradition of sisterhoods, particularly strong in southern China
Jingge	經歌	chants of mostly religious character
Jinxian Dadao	金仙大道	Doctrine of the Golden Deity
Jiuku miao	救苦廟	Jiuku (Salvation) Temple
Kanfang (*see* Zoufang)	看坊	religious leaders paying each other courtesy calls—a recent tradition introduced by Beida Women's Mosque, Henan
Kuhua	哭花	grieving chant (jingge)
Kundao	坤道	Female Way in Daoist Quanzhen Tradition
Lao Guniang	老姑娘	woman unwed/celibate woman/spinster/Shouzhen guniang (colloquial)

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Nansi	男寺	men's mosque
Nantang	男堂	segregated space for men to pray (Catholic)
Nü ahong	女阿訇	woman Ahong/imam
Nü daozhang	女道長	senior nun/abbess (Daoism)
Nüdadian	女大殿	women's prayer hall (Islam)
Nüergua	女兒寡	widowed daughter/Shouzhen guniang (colloquial)
Nülibaidian	女禮拜殿	women's hall of worship/mosque
Nüsi	女寺	women's mosque
Nütang	女堂	segregated space for women to pray (Catholic)
Qiandao	乾道	Male Way in Daoist Quanzhen Tradition
Qingzhen nüsi	清真女寺	women's mosque, see Nüsi
Qingzhen Nüxue	清真女學	women's madrassa
Quanzhen	全真	Quanzhen Tradition in Daoism
Shengji	圣纪	Dhikr, Remembrance day, one of most important days in religious calendar of women's mosques
Shengmu	聖母	Holy Mother, Virgin Mary
Shetou	社頭	member of mosque administrative committee
Shifu	師傅	common form of address for Ahong
Shoushi	首師	(male) administrator
Shouzhen guniang	守貞姑娘	Catholic celibate women
Shouzhennü	守貞女	Catholic celibate women
Wangmu niangniang	王母娘娘	Queen Mother of the West
Xiangshe	香社	pilgrim group (colloquial)
Xiansheng	先生	Mr.; title commonly used for men, when given to women, signifies elevation of status
Xiaolao guniang	小老姑娘	Little Old Women, colloquial term for Shouzhennü

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Xiudao	修道	Catholic nun (colloquial)
Xiudaoyuan	修道院	Catholic convent
Xiunü	修女	Catholic nun
Xiunühui	修女會	female Catholic congregation/convent
Xiuti	羞體	part of women's body to be concealed from public
Yuanfen	緣分	fate
Zhugu xiunühui	主顧修女會	Sisters of Providence congregation
Zhujia guniang	住家姑娘	another term for Shouzhennü
Zishunü	自梳女	tradition of spinsterhood in southern China, lit., women who comb their own hair
Zoufang (*see* Kanfang)	走坊	religious leaders paying each other courtesy calls—a recent tradition introduced by Beida Women's Mosque, Henan

*Only selected core terms expressive of local women's cultures treated in this volume are listed. For more terms relating to women's mosque tradition in China, see Jaschok and Shui, 2000a

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Notes

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. This chapter borrows from and develops ideas first formulated in an article published electronically under the title of '"Fields of Knowing" and "World-Travelling": Of Passages and Boundaries, of Aspirations and Differences' (Jaschok, 2007a). The publisher's permission is gratefully acknowledged. *Outskirts: Feminisms Along the Edge* is an online feminist cultural studies journal published twice yearly by the University of Western Australia.
2. Such a letter is provided by the work unit of the researcher, certifying her identity as a researcher and her right to access resources relevant to her project.
3. Co-authored for English language publication in 2000 (Jaschok and Shui, Richmond: Curzon) and then revised for the Chinese language publication in 2002 (Shui and Jaschok, Beijing).
4. Leutner's term to describe relations between researchers from within and from outside the studied culture.
5. Fields of Knowing; Gender, Culture, Praxis. A Research Symposium (joint presentation: "How Do We Know What Is Worth Knowing"), Monash University, Melbourne, 27–28 August 1998. Our dialogue was first published in the feminist journal, *Feminist Theory*, (2000b).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. Names used for a given women's mosque have changed over time and express complex negotiations of identities and allegiances. Names signify location and local cultural influences as well as subjective aspirations. For example, whereas some Muslim women's congregations have kept their historical name, others have changed over to *Qingzhensi* (mosque), the generic term used for most men's mosques. In this case, the name change may reveal insistence on equal standing and symbolic expression of women's claim to entitlement. Other congregations have preferred to preserve the link with their historical origin of more modest sites of prayer and/or education, featuring gate inscriptions such as *Nüxue, Nüdadian, Nülibaidian* and *Nülibai xuetang* as well as *Nüshaoma*, and the like; these terms are also often used inter-changeably with *Nüsi*. Local linguistic usages vary in accordance with the standing and self-image of a women's congregation, with the nature of relations between female and male religious leaderships and, not least, with the contemporary significance of a given women's mosque in its home community (Jaschok and Shui, 2000a: 103–08).

2. Religious practice is allowed within traditions of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Catholicism and Protestantism. Further complexities arise from their respective relations with the State. For example, discussing Catholicism Madsen states that '"official [*guanfang*]" refers to the realm of activity that is publicly recognized and controlled by the state. "Unofficial [*feiguanfang*]" refers to a realm of private negotiations at least partly independent of state control.' Although the latter realm is associated with deviancy and heterodoxy, there is no neat separation of the 'official' from the 'unofficial' religious activities (Madsen, 2003:483).
3. For example, Gernet, 1987; Kindopp and Hamrin, 2004; Kung and Ching, 1989; Leung, 1996; MacInnis, 1989; Madsen, 1998; Standaert, 2001; Tang and Wiest, 1993; Thompson, 1996; Uhalley and Wu, 2000. In a recent survey of religious experience in contemporary Chinese society, based on over 3,000 interviews across China, interrogation of gender differences is singularly lacking (Yao and Badham, 2007).
4. See 'Introduction' to Hsiung, Jaschok and Milwertz, 2001; Harding, 1991.
5. For discussion of the place of religion in Chinese women's studies, *see* Jaschok and Shui, *The History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam*; Shui Jingjun (2001) in *Chinese Women Organizing;* for reflections on feminist involvement in the academic study of Chinese women in post-1949 China, *see* Elisabeth Croll (2001) in *Chinese Women Organizing.* Renewed interest in religion by feminist scholars finds expression also in relation to Chinese Islam; *see* Dru Gladney *Dislocating China* (2004: 276). An unprecedented number of articles are devoted to Chinese Muslim women in a multi-volume *Encyclopedia of Women & International Islam* which began publication in 2003, Brill, Leiden.
6. The virtuous woman was not to be idle, not to waste time gossiping, not to engage in social intercourse with neighbours and community.
7. Handrahan, exploring the perceived spiritual inferiority of women within Western thought, anchors European intellectual tradition in the deeply gendered polarity of reason/virtue/male/enlightenment and of irrationality/lack of virtue/female/benightedness as developed in Greek and Enlightenment thought (Handrahan, 2002:1).
8. In Zhou Yiqun's study of Confucian 'perceptions and polemics,' the 'hearth' becomes 'a symbol for the domestic realm that was perpetually consecrated by the concepts and rituals of ancestor worship' (2003: 114).
9. Indeed, this familial underpinning of Catholicism, as Richard Madsen (2003) argues, has enabled Catholic communities to survive countless challenges throughout its volatile history in China.
10. Equally influential for us have been J. Brink and J. Mencher (1997) and a volume edited by C. Fawzi El-Solh and J. Mabro (1994) as well as the seminal studies by Kari Elisabeth Børresen and Vogt (1993), Carol Christ (1989), Falk and Gross (1980), King (1995) and Chung Hyun Kyung (1991), among many others.
11. Zhao (1996); the philosophy of *Yin* and *Yang* gained popularity as early as the Xia, Shang, and Zhou periods. Through the interpretations of thinkers such as Laozi, Confucius and Zhuangzi during the Spring and Autumn (ca. 8th–3rd c. B.C.) and Warring State (770 B.C.–221 B.C.) periods, followed by generations of interpretations, the *Yin Yang* school of thought became a major influence.
12. There is ample literature on *individual lives* of exceptional women from families of the gentry where wealth and education produced gifted literary and intellectual voices (Ebrey, 1993; Ko, 1994, 2005; Mann, 1997; Wang, 1999) and on women of elite strata of entertainment and prostitution whose

education increased their value but also their opportunities to make a difference to their own lives (Gronewold, 1982; Hershatter, 1999). The tradition of *Huai nüren* (femme fatale) spawned an entire genealogy (and literary genre) of feared female power, to mention their most illustrious members, the Tang Emperor's consort Yang Guifei (719–756), the Qing Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908) or Mao Zedong's wife Jiang Qing (1914–1991), apparently threatening to destabilize society, but never quite successfully doing so.

13. *Ahong:* a generic term used among China's Muslims to refer to their imam; in regard to women *Ahong* the use of this term remains contested and controversial. In certain ethnic Muslim communities in China, female *Ahong* are unknown. We are using the term because it is used by women in central China's Hui Muslim communities to refer to their female religious leaders as a matter of honour and pride and as a claim to gender equality in the religious sphere.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. The term *Zhongyuan diqu* narrowly defined refers to Henan Province; in a broader definition it comprises Henan, Shanxi, Hebei, and Shandong (see Jaschok and Shui, 2000a).
2. See Livia Kohn's (2003) study of monastic life in medieval Daoism in China which points to a relatively high status of women believers (64–5). The status of 'nun' covered a broad spectrum of roles, statuses and commitment to religious life, from temporary refuge to perpetual vows.
3. *Xinxiu xiangfuxian zhi* (1898): a census of street names is provided in Volume 9 of 'Layouts of Street and Towns'.—Street names signified location, such as: the *Xiangguo si qianjie* (Street-in-front-of-Xiangguo Temple), *Lao wulonggong jie* (the Fifth Old Dragon Palace Street), *Yanqingguan jie* (Yanqing Daoist Shrine Street), *Tudimiao jie* (Village-Deity's Temple Street), and *Jiuku miao jie* (Salvation Temple Street).
4. Based on the latest survey by Guo Baoguang, Secretary General of the Kaifeng Islamic Association, five women's mosques existed in Kaifeng during the Emperor Guangxu's reign (1875–1908): the Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque, Jiamiao Street Women's Mosque, Xipiju Women's Mosque, and two women's mosques near Dongda Mosque.
5. *Henanshengzhi.jiaoyu* (Chronicle of Henan Province: Education) (1993), vol. 50(2). According to this source, in 1908, Henan had two colleges, 21 vocational schools, six vocational schools, two advanced normal colleges, 11 primary normal schools, 113 teacher-training schools, 23 middle schools, 1964 primary schools, 37 part-time schools, 13 women's schools, 53 boarding elementary schools, and 2,274 reformed old-style private schools.
6. An abundant literature exists on the social history of foot-binding, its place in feminist discourse and on its movement for abolition, see Ko (2005); Levy (1992); Wang Ping (2002); among many others.
7. Feng Yuxiang (1882–1948), a highly independent-minded warlord, military leader and provincial governor of Henan (appointed in 1922, and again in 1927), he allied himself with the cause of important political and military figures—from Yuan Shikai to Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek—but his support was never unconditional and unqualified. His conversion to Christianity in 1914 when he entered the Methodist Episcopal Church, earned him much sympathy and a reputation for being 'progressive' and 'open-minded,' e.g., open to Western influence. The Providence Sisters in Kaifeng (see Chapter 6), as testified in their letters, thought of him as worthy of their support

and of his policies, particularly in the realm of education, as promising well for their own future in Henan.

8. Terms like liberty, equality, philanthropy, people's livelihood, etc. symbolized the new society and proclaimed the ideology of a new order. Of the three counties named equality, liberty and philanthropy in 1927, *Boai xian* or the Philanthropy County, retains its name in the present. Street names in Kaifeng still in use include Zhongshan Road (after Dr. Sun Yat-sen), *Ziyou lu* or Road of Liberty, *Sanmin hutong* (Lane of the Three Principles of People), and *Boai hutong*, or Philanthropy Lane (Wu Kai, 1995: 25).
9. Set up in June 1927, the Henan Provincial Footbinding Abolition Department had also established branches at county level. In September 1927, the *Footbinding Banning Measures* were issued, followed by (1928) the *Faban chanzu funü jiazhang zanxing tiaoli* (Temporary By-laws for Punishing Parents of Girls with Bound Feet), *Kaohe banli fangzurenyuan chengji tiaoli* (Ordinance for Achievement Assessing Those in Charge of Unbinding Feet), and *Kaohe xianzhang banli jiangcheng zanxing tiaoli* (Temporary By-laws for Rewards and Punishments of County Heads by Assessing Their Work). Civil servants and their families were required to set positive examples and members of the local police force would check on compliance. Local government even after Feng Yuxiang continued these measures when in March 1931 the Henan Civilian Administration Bureau issued the *Lixing fangzubanfa shiyitiao* (Eleven Articles for Unbinding Feet). The campaign started in the cities, towns, and county seats, intended then to filter into the rural areas.
10. Women's schools were set up one after another in eight cities and counties such as Luoyang, Xinxiang, Xinyang, Zhoukou, and Fugou, etc,. between 1916 and 1918, and women workers' training centres were started in seven cities and counties like Qixian, Kaifeng, Mengxian, Nanyang, among others. In 1918, the Henan Peoples' Conference approved of the *Zhengdun kuochong nüxiao ziqing shengshu shixingan* (Program for Expanding Female Schooling), demanding every county to enlarge the existing public women's schools and set a deadline for counties without such facilities.
11. In 1910, three schools opened in Kaifeng: the *Gongli zhongzhou nűxue* (Public Zhongzhou Girls' School) renamed *Henan guanli nűzi shifang xuetang* (Official Girls Normal School) in 1910, once more renamed in 1912 as *Henan shengli műzi shefan xuexiao* (Public Girls' Normal School), the *Henan fazheng xuetang* (Henan Law School), and the *Sili zhongzhou gongxue* (Private Zhongzhou Public School).
12. Ma Jiwu was Headmaster of Beicang Girls' Middle School.
13. Between 1916 and 1939, the 9th May became an annual commemoration of Japan's incursion in China. The annual 'National Humiliation Day' was a rallying point for members of all classes to express anger, humiliation and frustration over China's continued weakness relative to the West in general and to Japan in particular.
14. Most active were the *Henan nűjie guomin cucenghui* (Henan Women's Association for Congress), the *Kaifeng nűzi jindehui* (Kaifeng Association for Promoting Women's Virtues), and the *Henan Nűjie gongye lianhehui* (Henan Women's Industrial Union).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. Our understanding of 'religion' is influenced by Daniel Overmyer's definition of religion as 'worship of symbols that are believed to represent extra-human power, either natural objects . . . or personified deities. The goals of such

worship range from seeking immediate practical aid like healing and safe child-birth to harmonizing oneself with cosmic forces. By this definition, the rituals and beliefs of Chinese local communities are as much religion as any other' (Daniel L. Overmyer, 2003: 308–9; also see G. Lang, 2004).
2. For an eloquent case, see Mai (1983:79).
3. See Raoul Birnbaum's article (2003) on the impact of the reformist monk Taixu on Buddhist organizational life and his attempts to pre-empt closure of monasteries in the face of a growing secular trend in the contemporary political discourse.
4. The name Beiping was adopted by the Guomindang (Nationalist) Government in 1928 to signify the fact that it had lost its status as China's capital city (instead, Nanjing became the capital under the National Government). Beiping transformed back into Beijing (literally, the Eastern *jing*, meaning Capital) when the victorious Communist Party, in 1949, moved the capital north, to its former location.
5. Information is based on Notes attached to Volume B, (in form of a draft), entitled *Kaifeng shi minzhengzhi* (The Kaifeng City Administrative Map), 1995. These Notes tell us that the Henan Charitable Relief Refuge (*Henan Jiujiyuan*) was founded in the seventeenth year of the Republic (1928), on the site of the former *Jiuku miao* inside the West Gate of Kaifeng City. Shelters were set up for the elderly, the disabled, orphans, foundlings, and for women.
6. Interviews in Kaifeng, May 2007.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. The manuscript was given to us by Kang *Daozhang* in August 2005. Although there is no date, it is likely that the manuscript was completed shortly before Kang *Daozhang* approached the Kaifeng City authorities on behalf of the *Jiuku miao*, in 2004.
2. Beata Grant (2009) argues in *Eminent Nuns: Women Chan Masters of Seventeenth-Century China* that all too often Chinese literature has treated nuns in one-dimensional fashion, maligning and slandering their way of life from a stance of deepest hostility to women outside the domestic sphere. Making use of the words of religious women themselves, Grant presents a 'multi-dimensional perspective' of women as believing and also socially engaged human beings.
3. *Jinxian* is the highest-ranking Daoist immortal, placed above the thirty-sixth celestial level. The purpose of practising the doctrine of *Jinxian* is to cultivate vital energies to attain enlightenment; it can be practiced by women and men, subject to certain gender-specific differences.
4. This story of the *Jiuku miao* has parallels with such accounts as can be found in Grant (2009), who tells of seventeenth-century Buddhist nuns who created their own lineage in order to set themselves up as *Shifu* (masters), thus challenging the male-dominated religious organization.
5. Some of these administrators are known, such as Commander Zhao Jie (whose elder brother Zhao Ti was Commander of the First Infantry Division in Henan) of the Hongwei Army; Yuan Buhuang, Commander-in-chief of the local army; Warlord Zhang Fulai, who took office in Henan (between 1923–1924); Zhao Anhou, a bank manager; and Wang Zizhen, owner of a seafood store; among others.
6. The *Shoushi* and disciples were lay Buddhists or Daoists who resided at home.

7. According to Kang *Daozhang*, the files they had consulted in the local archives give different figures concerning the scale of the property then owned by the *Jiuku miao*; one document mentions over 200 rooms, while another gives a figure of over 500.
8. Since the Ming and Qing dynasties, faith in the three religions was common among the populace in the Central Plains Region. In Shaolin Temple, Dengfeng and in the Museum of Qinyang City in Henan, stone tablets can be found carved with drawings of the three great traditions, illustrating ideas which fuse Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism. Also see Mou and Zhang, 2003: 1211–12, 1217.
9. Zhao Ti was appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of Henan from the autumn of 1914 to the summer of 1922. He also acted as provincial Governor between 1917 and 1920. Of all those who took office in Henan, Zhao was the most corrupt. In order to guarantee that they would not lose their black gauze caps, or official posts, officials at all levels tried their best to please him. When his three-year-old son, born by one of his concubines, fell sick, military and political senior officials in Henan, as well as heads of all the government departments and bureaus, went to *Jiuku miao* to pray for the boy's recovery. They were led to the Temple by Hu Dingyuan, Prolocutor of the provincial senate. Each official swore to donate 10 years of his life to the little boy (Qiao Peihua, 1993: 9).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. Material for this chapter has been adapted from a chapter contributed by Jaschok and Shui (Leutner and Spakowski, 2005), with permission of Lit Verlag, Münster; and from a Conference presentation (Jaschok, 2007b), with permission of Waseda University, Tokyo, *International Symposium on the Empowerment of Ethnic Minority Women in the Era of Globalization Proceedings*.
2. The May Fourth Movement was both an intellectual revolution and a sociopolitical reform movement. The Movement grew out of student demonstrations on the fourth May, 1919, when students in Beijing expressed their anger over the Chinese government's weakness in the face of foreign aggression. The humiliating terms imposed on China by the Treaty of Versailles compounded the anti-foreign sentiment of many ordinary Chinese.
3. Q*ingzhen quanjiao ge* 1922, and *Qingzhen tongsu ge* (Islamic Popular Songs) 1924; see Yu Zhengui and Yang Huaizhong (1993: 598–600). In 1934, Wang Chunli's compilation of *Jingjie alin xuanyan lüe* (Guidelines for *Ahong*) was printed in Shanghai (Yu and Yang, 1993: 357–59).
4. We use *Jing* rather than the more common *Jin* to reflect the meaning attached by women informants to the sacred task of communion with God's words as transmitted by the Prophet; that is, *Jing* (sacred scripture) rather than *Jin* (beautiful). See Shui and Jaschok (2002).
5. Helen Rees, who studied Lijiang's *Dongjing* music, remarks on the male dominance in Yunnanese local religious traditions, on how age and gender determine performer, performance and context. Exceptionally, a few Buddhist laywomen's groups, such as the *Mamahui* (women's group), 'held temple meetings on the first and fifteenth of each month, during which they recited Chinese-language sutras and ate vegetarian food' (Rees, 2000: 36).
6. *Yisilanjiao quanyuxing gushi shiji* (Collection of Islamic Moral Tales) borrowed much from the writings of the famous didactic Persian poet Sa'Di or Mushrrif-Uddin B. Muslih-Uddin (ca. 1213–1292). These texts formed part of the traditional middle-school level *Jingtang* education.

7. The first lament was recorded in the women's mosque of Zhuxian*zhen* and recited by Dan *Ahong* (June 2002). The second lament was recorded in Wangjia Hutong Women's Mosque and recited by Li Xiangrong (June 2002). Question marks indicate our current uncertainty over meaning as some of the original terms cannot be recovered.
8. Interviews (by Jaschok) with Guo *Ahong* (Kaifeng-born), first conducted in 1995, with continued visits until she left to take on a new position as *Ahong* in Xian in 2007.
9. Since the 1980s, mosques have printed their own religious materials, including *Jingge* we described above as having been shaped by male scholars during Minguo into what is now a highly popular and esteemed corpus of religious hymns (Zhengzhou Beida Mosque, 1994; Zhengzhou Yuyuanli Mosque, n.d.; *Yisilan jiaoyi ge,* n.d.; *Liu Zhisan lao ahong shiji* [The Collected Hymns of Liu Zhisan *Lao Ahong*], n.d.). Excluded are, as ever, the *Jingge* of women's mosques, and knowledge of these remains weak.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. The American historian Patricia Cleary (California State University, Long Beach) presented an account of the volatile and multiply constituted frontier-culture of eighteenth-century St Louis and the implications for women's lives under conditions of an unstable sexual morality, in a seminar presentation, 1 February 2006, to the Rothermere American Institute, Oxford: 'Legislating Women's Lives in Eighteenth-Century St Louis'.
2. As Sue Bradshaw points out, because the United States 'was listed officially as a mission land until 1908, very few American missionaries went to China before that time' (Bradshaw, 1982: 35).
3. See the excellent, candid account by Sister Ann Colette Wolf, S.P., about the 'Difficulties and Disappointments' which attended the subsequent eccentric and often highly arbitrary interpretations by the Bishop Tacconi of his contractual duties towards the Providence Sisters (Wolf, 1990: 31–53). The Agreement made the Bishop responsible for support of the Sisters and their projects until they would become self-sufficient. Whilst agreeing not to interfere with their day-to-day running of schools and their other activities, important decisions such as purchases of property and land were nevertheless referred to the Bishop in whose power it was to facilitate or deny the Sisters' plans for development. Given the authoritarian leanings of the Bishop, who prided himself on having brought to Kaifeng a group of American women religious, with a reasonably well-to-do Motherhouse to jump into the breach, tensions and later on open disagreements were inevitable (Wolf, 1990).
4. Published quarterly by the Le Fer Unit of the Catholic Students' Mission Crusade, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, *The Bugle Call* constituted an important site of dissemination of news from the China mission. *The Bugle Call* provided personal, affecting and often highly subjective accounts by Sisters and, less frequently, by Chinese converts, of the progress of the mission's many activities in Kaifeng. See 'China' papers in Sisters of Providence Archive (SPA), Indiana.
5. The presentation of missionary crosses takes place in a ceremony preceding the departure of the missionaries to symbolise their arduous labour and sacrifices ahead. Upon bestowal of the cross, the presiding priest prays for each missionary: 'Take this crucifix. May it be your companion in your apostolic labours and your consolation in life and at the hour of death. Amen.' The

crosses of the first group to China in 1920 had received the blessing of Pope Benedict XV himself (Wolf, 1990: 4).

6. *Providence Sisters in Kaifeng, Henan: Development Projects*: Providence Sister Joseph Henry, in charge of the Kaifeng mission at this time (1923–1927), writes to *The Bugle Call* in June 1924, '*If* God continues to bless our labours, and if America continues its aid, it will not be so very long before the Foundation will be self-supporting. Natives will join our ranks, become co-labourers and, eventually, emerge an Americo-Chinese Community' (SPA, *The Bugle Call*, 3(5), 1924: 72). The original ambitious project was set aside for something more feasible, given lack of resources and the Sisters' lack of familiarity with Chinese and with local culture. The primary school *Hua Mei* (Chinese-American) Girls' School was opened on 23 March 1921. Forty pupils arrived. It was popular among parents for the education offered and for shaping daughters into 'refined and virtuous' young girls (SPA, *The Bugle Call*, XV (1), 1935: 7). Not reopened when the Sisters returned to Kaifeng in 1929, *Ching-I* Girls Middle School was instead opened in 1932, successfully recruiting pupils from as far away as Shanghai and Pekin (Beijing). The school, located in central Kaifeng, came to be one of three high schools. Another *Ching I* Girls Middle School was opened in 1947 in the suburb of Nanguan; and the *Fu Yu* Girls Middle School was set up in Xinxiang (then known as Sinsiang). At the height of enrolment, over 1,200 girls were taught at this level. Furthermore, two primary schools, one located at the Kaifeng cathedral (1938) and the other, also called *Ching I* Primary School (1936) in Nanguan, both co-educational, together had a pupil population of about 800. Later, in 1947, the *Hwa Yang* Boys Middle School, founded by the Archbischop Pollio, was added, with an enrolment of over 350 pupils whom the Providence Sisters also taught. A Junior High School was set up offering three courses, again involving the Sisters as teachers. Central to the continued religious and secular quality of learning on the part of Chinese Catechist-Sisters as well as the American Sisters, houses of residence were opened in Beiping (Beijing) in 1945 to enable further studies, involving study at *Fu Jen* University for bright Chinese Catechists and Chinese language classes for Sisters upon arrival from the States; it also allowed attendance of private classes in English and typing and offered special convert classes.
7. See permission from Vatican for organizing the native diocesan congregation in Kaifeng, in SPA, Providence Sister-Catechist Records. Box 29, 7–0-2: 4.
8. Sister Marie Gratia assumed leadership of the Catechist Society until the Society was deemed ready to govern its own affairs. Its status was as an auxiliary group to the Sisters of Providence.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. Zhou Yiqun mentions, in relation to Confucianists' exhortations to young women whose frequent outings to Buddhist religious sites caused concerns over their loyalty to patriarchal institutions, that a certain adaptation of Buddhist concepts of piety was noticeable when literati in late Imperial times held up parents-in-law 'as Buddhas that had to be worshipped above all' (Zhou, 2003: 111).
2. An interesting literature relates differing interpretations of the significance of institutions such as *Zishunü* (lit. women who comb their hair [in a ceremonial gesture of commitment to celibacy]) and *Buluojia* (non-patrilocal marriage) to major marriage patterns (Jaschok, 1984; Stockard, 1989; Topley, 1975; Watson, 1991, 1994).

3. Throughout medieval and modern Chinese history, the White Lotus Society acted both as a religious Buddhist organization and as an effective political force in times of crisis. It re-emerged during the Qing Dynasty, contributing greatly to the weakening of its military authority and popular legitimacy (Spence, 1991).
4. According to Sister Sue Bradshaw, this German-language source is the sole article published in a Western language, in the nineteenth century, which treats the role of female missionaries in developing an indigenous church in China (Bradshaw, 1982: 28).
5. As early as the 1640s, Catholic women in Sichuan are known to have chosen a celibate life in preference to near-universal practice of marriage (Entenmann, 1996: 181).
6. Despite the persecution of Christians during much of the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth centuries, the Church attracted conversions. For the year 1810, Bradshaw gives a figure of 31 European missionaries, 80 Chinese priests and a Catholic population of about 215,000 (Bradshaw, 1982: 30).
7. By 1892, a total of 1,060 Christian Virgins lived in Sichuan. In the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangdong, Tibet and northeast China, 434 Virgins were within the missionary jurisdiction of the Société des Missions Étrangères. In 1925, the Institute of Christian Virgins counted 2,450 members, declining in the course of the twentieth century as established religious communities took over. When in 1950 the PLA entered Sichuan, a few survivors were still carrying on in the tradition of their forebears, according to Entenmann (1996: 192).
8. Bradshaw estimates that about 40 percent of Chinese Catholics came under local leadership, the rest remaining under the leadership of missionary orders (Bradshaw, 1982: 42).
9. Entenmann notes that the established religious communities were less effective than the Virgins, as the former were prevented by virtue of convent rules from venturing into outlying areas where Virgins would have been living as members of the community, engaged in educational and religious work (Entenmann, 1996: 192).
10. Chai Yuhuan's narrative excludes the contributions by Kaifeng's *Shouzhen guniang* to Catholic life beyond urban communities. Not only can we see in documents and letters from the Providence Sisters' archive how important the work of the 'Chinese Virgins' was when it came to 'outlying areas' of difficult access for Western missionaries, Chai herself has close links with rural communities where she instructs in knowledge of the Scriptures.
11. Although more conventionally used to address men, *Xiansheng* is also a title which conveys a respected senior status and can be attached to men and women.
12. The remaining survivor of the war generation of Kaifeng *Guniang*, we interviewed Li De in 2007 and in 2008, which as it turned out was shortly before her death in a Kaifeng Nursing Home.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1. Within Henan, nine parishes were set up between the early 1880s and the late 1930s: in Anyang (1882), Zhengzhou (1906), Kaifeng (1916), Xinyang (1927), Shangqiu (1928), Luoyang (1929), Zhumadian (1932), Xinxiang (1936) and Nanyang (1938).
2. Sixteen people enrolled for the first two training courses offered, and eight young women came from Jingang; five were from a village background and three were *Houyuannü*. Sixteen women enrolled for the third course, five of whom were Jingang *Houyuannü*. A total of 12 women joined the fourth

course with eight from Jingang, of whom two were *Houyuannü*. In the final course, only one *Houyuannü* from Jingang joined 10 other students.

3. According to available statistics, in the 1940s, Jingang had 801 Catholics and 228 Catholic families. The usable area of the villages was about 1,670 acres, about 20 percent of the total area of Jingang. The other part of Jingang belonged to the Catholic Church and landlords. The total number of houses was 1,424, with only 142 belonging to families. Most people lived in Church-owned dwellings, creating an overpowering dependency on the Church as landlord, employer and judicial authority. *Nanyang minzu zongjiaozhi* (The Chronicle of People and Religions of Nanyang), 1989: 363–64.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 9

1. HSD refers to documents consulted in the Henansheng Danganguan (Henan Provincial Archive). See Primary Sources in Bibliography,
2. When Delia Davin (1976) published her ground-breaking book *Woman-Work* as a study of the impact of Communist Party socio-economic revolution and its concerted mobilization of women in rural and urban areas, she pointed to the change brought about by contemporary developments, with researchers having to place women within a wider societal framework compared to pre-1949 studies of women in family and kinship. The diversity of women's choices and environments in relation to their religious identities however does not lend itself easily to such juxtaposition. Traditionally, religious women's organizations have ever probed, and problematized, conventional notions of women's sphere in society.
3. The Marriage Law of 1950 legislated equality in marriage between women and men, free choice of marriage partner, right to divorce, and reciprocal relations between different generations in a family. It was the culmination of decades of campaigning and political promises but its implementation, which took place during the CCP's Land Reform movement, was all too often marred by policy inconsistencies and lack of political will. The Law brought women undoubted rights and not infrequently considerable relief but also served to exacerbate the vulnerability of women when progressive intentions conflicted with the status quo of ingrained patriarchal State/family interests (Diamant, 2000).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 10

1. Pierre Bourdieu's influence on feminist and postcolonial geography of space has been all-pervasive. He defines inhabited space as a habitus, as 'principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at end . . . Objectively "regulated" and "regular" without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor' (Bourdieu, 1990: 33).
2. Gladney (2003: 452) argues that 'successful Muslim accommodation to minority status in China can be seen to be a measure of the extent to which Muslim groups allow the reconciliation of the dictates of Islamic culture to their host culture.' The case of Beida Women's Mosque illustrates a much more dynamic and dialogic interaction with political authorities.

3. A bulletin board in Xingyue Shequ introduced the situation of the Residential Area in 2003 as comprising, 1,504 households, a population of 4,000 with 90 percent Muslims, one Muslim primary school and one kindergarten, two mosques, one Halal food hall and 29 Muslim retail outlets selling halal food.
4. Yuyuanli Mosque was built in late Qing; Huayuan Street Mosque and Beixia Street Mosque were built in 1912; Beixia Street Mosque was once a simple and small *Jingfang* [prayer room]; Qingpingli Mosque was built in 1918; and a site for worship was built in Fumin Lane in 1918, which in 1925 was turned into a mosque proper. Xiaolou Mosque was built in the 1920s; Wuying Lane Mosque was built in the 1930s; Duizhou Mosque was rebuilt in 1918; Niuzhai Mosque was established in 1910; Yuyuan Lane Women's Mosque, Beixia Street Women's Mosque, Fumin Lane Women's Mosque and Huayuan Street Women's Mosque were built between the 1930s and 1940s.
5. In 1995 a Stone Tablet, inscribed *Wei zhu jian si* (Constructing the Mosque for Allah), was erected in the compound of the Beida Women's Mosque, commemorating the successful completion of the project and listing the names of all donors.
6. *Kaizhai juan* means Donation for Breaking the Fast. Islam requires Muslims to donate their wealth during certain religious feast days. Men usually donate with their families, so the donations are sent to the Men's Mosque. Some women are making a point of donating separately, sometimes helped by their husbands, in order to benefit their own mosque.
7. Her grandfather Du Yunzhuo, Imam of Kaifeng's Dongda Mosque, was the teacher of Zhao Yongqing, famous as *Ahong* in Henan during the late Qing and the Republican eras. Her father Du Qing, who received his religious education under the guidance of Zhao Yongqing, became one of the most outstanding students of Zhao. The religious education associated with Zhao Yongqing is called the 'Zhao School', and many religious scholars and *Ahong* emerged from this educational heritage.
8. Du *Lao ahong* studied the following scriptures: (1) *Fansuli* dealing with Islamic dogma; (2) *Muxin mati* on Islamic dogma; (3) *Oumudai* on Islamic laws; (4) *Fouzu* on Islamic laws; (5) *Hagayege*; (6) *Jielaini* on Islamic laws; (7) *Yiershada* on self-cultivation; (8) *Haiwayi*, Minahaji, a book of Persian Grammar; (9) *Xila Jieli Gulubi* (the True Light of Hearts), on Islamic dogma; (10) *Hai Ti Tai Fu Xi Er*, Persian Annotations; (11) *Jimiyayi*, a book on Persian Grammar; (12) *Hutuofuer*, Annotations on Sacred Instruction; and (13) *Gulisitan*, a literary work.
9. During the Anti-illiteracy Movement in the early 1950s, the opportunity to learn Chinese characters made Du *Lao ahong* a rarity among contemporary fellow-*Ahong* who would have been literate in Persian rather than in Chinese.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 11

1. In 1995, an exquisitely restored *Nűzhonglin* received the name of *Baozhu si*, or the Temple of Precious Pearls. Also, the *Baiyi ge*, another Buddhist nunnery, gradually and successfully resumed its regular religious life.
2 The establishment of Daoist Associations (administered by the *Zongjiao shuwuju* (Religious Affairs Bureau)) served the purpose of ensuring 'effective management and control of Daoist temples and their members' at national and district level (Lai, 2003: 416).
3. Min Zhiting *Daozhang* was born in Nanzhao County, Henan. Min's reputation grew quickly after he entered his religious vocation, and he was

appointed the nineteenth-generation exponent of the Daoist Huashan order. He assumed the position of Chairman of the Sixth Conference of the Chinese Daoist Association; was a member of the Standing Committee of the Ninth and Tenth National Political Consultative Conference; acted as the Deputy Director of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee under the National Political Consultative Conference; was a trustee of the Overseas Chinese Society, Chairman of Shaanxi Daoist Association, a Deputy of the Seventh, Eighth and Tenth Shaanxi Provincial People's Congress; and was also a member of the Eighth, Ninth, Tenth and Eleventh Standing Committee of the Xi'an Political Consultative Conference.

4. A title granted to a Reverend Daoist Master, a *Gaogong* has obtained profound knowledge of the Daoist liturgy and scriptures. She takes the lead in the religious ceremony, sitting in the centre of the forum (see Ren, 1981).
5. New administrative rules and regulations are as follows: *Daojiao huodongchangsuo guanli zhidu* (The Administrative System for Sites of Daoist Activities); *Jiuku Miao changzhu daozhong guanlizhidu* (Regulations for Permanent Resident Daoist Nuns); *Caiwu guanli zhidu* (Financial Management System); and *Diantang guanli zhidu* (Rules for the Management of Sites of Worship). 'The Administrative System for Sites of Daoist Activities' has as its stated purpose the establishing of rules and regulations to protect normal religious activities, and to help maintain social stability and national unity through better administration.
6. Referring to the period of her ascetic life which commenced in 1977 (Interviews, 12 July 2004 and 3 August 2005, in the *Jiuku miao,* Kaifeng).
7. Literally, the philosophy of liberalism; Kang *Daozhang*'s understanding of the term conveys her conviction that only complete dedication to religious service, unfettered by family responsibilities, is a life that is truly self-determined, thus truly free. Such a meaning fuses Daoist philosophy and Kang *Daozhang*'s personal belief that by reconnecting with the past, women reclaim also their right to choose their way of life. And that Chinese society must tolerate such a personal choice as among the core principles which distinguish civilised society.
8. On the predicament of religious groups in contemporary China 'between autonomy and loyalty,' see Potter (2003).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 12

1. Madsen presents a nuanced analysis of the multidimensional and complex situation of Chinese Catholicism after the 1980s, its growth stultified by an ongoing volatility in the torturous relationship between the Chinese Communist Party and the Vatican (Madsen, 1998, 2003).
2. September 2005, April 2006, April 2007, September 2008, informal conversations with members of the Catholic congregation of Kaifeng; formal, taped interview with Martha Chai Yuhuan *Shouzhen guniang* (she was 46 years old when first interviewed in 2005).
3. Some modifications of name, place and time have been made to preserve the anonymity of persons involved.
4. According to Jingang statistics, from 1949 to 1985, 35 people joined the army, 26 people worked for the Government (including six doctors and teachers), one person was elected as the Henan representative for the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and one person was elected to attend the Fifth National People's Congress for Nanyang City. Two people were elected as committee members of the National People's Congress for

Nanyang City. Sixteen people joined the Communist Party and seven joined the Communist Youth League. Eighteen people were elected as 'model workers' and 'advanced workers' (Interviews, 2008, Jingang).

5. However, Lai Chi-Tim (2003) argues that Daoism suffers too much from local government policies hostile to religion, from secularist State-sanctioned modernization and from entrenched prejudices of officialdom to be certain of a future for its practices and institutions.
6. For an overview of the vibrancy of the Chinese women's movement since the 1980s (see Hsiung *et al.*, 2001).

NOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

1. The well-known historian Du Fangqin (2004: 232), in her review of the Chinese edition of *The History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam* (*Zhongguo qingzhen nüsishi*), states as long overdue in Chinese mainstream women's studies the problematization of the construct of Chinese women (*Zhongguo funü*) and of the history of women's aspirations for liberation. She suggests that it is no longer sufficient to retain an exclusive focus on Han Chinese women and on secular models of progress.

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