

AN ANALYSIS OF “TELLING SCRIPTURES” (*JIANGJING*)
DURING TEMPLE FESTIVALS IN GANGKOU
(ZHANGJIAGANG), WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE
STATUS OF THE PERFORMERS

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“Telling scriptures” (*jiangjing* 講經)² is a kind of storytelling that survives today mainly in two areas of Jiangsu: Zhangjiagang 張家港 (a county-level city under the jurisdiction of Suzhou 蘇州) and Jingjiang 靖江 (a county-level city under the jurisdiction of Taizhou 泰州). Telling scriptures deals predominantly with religious subjects and is connected with a specific genre of written texts, *baojuan* 寶卷 (precious scrolls).³ An alternative name for telling scriptures that is also in use in Zhangjiagang, “scroll recitation” (*xuanjuan* 宣卷), clearly refers to this type of text. This last term has been in use for centuries, and is still applied to similar

¹ I would like to express my deep appreciation to David Rolston, Victor H. Mair, and the two anonymous readers for their comments and suggestions.

² “Telling scriptures” seems to be the most useful translation of the term in English, as the texts performed are connected with a variety of religious traditions and not just Buddhism. However, most probably this art originated from lecturing on Buddhist sūtras.

³ Often abbreviated to “scroll” (*juan*) in the titles of texts. A number of other names, such as scripture (*jing*), or liturgy (*keyi* 科儀) are used to designate texts that are included in the corpus of *baojuan* texts. See Che Xilun 車錫倫, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* 中國寶卷總目 (Comprehensive Catalogue of Chinese *Baojuan*; Beijing: Yanshan shuju, 2000), pp. VII–VIII.

performance traditions in several other towns around Suzhou, such as Changshu 常熟, Wujiang 吳江 and Kunshan 崑山.⁴

I have provided an introduction to the telling scriptures tradition in Zhangjiagang in another paper,⁵ here I would like to concentrate on a particular type of performance, namely telling scriptures during temple festivals, which I witnessed in one particular place in the Zhangjiagang area, Gangkou 港口 town.⁶ This type of performance has not yet received enough attention from the Chinese and foreign scholars who study the modern traditions of *baojuan* recitation. While Yu Yongliang 虞永良 and Che Xilun 車錫倫 do mention telling scriptures during temple festivals in their works,⁷ and Che Xilun furthermore has given an excellent description and analysis of funerary telling scriptures in Gangkou,⁸ nobody has given a similar amount of attention to telling scriptures during temple festivals. Nevertheless, the study of this aspect is very important for the overall interpretation of the Gangkou tradition of telling scriptures. It will also help us to re-think and re-define the roles of performers of *baojuan*, the “masters of telling scriptures” (*jiangjing xiansheng* 講經先生), in the religious life of the community of Gangkou. In the rural areas around Gangkou, telling scriptures remains one of the essential features of temple celebrations. This, on the one hand, would seem to prove the

⁴ See Che Xilun 車錫倫, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu* 中國寶卷研究 (Research on Chinese *Baojuan*; Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue, 2009), pp. 367–76; *Yulian huan: Jinxi xuanjuan* 玉連環: 錦溪宣卷 (*Yulian huan: Scroll Recitation in Jinxi*), in *Kunshan minzu minjian wenhua jingcui, wenyi juan* 崑山民族民間文化精粹: 文藝卷 (Essentials of Kunshan Folk Culture, Literature Volume) 3 vols. (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2007), 3: 12–23; and Qiu Huiying 丘慧瑩, “Jiangsu Changshu Baimao diqu xuanjuan huodong diaocha baogao” 江蘇常熟白茆地區宣卷活動調查報告 (Report on a Survey of Scroll Recitation Activities in the Baimao District in Changshu), *Minsu quyi* 民俗曲藝 (Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore) 169 (2010.9): 183–247.

⁵ Rostislav Berezkin, “Scripture-telling (*jiangjing*) in the Zhangjiagang Area and the History of Chinese Storytelling,” *Asia Major*, third series, 24.1 (2011): 1–42.

⁶ Before 1962, Gangkou was a part of Changshu county.

⁷ Yu Yongliang 虞永良, “Heyang baojuan diaocha baogao” 河陽寶卷調查報告 (Report on a Survey of *Baojuan* in Heyang), *Minsu quyi* 110 (1997): 67–68; Che Xilun, “Jiangsu Zhangjiagang Gangkou zhen de zuohui jiangjing (diaocha baogao)” 江蘇張家港港口鎮的做會講經 (調查報告) (Telling scriptures at Religious Meetings in Gangkou in Zhangjiagang in Jiangsu [Survey Report]), in his *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 384–400.

⁸ Che Xilun, “Gangkou zhen de zuohui jiangjing,” pp. 389–400.

ancient origin and form of the Gangkou tradition, and on the other hand, makes it quite different from other modern traditions of *baojuan* performances in Southern Jiangsu and Northern Zhejiang. There is evidence in both the *baojuan* texts themselves and external sources that *baojuan* in Jiangsu and Zhejiang in the past were often performed during temple festivals, and also in connection with pilgrimages to sacred sites.⁹ There is also some information about modern performances of *baojuan* during temple festivals in places other than Gangkou. Che Xilun mentions the recitation of *Miaoying baojuan* 妙英寶卷 (Precious Scroll of Miaoying) during temple festivals dedicated to the Bodhisattva Guanyin in Haiyan 海鹽 county of Zhejiang province.¹⁰ Chün-fang Yu has also presented some evidence on the recitation of *Xiangshan baojuan* 香山寶卷 (Precious Scroll of Incense Mountain)¹¹ and texts derived from it at pilgrimage sites.¹² However, as Che Xilun has indicated, the majority of *baojuan* performances in Jiangsu and Zhejiang region are connected with family occasions and take place in private homes, especially in recent times. These occasions include birthday celebrations of elderly people, protection rituals for small children, marriage, funerals, rituals to ward-off calamities and illnesses, and rituals to consecrate a new home.¹³ Most

⁹ Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 219–20.

¹⁰ Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, p. 220. On the story featured in this *baojuan*, see Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 259–60 and Che Xilun 車錫倫, *Minjian xinyang yu minjian wenxue: Che Xilun zi xuan ji* 民間信仰與民間文學: 車錫倫自選集 (Folk Belief and Folk Literature: Che Xilun's Self-Selected Anthology; Luzhou: Bo yang wenhua shiye youxian gongsi, 2009), p. 170. A similar text, certainly based on earlier printed redactions, is performed in Gangkou (see below).

¹¹ An English translation of the compact redaction of this *baojuan* is included in Wilt L. Idema, tr., *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Precious Scroll Narratives of Guanyin and Her Acolytes* (Honolulu: Hawaii University Press, 2008). See also Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miao-shan* (New York: Oxford University Press, revised edition, 2004), pp. 47–56 and Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation*, pp. 293–352.

¹² Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation*, p. 536 n12; idem, Kuan-Yin pilgrimage (videorecording, 1988); idem, "Baojuan wenxue zhong de Guanyin yu minjian xinyang" 寶卷文學中的觀音與民間信仰 (Guanyin and Folk Belief in the Literature of Baojuan), in *Minjian xinyang yu Zhongguo wenhua guoji yantaohui lunwen ji* 民間信仰與中國文化國際研討會論文集 (Collected Papers from the Academic Conference on Folk Belief and Chinese Culture; Taipei: Hanxue yanjiu zhongxin: 1994), pp. 333–51.

¹³ Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, p. 221.

studies of *baojuan* in this geographical area usually refer to these types of private assemblies.¹⁴

While in the Gangkou area there is indeed a variety of types of *baojuan* performances that take place as part of private events, telling scriptures during temple festivals still thrives, especially in connection with the revival of village temples to local gods and activities centered on those temples. It represents an interesting aspect of the wider question of local traditions of temple festivals, a topic which in recent years has attracted the attention of scholars of Chinese religion and society.¹⁵

Sources

In this article, I use materials obtained during three research visits to Gangkou on April 14–16, 2009, April 18–19, 2010, and June 2–4, 2011. I witnessed performances of telling scriptures during three temple festivals. Of the two witnessed in 2009, one took place at the temple of Deity Gao

¹⁴ On the historical evidence for scroll recitation performances in intimate domestic or quasi-domestic settings, see also David Johnson, “Mu-lien in *Pao-chüan*: The Performative Context and Religious Meaning of the *You-ming Pao-chüan*,” in David Johnson, ed., *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion: Five Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 58–68.

¹⁵ For representative studies see Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü, eds., *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Gao Zhanxiang 高占祥 ed., *Lun miaohui wenhua 論廟會文化* (On Temple Fair Culture; Beijing: Wenhua yishu, 1992); Zhongguo liuyou wenhua xuehui liuyou minsu zhuan ye weiyuan hui 中國旅游文化學會旅游民俗專業委員會 (Committee for Specialization in Tourism and Customs of the Association for the Study of Tourist Culture in China), ed., *Miaofeng shan: Shiji zhi jiao de Zhongguo minsu liubian 妙峰山: 世紀之交的中國民俗流變* (Mount Miaofeng: Changes in Chinese Customs at the Turn of the Millennium; Beijing: Zhongguo chengshi, 1996); Luo Yong 羅勇 and Lao Gewen 勞格文 (John Lagerwey) eds., *Gannan diqu de miaohui yu zongzu 贛南地區的廟會與宗族* (Temple Fairs and Clan Lineages in Southern Jiangxi; Hong Kong: Guoji Kejia xuehui, 1997 [*Kejia chuantong shehui congshu 客家傳統社會叢書* (Collectanea on Hakka Traditional Society), vol. 3]); Adam Y. Chau, “Hosting Funerals and Temple Festivals: Folk Event Production in Rural China,” *Asian Anthropology* 3 (2004): 39–70; Stephen Jones, *Ritual and Music of North China: Shawm Bands in Shanxi* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 71–83; idem, *Ritual and Music of North China: Shaanbei* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 175–91; and David G. Johnson, *Spectacle and Sacrifice: the Ritual Foundations of Village Life in North China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009).

高神¹⁶ in Qingshui 清水 village of Gangkou town¹⁷ on April 15, and the other at the temple of Deity Liu 劉神¹⁸ in Shuangtang 雙塘 village, on

¹⁶ Deity Gao has two historical prototypes. One is Gao Huaide 高懷德 (926–982). He was a famous general and the brother-in-law of the founder of the Song dynasty (960–1279), Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤 (Taizu, r. 960–976), see Tuotuo 脫脫 (1313–1355) et al., eds., *Song shi* 宋史 (History of the Song), *Ershi si shi* 二十四史 (The Twenty-Four Histories; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962–1977) edition, *juan* 250, p. 8822. According to a local legend, Gao Huaide was awarded land in Changshu county and lived there. *Gaoshen [bao]juan* 高神[寶]卷 ([Precious] Scroll of Deity Gao) is dedicated to the activities of Gao Huaide. However, there is also a second prototype—another famous Song-dynasty general named Gao Qiong 高瓊 (935–1006). Gao Qiong was known for his military deeds and honesty. On him, see Tuotuo et al., *Song shi*, *juan* 289, pp. 9691–9694 and Li Tao 李燾 (1115–1184), *Xu Zizhi tongjian changpian* 續資治通鑿長篇 (Long Draft of the Continuation of the Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government; Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1986), *juan* 63, pp. 549–50. A Changshu county gazetteer records that two temples to Deity Gao in Gangkou town were dedicated to Gao Qiong. See Pang Hongwen 龐鴻文 (*jinshi* 1876) et al., *Chongxiu Chang-Zhao he zhi gao* 重修常昭合志稿 (Revised Draft of the Combined Gazetteer of Changshu and Zhaowen) in *Zhongguo fangzhi congshu: Huazhong difang* 中國方志叢書: 華中地方 (Collectanea of Chinese Gazetteers: Central China; Taipei: Chengwen chuban she, 1974), vol. 153 (rpt. of 1904 edn.) *juan* 15, p. 845. Indeed, the memorial written for the temple meeting in Gangkou (see appendix 1), mentions Deity Gao by his title of Righteous and Martial King (Liewu wang 烈武王). According to official accounts, Gao Huaide did not have such a title but it was a title that was awarded posthumously to Gao Qiong in 1076. See “Gao Liewu wang Qiong shendao bei” 高烈武王瓊神道碑 (Stelae in Memory of Gao Qiong, Righteous and Martial King), in Wang Gui 王珪 (*jinshi* 1042) *Huayang ji* 華陽集 (Huayang Collection), Wang Yunwu 王雲五, ed., *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 (Collected Collectanea, First Collection; Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), vol. 1011/5, *juan* 35, p. 471. Apparently these two figures merged into the image of Deity Gao. The claim in *Zhongguo Heyang baojuan ji* 中國河陽寶卷集 (Collection of *Baojuan* of Heyang in China; Shanghai: Shanghai wenhua, 2007), hereafter ZHBJ, 2: 1479, that Gao Huaide and Gao Qiong were the same person and Huaide was the style name of Gao Qiong is wrong. The Heyang in the title of ZHBJ is another way to refer to Zhangjiagang.

¹⁷ Before 1962 Gangkou belonged to Changshu county of Jiangsu province. This affiliation is preserved in the memorial (*shutou* 疏頭) written for the festival: “Huxia ward of Yuanyang village of Chongsu township of Changshu county” 常熟縣崇素鄉元陽里湖下保 (see appendix 1 below).

¹⁸ This is another name for Fierce General Liu (Liu Mengjiang 劉猛將), a deity efficacious against locust invasions. General Liu most probably is a deified historical person. Several figures are listed as his possible historical prototypes, but the most probable among them is a Song dynasty general Liu Qi 劉錡 (1098–1162) or his younger brother (?) Liu Rui 劉銳. See Che Xilun 車錫倫 and Zhou Zhengliang 周正良, “Qu

April 16. The third festival witnessed was one at the joint temple of The Chief Supervisor 總管¹⁹ and Deity Liu in Chengdun 程墩 village of Gangkou town on April 19, 2010. In my description of storytelling at the festivals, I use mainly material from the first festival, though I also refer to the other two, as some of their elements were different. I have privileged the festival for Deity Gao because it seemed to be more traditional in terms of its organization and basic program (see discussion below).

For the purpose of comparison, I refer to the material of several recent fieldwork reports by Chinese scholars that concern the performance of *baojuan* on temple grounds in the Wujiang and Changshu areas, which are close to Gangkou.²⁰ As we will see, there are substantial differences between telling scriptures in Gangkou and those performances.

huang shen Liu Mengjiang de laili he liubian” 驅蝗神劉猛將的來歷和流變 (The History and Transformations of the Fierce General Liu, Expeller of Locusts), *Zhongguo minjian wenhua* 中國民間文化 (China Folk Culture) 1995.5: 1–3. The cult of General Liu was especially popular in the Suzhou area. On his cult in Jiangnan, see also Hamashima Atsutoshi 濱島敦俊, *Ming Qing Jiangnan nongcun shehui yu minjian xinyang* 明清江南農村社會與民間信仰 (Rural Society and Folk Beliefs in Jiangnan during the Ming and Qing Dynasties), Zhu Haibin 朱海濱, tr. (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue, 2008), pp. 49–61; Wan Zhiying 萬志英 (Richard von Glahn), “Taihu pendi minjian zongjiao de shehui xue yanjiu” 太湖盆地民間宗教的社會學研究 (Research on Popular Religious Culture in the Taihu Basin), Wang Xiangyun 王湘雲, tr., in Li Bozhong 李伯重 and Zhou Shengchun 周生春, eds., *Jiangnan de chengshi gongye yu difang wenhua*, 960–1850 江南的城市工業與地方文化 (Urban Industry and Local Culture in Jiangnan, 960–1850; Beijing: Qinghua daxue, 2004), pp. 305–07; Wang Shui 王水, “Cong tianshen xiang shuishen zhuanbian de Liu Mengjiang: Jiaying Liansi dang Liu wang miaohui diaocha” 從田神向水神轉變的劉猛將: 嘉興連四蕩劉王廟會調查 (The Transformation of Liu Mengjiang from Agricultural to Water Deity: A Survey of the Temple Festival of King Liu in Liansi dang in Jiaying) in his *Jiangnan minjian xinyang diaocha* 江南民間信仰調查 (Survey of the Folk Beliefs of Jiangnan; Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi, 2006), pp. 46–57.

¹⁹ Also called Jin Deity (Jinshen 金神), one of the Jin [family] Lads (Jin tong 金童). According to the legend retold in *baojuan*, Jin Lads were local heroes who fought with foreign invaders during the Song dynasty (960-1279): ZHBJ, 1: 131–34. Jin Lads seem to be popular deities in the Lower Yangtze region. On them, see also Hamashima Atsutoshi, *Ming Qing Jiangnan nongcun*, pp. 15–26.

²⁰ Qiu Huiying, “Baimao diqu xuanjuan,” pp. 183–247; Sai Ruiqi 賽瑞琪, “Wenxue xushi zai minjian xinyang yujing zhong de shengcheng, bianyi yu zhanyan xingtai” 文學敘事在民間信仰語境中的生成, 變異與展演形態 (The Formation, Transformation and Development of Literary Narration in the Context of Folk Beliefs), master’s thesis, Fudan University, Shanghai, 2008, pp. 46–53 and 64–73.

A short explanation of the nature of *baojuan* performed in Gangkou is also necessary. In the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries *baojuan* were usually used as the scriptures of sects. However, they apparently co-existed with texts based on popular Buddhist tales. This second kind of text developed rapidly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By that time most *baojuan* were not connected with sectarian teachings. Texts which narrated the biographies of holy figures and even texts with secular subjects predominated.²¹ Texts performed in Gangkou are typical for this late period of *baojuan* development. However, many of them seem to have local origins. For example, the *baojuan* that features Deity Gao performed at the festival witnessed in 2009 certainly belongs to that kind. The titles of this and several other *baojuan* recited there do not appear in the most comprehensive catalogue of *baojuan*,²² which leads one to believe that they were composed locally.

Spring Festivals in Gangkou: An Historical Perspective

The festival at the temple of Deity Gao belongs to the category of "spring celebrations" (*chun she* 春社), also known as "festivals of green sprouts" (*qingmiao she* 青苗社). Dedicated to popular agriculture deities, these festivals are expected to bring good harvests. Such assemblies are also known as "benevolent assemblies of the great peace" (*taiping shanhui* 太平善會), as testified by the written memorial of the assembly (for the full translation, see appendix 1 below) and interviews with the masters of telling scriptures. These festivals have at their core a religious assembly of a village community that is supposed to bring peace and ward off calamities. The goals of such an assembly are clearly stated in the memorial: health and well-being, safety of drivers and luck in commerce, children's success in their studies, prosperity, longevity of people, and good harvests (see appendix 1).

This kind of spring festival dates back to remote antiquity in China. The term "she" 社 which designates it appears in the Confucian classics. Apparently it originally meant the deities of soil and grain, but then acquired the meaning of the sacrifices to these deities, performed on different levels of society from the king to commoners. The *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) in the chapter "Proceedings of Government in the Different Months" ("Yueling" 月令, 2.7) says that "[in the middle month of spring]

²¹ See, Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 5–7.

²² Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu*.

the fortunate day is chosen, and orders are given to the people to sacrifice at their altars to the spirits of the ground (*she* 社).”²³ The commentary to the *Book of Rites* by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) explains that this sacrifice was made to Houtu 后土, the deity of earth.²⁴ Thus, commoners have made important ritual observances in the spring since antiquity. The expression “spring sacrifice” also appears in the *Book of Rites* in the chapter “Brilliant Hall” (“Mingtang” 明堂, 12): “[In Lu] they offered [also] the sacrifices of summer, autumn, and winter [in the ancestral temple]; with those at the altars of the land and grain in spring [*chun she*]; and that at the autumnal hunt, going on to the great sacrifice of thanksgiving at the end of the year:—all after the pattern of the sacrifices of the son of Heaven.”²⁵

One expects that the ancient custom of spring sacrifice underwent a long process of transformation from its beginnings to the present day. The sources from the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties already testify that the spring sacrifice became a popular festival. For example, Wang He 王賀 (*jinshi* 890) in the poem “Staying in the Village during the Sacrifice Day” (*She ri cun ju* 社日村居) describes the spring festival as a joyous occasion: “The shadows of mulberry trees have lengthened and the spring festival breaks up;/ Each family returns home supporting those who are drunk.” 桑柘影斜春社散，家家扶得醉人歸。²⁶ *Record of Dreams of Splendor of the Eastern Capital* (*Dongjing menghua lu* 東京夢華錄) by Meng Yuanlao 孟元老 (fl. ca. 1147), in its descriptions of the festivals of the Northern Song capital Bianliang (modern Kaifeng) and adjacent rural areas before 1125, portrays “the autumn festival” (*qiu she* 秋社) as a

²³ James Legge, tr., Ch'u Chai and Winberg Chai, eds., *Li chi: Book of Rites: An Encyclopedia of Ancient Ceremonial Usages, Religious Creeds, and Social Institutions*, 2 vols. (New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1967), 1: 259.

²⁴ *Liji zhushu* 禮記注疏 (Commentary and Subcommentary to the *Liji*), in *Shisan jing zhushu fenduan biaodian* 十三經注疏分段標點 (The Thirteen Classics with Commentary and Subcommentary, Paragraphed and Punctuated; Taipei: Xin wen feng, 2001), *juan* 15, p. 736.

²⁵ Legge, tr., *Li chi*, 2: 33–34.

²⁶ *Yuding Quan Tang shi* 御定全唐詩 (Imperially Commissioned Complete Poetry of the Tang Dynasty), in *Yingyin Wenyuan ge Siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書 (Photoreprint of the Wenyuange Copy of the Imperial Quadripartite Library; Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshu guan, 1983–1986), *Ji* 集 (Literature), *Zongji lei* 總集類 (Anthologies), vol. 1429, *juan* 600, p. 5.

popular seasonal celebration. The passage ends by saying that the *chun she* and two other festivals were similar to the *qiu she*, which implies that the activities listed for the *qiu she*, such as teachers in villages putting on communal celebrations with waiters, masters of ceremonies, musicians, and singers, also applies to the *chun she* of the day.²⁷

A simple survey of the gazetteers for Changshu county, to which Gangkou belonged before 1962, demonstrates that the tradition of communal celebrations of folk deities, especially magnificent in the spring, existed there since long ago. They were usually associated with the so-called “birthdays of deities” (*shen dan* 神誕), and, as officials reported, were organized on a large scale.²⁸ For example, the gazetteer of 1617 mentions festivals (*she* 社) on the occasions of the birthdays of the deity known as Righteous Mr. Li (Li Lieshi 李烈士)²⁹ on the 18th of the first lunar month and for Guandi 關帝 (Guan *she* 關社)³⁰ on the 13th of the fifth month.³¹ The gazetteer of 1639 mentions festivals (*shehui* 社會) on the occasions of the birthdays of Righteous Mr. Li, The Great Emperor of Mount Ci (Cishan dadi 祠山大帝),³² on the 8th of the second month; and The Great Master” (Dashi 大士; Guanyin)³³ on the 19th of the same month.³⁴ The gazetteer of 1687 mentions “festivals of the City God”

²⁷ Jiang Hanchun 姜漢椿, tr., *Dongjing menghua lu quanyi* 東京夢華錄全譯 (Complete Translation [into Modern Chinese] of *Dongjing menghua lu*; Guiyang: Guizhou renmin, revised edition, 2009), p. 158.

²⁸ Pang Hongwen et al., *Chongxiu Chang-Zhao hezhi gao*, *juan* 6, p. 234.

²⁹ A local deity, worshipped in Changshu since the early times, see Hamashima Atsutoshi, *Ming Qing Jiangnan nongcun*, pp. 27–43.

³⁰ A deification of the historical figure Guan Yu 關羽 (160–220). There are several *baojuan* dealing with him in circulation in Gangkou.

³¹ Yao Zongyi 姚宗儀 and Feng Laifu 鳳來父, *Changshu si zhi* 常熟私志 (Private Gazetteer of Changshu; woodblock edition of 1617 in the possession of Tōyō bunko, microfilm at the Fu Ssu-nien Library of Academia Sinica, Taiwan, ROLL 3314–3317), *juan* 3, pp. 32a and 34a.

³² This deity is usually considered to be a deified local hero who was a pioneer in the development of South China and who effectively fought against floods; he is still worshipped in many areas of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Anhui provinces.

³³ Skt. Avalokiteśvara, the deity of compassion. “Great Master” is the translation of the Sanskrit *mahā-sattva*.

³⁴ *Changshu xian zhi* 常熟縣志 (Gazetteer of Changshu District), cited in Ding Shiliang 丁世良 and Zhao Fang 趙放, eds., *Zhongguo difangzhi minsu ziliaohuibian*:

(*Chenghuang shen shehui* 城隍神社會).³⁵ The gazetteer of 1795 mentions festivals in honor of Guandi (Guandi *she*).³⁶ Significantly, the gazetteer of 1904 says that festivals for Guandi were held in the county seat as well as in the villages,³⁷ which testifies for the existence of similar festivals in the rural areas of Changshu, to which modern Gangkou belonged at that time. A 1926 essay on folk customs of Haiyu海虞 county (the ancient name of Changshu) informs us that Guandi festivals were held separately by different levels of society, which the text classifies as (1) gentry (*jinshe* 縉紳), (2) merchants and students, and (3) butchers, winemakers, and peddlers. The same text claims that these festivals have almost lost their religious characteristics.³⁸ The same essay also mentions “spring festivals” using the same term (*chun she*) still employed in Gangkou now. It says that the *chun she* were held in the county city in honor of such deities as the City God, Deity Zhou The Pious Son (Zhou Xiaozi 周孝子),³⁹ and Jin

Huadong juan 中國地方志民俗資料彙編：華東卷 (Collected Materials on Folk Customs in Chinese Gazetteers, East China Volume; Beijing: Shumu wenxian, 1995), p. 424.

³⁵ Qian Lucan 錢陸燦 (1612–1697) et al., [*Kangxi*] *Changshu xian zhi* [康熙]常熟縣志 (Gazetteer of Changshu District [Kangxi era]) in *Zhongguo difangzhi jicheng: Jiangsu fu xianzhi ji* 中國地方志集成：江蘇府縣志輯 (Collected Chinese District Gazetteers: Prefectural and District Gazetteers of Jiangsu; Nanjing: Fenghuang chuban she, 2008), vol. 21 (rpt. of the 1687 edition), *juan* 9, p. 167.

³⁶ Yan Rusi 言如泗 et al., Wang Jin 王錦, ed., *Chang-Zhao he zhi gao* 常昭合志稿 (Draft Gazetteer of Changshu and Zhaowen, 1797 woodblock edition), *juan* 1, p. 26a.

³⁷ Pang Hongwen et al., *Chongxiu Chang-Zhao he zhi gao*, *juan* 6, p. 255.

³⁸ Wu Shuangre 吳雙熱 (ca. 1889–before 1938), *Haiyu fengsu ji* 海虞風俗記 (A Record of the Customs in Haiyu), in *Zhongguo fengtu zhi congkan* 中國風土志叢刊 (Collectanea of Records of Local Customs in China; Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2003), vol. 32 (rpt. of 1926 edition), p. 26.

³⁹ The cult of Deity Zhou was especially popular in Changshu county. On his cult in Changshu and in Lower Yangtze region in general, see Hamashima Atsutoshi, *Ming Qing Jiangnan nongcun*, pp. 44–49; Wang Jian 王健, *Li hai xiang guan: Ming Qing yilai Jiangnan Su Song diqu minjian xinyang yanjiu* 利害相關：明清以來江南蘇松地區民間信仰研究 (Concerning Profit and Harm: Research on the Folk Beliefs in the Suzhou and Songjiang Area of Jiangnan since the Ming and Qing Dynasties; Shanghai: Shanghai renmin, 2010), pp. 174–186; Zhu Haibin 朱海濱, *Jisi zhengce yu minjian xinyang bianqian: Jinshi Zhejiang minjian xinyang yanjiu* 祭祀政策與民間信仰變遷：近世浙江民間信仰研究 (The Sacrificial Policy and the Transformation of Folk Beliefs: Research on the Folk Beliefs of Zhejiang in the Modern Period; Shanghai: Fudan daxue, 2008), pp. 74–86.

the Chief Supervisor, all of whom are still worshiped in Gangkou.⁴⁰ The essay says that processions, penitence rituals, and incense burning took place as part of the festivals.⁴¹ Presumably, the ancient ceremony performed for the earth deities was later associated with the cults of local deities, called *tushen* 土神 in historical sources, and took the form of temple festivals associated with those deities. The use of the term "spring festival" for temple festivals appears in another area of the Lower Yangtse region, namely Shuanglin 雙林 town in Huzhou 湖州. The account in *Shuanglin zhen zhi* 雙林鎮志 (Shuanglin Town Gazetteer) of the Tongzhi reign period (1862–1874) talks about "spring festivals greeting deities" (*chun she sai shen* 春社賽神) associated with village temples held using collected funds and including the staging of "communal drama" (*she xi* 社戲).⁴²

Gazetteers do not provide much information on the activities at temple festivals. They do not give any information about telling scriptures during those festivals; and do not use the term *taiping shanhui*, which is used for the telling scriptures assemblies now. We can, however, assume that religious festivals had a long history in the Gangkou area. The cults of deities Zhou, Li, and Liu in Changshu can be traced to the 14th–15th centuries.⁴³ Based on the historical records, we cannot say exactly when popular deities such as Gao and Liu began to be major objects of the traditional spring sacrifices, but it is clear that in the 16th–17th century local cults were already associated with these sacrifices. It is also hard to say how much temple festivals in the late imperial period resembled modern ones. One can assume that temple festivals in the county seat mentioned in the historical sources differed significantly from modern village celebrations. Historical sources cannot answer the important question of when telling scriptures became a part of these festivals.

Telling Scriptures at the Deity Gao Temple in Gangkou

Telling scriptures was one of the activities centered on the Temple of Deity Gao witnessed in 2009. The temple is a one-storied modern building, which replaced an old temple that was destroyed during the Cultural

⁴⁰ Significantly, these deities are featured in *baojuan* recited in Gangkou.

⁴¹ Wu Shuangre, *Haiyu fengsu ji*, p. 67.

⁴² Cited and discussed in Hamashima Atsutoshi, *Ming Qing Jiangnan nongcun*, pp. 8–9 and 249–50.

⁴³ Hamashima Atsutoshi, *Ming Qing Jiangnan nongcun*, pp. 27–61.

Revolution.⁴⁴ This temple houses statues of Deity Gao and several other popular deities (see fig. 1). According to my informants, the Temple of Deity Gao was restored with funds collected by the villagers. It is a so-called “folk temple,” which means that the state does not provide money for its upkeep, and it is maintained by villagers themselves. Masters of telling scriptures told me that villagers also contributed money and food in order to organize the festival. Such contributions are regarded as producing merit (*gongde* 功德) for the sponsor, and the name of each sponsor (they numbered into the hundreds) was listed on the memorial written for the festival. Masters of telling scriptures also received payment from the collected funds. However, when interviewed, they said that their payment was just symbolic; they regarded their participation in the festival also as an act of merit. This makes the performances at temple festivals quite different from those at private houses, which require considerable payments (in village terms) to be made to the masters of telling scriptures.

During the festival at the temple for Deity Gao five masters of telling scriptures participated in the performance: a female master Zhang Yongyin 張詠吟 (born 1939),⁴⁵ her daughter Jiang Jianmei 蔣健梅 (born 1965), Qian Jianguo 錢建國,⁴⁶ Zhou Yongcai 周永財 (born 1951), and Ma Xiangbao 馬祥保. Zhang Yongyin occupied the position of the lead performer.

In the Gangkou area, masters of telling scriptures usually are peasants or workers who can also perform *baojuan*. Telling scriptures is not their sole form of support. They usually receive special training from teachers but the degree of their engagement in the tradition is different in each concrete case and ranges from professional to avocational. Masters of

⁴⁴ According to legend, the first temple of Deity Gao in this area was established in the eleventh century; there have been several temples to this deity in the area (see ZHBJ, 2: 1477–79). All the other temples in the Gangkou area that I saw were also in modern buildings, but they may have been built on old sites.

⁴⁵ Zhang Yongyin is one of the first female masters of telling scriptures who appeared in Zhangjiagang in the 1980s. Previously, all storytellers were male, but now there are quite a few female masters of telling scriptures in Gangkou. Zhang Yongyin studied the art of telling scriptures with a famous master Qian Xiaoyan 錢筱彥 (born 1932). She is known for her melodious voice, and besides being literate, as most masters of telling scriptures are now, she is also able to write down musical melodies using cipher notation (*jianpu* 簡譜). She was once a teacher of music in a local elementary school (ZHBJ, 2: 1472).

⁴⁶ Qian Jianguo is a son of Qian Xiaoyan.

telling scriptures are usually organized in teams. The team includes the head, several apprentices (usually two), and the chorus. Zhang Yongyin is the head of such a team. Because a usual session of telling scriptures takes quite a long time, apprentices often substitute for the head of the team in the recitation of texts. This works perfectly for performances at private occasions. However, for such a solemn occasion as a temple festival, several masters, who may perform separately as heads of their own teams, are invited. This was the case with the Deity Gao festival. This arrangement fits into the general picture of cooperation between the teams of performers that masters of telling scriptures described when interviewed.

Telling scriptures at the Deity Gao's temple took place on one day, between 8.30 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. However, the preparations for the performance started before that time. Before I had arrived, masters of telling scriptures had already set up a special place for performance, called a "scripture hall" (*jing tang* 經堂, also called "Buddha platform," *Fo tai* 佛台). It was located in a believer's house near the temple. Several tables were put together in order to provide space for offerings and for the lead performer and her assistants, who comprise the chorus (fig. 2). The host of the performance also made his kitchen available and food for a communal meal was cooked there during the performance.

On the wall opposite the entrance, the masters of telling scriptures hung a picture, called a "sacred image" (*sheng xiang* 聖像), which was an image of the Longevity Star (Shouxing 壽星). On the wall to the right of the sacred image, the masters of telling scriptures hung a special envelope for the memorial (*shutou* 疏頭) used in the assembly. This envelope was variously referred to as the *shuke* 疏殼, *fengdai* 封袋, and *zhitao* 直套 (fig. 3). The lead performer Zhang Yongyin wrote the memorial on several long pieces of paper (fig. 4). In the memorial, the place, time, and purpose of the assembly were stated, as well as the names of performers, number and titles of recited texts, and names and ages of the participants of the assembly (see appendix 1). At the end of the telling scriptures session, the lead performer recited the memorial in front of the sacred image and raised the sheets of paper with the lists of sponsors' names as if recommending them to the deity. This ritual is called the submission of the memorial (*tong shu* 通疏). After that, the lead performer burned the memorial together with all ritual paraphernalia in the special stove in the temple yard.

Small icons (literally, paper horses, *zhima* 紙馬) were placed in front of the sacred image.⁴⁷ These icons represent deities who are summoned to receive offerings during telling scriptures (see below). On the witnessed occasion, the icons were arranged in a single row. According to the explanations by the masters of telling scriptures, the icons represented (from left to right) the Stove God (Zaojie 竈介),⁴⁸ the Earth God (Tudi 土地), Blood Light (Xue guang 血光), Deity Gao, the North Dipper (Bei dou 北斗),⁴⁹ Amitâbha, the Deity of the Current Year (Benming 本命), the Three Realms (San jie 三界), Earth, the Buddha-Tathagata (Rulai 如來), Heaven, Bodhisattva Guan[shi]yin, the Longevity Star, the South Dipper (Nan dou 南斗), Small King (Xiaowang 小王),⁵⁰ General [Liu], the City God, and the Family Hall God (Jiatang 家堂).

On the table in front of the sacred images there were offerings to the deities, which included ritual money, paper lotuses, candy, tea, pastry, and fruits. Tea was poured in small cups placed in front of each paper horse (fig. 2). Six incense burners and six lit candles were also placed in front of the images. Incense sticks were constantly burning during the performance. There was also a thermos and a cup on the table, from which the performer could sip tea during the performance.

The lead performer sat on the side of the table opposite the deities' images. The chorus sat around the table and it consisted of about a dozen elderly females who chanted the name of the Buddha following the master of telling scriptures (*he Fo* 和佛). In the Gangkou area, the chorus for telling scriptures is exclusively female. The chorus members are believers

⁴⁷ On *zhima*, see Po Sung-nien and David Johnson, *Domesticated Deities and Auspicious Emblems: The Iconography of Everyday Life in Village China: Popular Prints and Papercuts from the Collection of Po Sung-nien* (Berkeley: Publications of the Chinese Popular Culture Project, 1992), pp. 11–12 and Anne S. Goodrich, *Peking Paper Gods: A Look at Home Worship* (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1991), pp. 23–25.

⁴⁸ That is Zaojia 竈家. On the Stove God, and literature dedicated to him (including *baojuan*), see Robert L. Chard, “Folktales on the God of the Stove,” *Chinese Studies* 8 (1990): 149–82; idem, “Rituals and Scriptures of the Stove Cult,” in David G. Johnson, ed., *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion: Five Studies* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1995), pp. 3–54; and Randall Nadeau, “Domestication of Precious Scrolls: The *Ssu-ming Tsao-chün pao-chüan*,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 22 (1994): 23–50.

⁴⁹ Stellar deities who determine a person's longevity and fortune.

⁵⁰ According to local lore, he is the deified son of general Zhang Xun 張巡 (708–757). See Pang Hongwen et al., *Chongxiu Chang-Zhao he zhi gao*, *juan* 15, p. 844.

who are very familiar with the masters of telling scriptures, and participate in the temple performances on a voluntary basis. Other participants at the assembly, who were mostly old women in all of the three cases I witnessed, sat in two rows on the sides of the table.

Before starting the recitation of the main text, the lead performer “invited buddhas” (*qing fo* 請佛), using the special text entitled *Qing fo baojuan* 請佛寶卷 (Precious Scroll for Inviting Buddhas).⁵¹ The performer invited all deities by their names. The pantheon of telling scriptures tradition in Gangkou includes numerous deities of different origins (Daoist, folk, and Buddhist). For example, *Precious Scroll for Inviting Buddhas*, used by the master of telling scriptures Xia Genyuan 夏根元 (1945–), who is active in the Gangkou area, mentions seventy-five names of deities to be invited.⁵² It starts with Buddhist deities: Buddhas Tathagata, Maitreya,⁵³ Bhaisajyaguru,⁵⁴ Bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī (Wenshu 文殊) and Samantabhadra (Puxian 普賢),⁵⁵ and then proceeds with deities of different origins. Those include the Jade Emperor (Yuhuang 玉皇), Queen-Mother of the West (a.k.a., Queen-Mother of the Western Pond, Xichi wangmu 西池王母), the Three Emperors of the Great Primordials (Sanyuan dadi 三元大帝),⁵⁶ Guan Yu, the City God, Earth God, Small King, General Liu, Deity Gao, Deity Li, Deity Zhou, Jin family Lads, the Stove God (called there Lord of the Destiny of the Eastern Kitchen, Dongchu siming 東廚司命), Dragon Deity (Long shen 龍神) of the Four

⁵¹ Similar rituals of inviting and sending-off the deities appear in ritual performances in China; see for example, Ch’iu K’un-liang, “Mu-lien ‘Operas’ in Taiwanese Funerary Rituals,” in David G. Johnson, ed., *Ritual Opera, Operatic Ritual: “Mu-lien Rescues His Mother” in Chinese Popular Culture. Papers from the International Workshop on the Mu-lien Operas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 107, 110, and 113.

⁵² The recently published text of a *baojuan* with the same title that belonged to the master of telling scriptures Qian Zaiqing 錢載卿 (1911–1999) of Xipu 奚浦 village of Luyuan 鹿苑 town in modern Zhangjiagang differs in the number and names of deities. See ZHBJ, 2: 1388, for this text.

⁵³ Ch. Mile Fo 彌勒佛 (the future Buddha).

⁵⁴ Ch. Yaoshi 藥師 (the Master of Medicine), the healing buddha, chief teacher of the pure emerald world in the east.

⁵⁵ Various Buddhas also are subsumed under the category of Six Buddhas of Six Directions in this text.

⁵⁶ Three celestial officials (San guan 三官): prominent deities of the Daoist traditions.

Seas, Bodhisattva Dizang 地藏,⁵⁷ Mulian 目連,⁵⁸ the Deity of the Current Year, South and North Dippers, Bodhisattva Guanyin and her acolytes Shancai 善才 (Good-in-Talent, Skt. Sudhana) and Longnü 龍女 (Dragon Girl, Skt. Nāgakanyā). Each deity is mentioned along with its attributes and supposed place of residence. As a comparison shows, *Precious Scroll for Inviting Buddhas* as used now in Gangkou includes most of the deities of paper horses listed above. However, the number of deities in the text is quite large; *Precious Scroll for Inviting Buddhas* mentions “all three thousand Buddhas” (*san qian zhu Fo* 三千諸佛), and contains an apology that the master of telling scriptures was not able to invite all of them by name.

During the ceremony of inviting the deities, the lead performer stood and bowed in the direction of the sacred images. After she invoked the name of each deity, she lit an incense stick, which was immediately stuck in the incense burner held by a helpful believer.

After the invitation of the deities, the master recited the text of the main *baojuan*. At the festival at the temple of Deity Gao, masters of telling scriptures performed six texts: *Baiyi juan* 白衣卷 ([Precious] Scroll of [Guanyin] in White Robes),⁵⁹ *Pipa juan* 琵琶卷 ([Precious] Scroll of the Lute),⁶⁰ *Gao shen juan* 高神卷 ([Precious] Scroll of Deity Gao), *Zaohuang juan* 竈皇卷 ([Precious] Scroll of the Stove Emperor), *Caishen juan* 財神卷 ([Precious] Scroll of the Gods of Wealth), and *Ba xian shang shou* 八仙上壽 (Eight Immortals Offer Longevity [Precious Scroll]).⁶¹

According to the masters of telling scriptures themselves, these texts belong to three types: 1) sacred scrolls (referred to variously as *shen juan*

⁵⁷ Skt. Kṣitigarbha, worshiped in China as the savior of souls from hell.

⁵⁸ Skt. Maudgalyāyana, a disciple of Buddha. In China the story how he rescued his sinful mother from hell became popular. On his story in *baojuan*, see Rostislav Berezkin, “The Development of the Mulian Story in *Baojuan* Texts (14th–19th centuries) in Connection with the Evolution of the Genre,” doctoral thesis, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 2010.

⁵⁹ Also called *Baojuan of Miaoying* and *Small Baojuan of Fragrant Mountain* (*Xiao Xiangshan baojuan* 小香山寶卷). The latter title positions it as a counterpart of the famous *Xiangshan baojuan* about Guanyin.

⁶⁰ Also known as *Xiao xian baojuan* 孝賢寶卷 (Precious Scroll of the Pious and Virtuous [Woman]).

⁶¹ For published versions of all these texts, see ZHBJ, 1: 251–59, 643–55, 119–22, 76–80, 123–25 and 2: 1339–42, respectively.

神卷 [deity scrolls], *sheng juan* 聖卷 [sacred scrolls], or *Fo juan* 佛卷 [Buddha scrolls]), 2) secular scrolls (*fan juan* 凡卷), and 3) liturgies (*keyi* 科儀). Sacred and secular scrolls, as one might expect, are distinguished according to the kinds of figures and stories they treat. Liturgies usually contain invocation of deities. Significantly, masters of telling scriptures performed texts of all types during the Deity Gao festival. [*Precious*] *Scroll of [Guanyin] in White Robes*, [*Precious*] *Scroll of the Stove Emperor*, [*Precious*] *Scroll of Deity Gao* and [*Precious*] *Scroll of the Gods of Wealth* are sacred scrolls, [*Precious*] *Scroll of the Lute* is a secular scroll, and *Eight Immortals Offer Longevity [Precious Scroll]* is classified as a liturgy. The first text, [*Precious*] *Scroll of [Guanyin] in White Robes*, tells the story of the origin of her particular image in white clothing. It deals with the earthly life of Xu Miaoying 徐妙英, who is presented in it as an incarnation of Guanyin. Because she is wholeheartedly devoted to religious self-cultivation, Miaoying refuses to be forced into marriage by her parents. Deities help her escape from the sexual advances of her chosen husband and transport her to a safe place where she can continue her religious practice. Later, after undergoing a variety of trials, all the members of both Miaoying’s and her groom’s families convert to Buddhism and reach sainthood together with Miaoying. [*Precious*] *Scroll of the Stove Emperor* is related to the cult of this deity, and deals with the stories about people who venerated or offended the Stove Emperor and were rewarded or punished according to their deeds. [*Precious*] *Scroll of Deity Gao* and [*Precious*] *Scroll of the Gods of Wealth* tell the stories of local deities. The first one deals with the lives of Gao Huaide 高懷德 (on him see above) and his father Gao Xingzhou 高行周,⁶² and uses some historical facts. However, most of the details in it are fantastic and anachronistic, and contradict the evidence of the historical sources; they certainly represent local lore about these historical figures (for a summary of the text’s content, see appendix 2). [*Precious*] *Scroll of the Gods of Wealth* is a narrative about five sworn brothers, named Du Ping 杜平, Ji Si 季四, Ren An 任安, Sun Li 孫立, and Zhonggeng Yan 中耿彥, who were born in Hangzhou during the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 B.C.E.), made a fortune and became gods of wealth. King Zhou 紂王 of the Shang dynasty bestowed on them the title of “Gods of Wealth of

⁶² Gao Xingzhou was a general. His biography appears in Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) et al., *Xin Wudai shi* 新五代史 (The New History of the Five Dynasties), *Ershisi shi* edition, *juan* 48, pp. 547–49.

the Five Directions” (Wulu caishen 五路財神).⁶³ [*Precious*] *Scroll of the Lute* retells the story of the famous drama *Pipa ji* 琵琶記 (The Lute) by Gao Ming 高明 (fl. 1345).⁶⁴ *Eight Immortals Offer Longevity* [*Precious Scroll*] tells how twenty-four (not eight, as in the title, though the famous Eight Immortals are included in this number) deities, all called immortals, arrive at a religious assembly and bestow longevity on the participants. It describes the appearance and attributes of all these deities. *Eight Immortals Offer Longevity* [*Precious Scroll*] differs from all texts listed above in the aspect of form. It is not prosimetric as are the other texts, but instead consists completely of verse that is sung by the master of telling scriptures to different melodies. The contents and form of *Eight Immortals Offer Longevity* [*Precious Scroll*] makes it very similar to *Precious Scroll for Inviting Buddhas*, which is also classified as a liturgical text.

Another secular text which was recited at a different temple festival I witnessed was *Zhenzhu ta baojuan* 珍珠塔寶卷 (Precious Scroll of the Pearl Pagoda).⁶⁵ Nevertheless, sacred scrolls predominate in the temple performances. Masters of telling scriptures always perform the *baojuan*

⁶³ This cult should be connected to that of Wutong 五通, otherwise known as Wusheng 五聖, which has been popular in the Lower Yangtze region for a long time. These deities are still venerated in the Gangkou area, and there are *baojuan* dedicated to them. For the cult of Wutong, especially in Suzhou and the modern Zhangjiagang area, see Richard Von Glahn, *The Sinister Way: The Divine and the Demonic in Chinese Religious Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Jiang Zhushan 蔣竹山, “Tang Bin jinhui Wutong shen: Qingchu zhengzhi jingying daji tongsu wenhua de ge’an” 湯斌禁毀五通神—清初政治菁英打擊通俗文化的個案 (Tang Bin Burns down the Wutong Deities: A Case of Governing Elites Attacking Popular Culture at the Beginning of the Qing Dynasty), *Xin shixue* 新史學 (New Historiography) 6.2 (1995): 67–110; Zhou Kaiyan 周凱燕, “‘Taijun baojuan’ he Wutong shen xinyang de bianqian” 太郡寶卷和五通神信仰的變遷 (On *Baojuan of Taijun* and the Transformation of the Cult of Wutong Deities) *Changshu ligong xueyuan xuebao* 常熟理工學院學報 (Journal of Changshu Institute of Technology) 2009.3: 120–22. However, [*Precious*] *Scroll of the Gods of Wealth* does not identify five sworn brothers as Wusheng, and their story is completely different from other *baojuan*.

⁶⁴ For an English translation, see Jean Mulligan, *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

⁶⁵ This *baojuan* is based on the famous story that apparently first appeared in as a *tanci* 彈詞 (“plucking lyrics” or “Suzhou chantefable”), see Zhu Hengfu 朱恆夫, *Tanhuang kaolun* 灘簧考論 (Research on *Tanhuang*; Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2008), pp. 255–56. On *tanci*, see Mark Bender, *Plum and Bamboo: China’s Suzhou Chantefable Tradition* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2003), particularly pp. 207–209.

that features the main deity the temple is dedicated to, which in our case was Deity Gao. I noticed that masters brought with them more manuscripts of different titles than they actually performed. They explained that in this way they provide the believers with a choice of texts that could be performed. The presence of many scripts may also confirm the authority and competence of the performers. They certainly are perceived as the owners of sacred knowledge, which is represented by the scripts.

One should note that all these texts were perceived as scriptures by the performers and audience. The performance of all of them was referred to as telling *scriptures*, and a miraculous quality was attributed to all of them. For example, the memorial written for the festival states that the performance of *Precious Scroll of the Pious and Virtuous [Woman]* (a.k.a, *Precious Scroll of the Lute*) has the same effect as that of the sacred scrolls, as its “every phrase wards off calamities” (see appendix 1). Although masters of telling scriptures differentiate between sacred and secular scrolls, they have many similar features in their content and form. On the one hand, secular scrolls, although they use stories that originally have nothing to do with religion, present these stories in the ideological frame of karmic causation or retribution. They start and conclude with ritual verses that are similar to those used in the sacred scrolls (see below). On the other hand, sacred scrolls include local stories, such as those about believers or disbelievers in [*Precious*] *Scroll of the Stove Emperor*, and amusing descriptions, such as the lists of goods purchased by the future Gods of Wealth and the persons of different professions who purchased their goods (fans) in [*Precious*] *Scroll of the Gods of Wealth*. They have their entertaining qualities. Based on their content, texts can be characterized as representing folk (or local) religion rather than the distinct traditions of Buddhism, Daoism, or Confucianism.⁶⁶ Although texts combine figures and ethical values borrowed from all three great traditions, it is clear that local deities of folk tradition such as Gao, Liu, and Jin the Chief Supervisor occupy the central place in both festivals and texts of *baojuan* in Gangkou.

Each text usually starts with a hymn (*zan* 讚) and a “scripture-opening *gāthā*” (*kai jing ji* 開經偈).” These short verses tell the name of the text to be recited, invoke the main deity/deities featured in it, and praise the

⁶⁶ On the definition of folk (or local) religion, see Daniel L. Overmyer, *Local Religion in North China in the Twentieth Century: The Structure and Organization of Community Rituals and Beliefs* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 1–6.

wonderful quality of the text, which will bring blessing and fortune for the audience and the performers. For example, the scripture-opening *gāthā* in [*Precious*] *Scroll of Deity Gao* says:

Precious Scroll of Deity Gao has just been opened,
Deities of the three realms descend to the altar.
The body of believers has reverently convened this benevolent
assembly,
It will make them able to avoid the eight difficulties and three
disasters.

高神寶卷初展開。
三界神明降臨來。
大眾虔誠修善會。
能消八難免三災。⁶⁷

The use of such verses to open as well as close scriptures in the Gangkou tradition of telling scriptures constitutes a special feature of the *baojuan* genre that has been present from their first appearance. Chinese scholars have demonstrated their origin in the tradition of Buddhist scripture recitation, including the unique popular proselytizing texts of *sūtra* explanation of the 8th–10th centuries discovered in Dunhuang in 1900.⁶⁸

Telling scriptures, except for the performance of purely verse texts such as *Eight Immortals Wishing Longevity* [*Precious Scroll*], alternates the recitation of prose parts with the singing of verses. While singing verses, the masters of telling scriptures employ a “clap block” (*qipai* 氣拍),⁶⁹

⁶⁷ ZHBJ, 1: 119. These are Buddhist terms. The eight difficulties (Skt. *aṣṭāvakaṣaṇāḥ*, *aṣṭākṣaṇāḥ*) refer to the circumstances in which it is difficult to see the Buddha or hear his teaching. The three calamities (Skt. *tribhayāni*, *saṃvartanyaḥ tisro*) mean wars, pestilence, and famine during a decadent world-period, or fire, floods, and storms during a period of world-destruction; see Nakamura Hajime 中村元, *Bukkyōgo daijiten* 佛教語大辭典 (Tokyo: Tōkyō Shoseki, 1988), 2: 1104 and 1: 463.

⁶⁸ See Li Shiyu 李世瑜, “*Baojuan xin yan*” 寶卷新研 (New Research on *Baojuan*), *Wenxue yichan zengkan* 文學遺產增刊 (Supplement to Literary Heritage) 4 (1957): 165; and Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 56 and 518–25.

⁶⁹ Known under different names in different traditions: “awakening block” (*xing mu* 醒木 or *jingtang mu* 警堂木) in *tanci* storytelling, “spirit tablet” (*ling pai* 靈牌) in Daoist services, and “Buddha’s measure” (*fo chi* 佛尺) in the Buddhist context.

wooden fish (*muyu* 木魚; a percussion instrument), and *xingzi* 星子⁷⁰ (fig. 5). No melodic instruments are used. The singing follows set melodies, the number of which in Gangkou telling scriptures runs into the dozens. The sound of the clap block during the performance notifies the audience and chorus when the singing of the refrain ends and the performer starts to recite a new prose passage. At the moment the storyteller finishes each even line of verse, the chorus sings the last syllable/character in the line (it is this character that is rhymed) together with the storyteller and chants the name of Buddha Amitâbha: "Homage to⁷¹ Buddha Amitâbha!" (*Na-ai, ma-ya, A-ya mi-ya tuo-ya he-ya he-he-fo* 吽哎, 麼呀, 阿呀弥呀陀呀訶呀訶訶佛). Chorus members are also engaged in the preparation of ritual paraphernalia. Women were folding ritual money in the shape of ingots⁷² and paper lotuses during the performance. The active participation of a certain part of the audience is characteristic of folklore genres in different parts of the world. Mark Bender has already noted the role of the chorus in the co-creation of the performance and a "story trance" with regard to the Jingjiang tradition of telling scriptures.⁷³

Other participants of the festival who did not attend the telling scriptures session still treated it as a sacred event. The main activity of worshippers was to purchase another type of ritual money, called "thousand bills" (*qian zhang* 千張), and incense, which were all burned in the temple yard. Worshippers purchased ritual money from the special vendors in front of the temple, but assistant masters of telling scriptures, who were not engaged in performance at that time, and were sitting outside the scripture hall in the yard of the house where the scripture hall was set up, were in charge of putting the stamp with the name of Deity Gao onto the packets of bills, and also inscribing the name of each believer on them. Before burning ritual money, many believers not only entered the temple to worship deities' images, but first went to bow in front of the room where telling scriptures took place, and then returned to the temple for worship. As for why worshippers usually do not enter the room to listen to the performance even for a short time, performers

⁷⁰ A small bell that is struck rather than having a clapper. It is similar to the "guiding gong" (*yinqing* 引磬) in the Buddhist monastic traditions.

⁷¹ Chin. transcription of Sansk. *namas*.

⁷² They are made of foiled paper, and have the form of ingots (*yuanbao* 元寶).

⁷³ Mark Bender, "A Description of 'Jiangjing' (Telling Scriptures) Services in Jingjiang, China," *Asian Folklore Studies* 60.1 (2001): 111.

answered that they did not have interest or time for this activity. It was also the case that the room the performances took place in was too small to accommodate many worshippers. The reverence for the performance shown by festival participants demonstrates that despite the fact that not many of them actually listened to the performance, telling scriptures at the temple festivals is still closely connected with other ongoing religious activities at the temple, and maintains an important role among those activities. This situation seems to be very typical for the events in the popular local traditions of Chinese religions, where the local communities sponsor quite elaborate and sophisticated rituals and performances for a given event, but the contents do not matter much for the community members.⁷⁴ An important point is that in many localities quite entertaining performances are included into the ritual event, but such pieces are performed for the gods, as an offering, rather than for the spectators.⁷⁵

After all of the narrative texts were completely recited the ritual of sending-off the deities was performed. Masters of telling scriptures perform it similarly to the ritual of greeting deities: the standing lead performer, accompanying herself with the wooden fish and *xingzi*, sang the *gāthā* of sending buddhas off (*song Fo ji* 送佛偈), bowed in the direction of the sacred image and then to the exit following the invocation of each deity's name.

After that, the lead performer took the memorial, icons,⁷⁶ and ritual money outside of the room, and burned them in a special stove. The sounds of firecrackers symbolized the deities' departure. The participants of the assembly collected food offerings and took those food items home. Consumption of the food offerings is believed to bring good fortune to all family members. After the ritual of sending off deities, the participants of the assembly are allowed to stop fasting. Following the end of the performance at the Deity Gao's temple, there was a big collective meal with meat dishes.

⁷⁴ Adam Yuet Chau, *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 145.

⁷⁵ Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults in Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 50. On the concept of ritual event in Chinese traditions, see also Chau, *Miraculous Response*, pp. 124–46 and Kenneth Dean and Zheng Zhenman, *Ritual Alliances of the Putian Plain* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), pp. 151–54.

⁷⁶ Only paper horses, but not sacred images. The latter are reused.

Variation in Temple Performances

While the basic scheme of events was similar in all the telling scriptures performances in Gangkou, there was significant diversity in their actual organization. Firstly, the performed rituals were different. For example, during other spring festivals in the villages of Shuangtang and Chengdun, masters of telling scriptures also distributed red strings that were believed to bring luck and safety, if one attached them to a vehicle. Worshippers put them into the incense smoke at the temple where telling scriptures took place (fig. 6), and then attached them to motorcycles, which are common means of transportation in Gangkou now. Masters of telling scriptures explained the inclusion by the fact that in these instances the spring festival was combined with the "Buddhist assembly by the road side" (*lu bian Fo hui* 路邊佛會), the aim of which was to pray for the welfare of drivers. In that case, masters of telling scriptures usually recite *Lu shen juan* 路神卷 (Scroll of the Road Deity),⁷⁷ and pray to the deity in charge of road safety. The celebration at the temple of Deity Gao also had this purpose, as pronounced in the memorial; however, masters of telling scriptures did not distribute strings there.

Elements of the rituals described above can also be left out at different venues. During festivals in villages of Shuangtang and Chengdun performers did not organize separate scripture halls but instead performed directly in the temples (fig. 7). During the festival of Deity Liu in Shuangtang the masters of telling scriptures did not perform the ritual of the invitation of the deities. They explained this omission by claiming that the deities' immediate presence in the temple made invocation of them unnecessary. The masters of telling scriptures also did not put icons on the table, as they performed in front of the temple altar. However, during the festival of Deity Liu in Chengdun, the lead performer invited the deities right in front of the images in the temple.⁷⁸ According to my informants, in the past telling scriptures usually was not performed in the temples proper. Usually worshippers erected special temporary tents (*xuanjuan peng* 宣卷棚) in the temple yards. One can find mentions of them in "mountain songs" (*shan'ge* 山歌) collected recently in the Gangkou

⁷⁷ For a published text, see ZHBJ, 1: 178–81. According to this text, two righteous brothers—generals Fang Bi 方弼 and Fang Xiang 方相, who saved the heir of the Shang dynasty throne, became deities-protectors of travelers and drivers.

⁷⁸ This situation seems to be similar to the modern recitation of *baojuan* in temples in Baimao; see Qiu Huiying, "Baimao diqu xuanjuan," pp. 206–207.

area,⁷⁹ and also see them in recent photographs (for example those of the festival which took place at the temple of Guanyin in Dongnan 東南 village in the fall of 2004).⁸⁰ In Wujiang, such tents are also set up for *baojuan* performances during temple festivals.⁸¹ Judging by the remarks of my informants, it can be the case that the inside of the temple, adjacent buildings, or the yard of the temple can all be regarded as possible venues. Masters of telling scriptures appear to be very flexible when it comes to the choice of venue.

Secondly, other groups of religious specialists and entertainers may participate in the festival along with the masters of telling scriptures. The first among these, according to information provided by the masters of telling scriptures, are the Daoist priests. They did not appear at the temple festivals that I observed. However, I saw them performing their rituals at the same time as the performance of telling scriptures on the short video record of the festival in the Guanyin temple in Dongnan village in fall 2004.⁸² It seems that in the past Daoists more often participated in the temple festivals in the area. For example, modern scholars of local customs in the Changshu area write that in the past during the “festival of the Fire deity” (Huo shen dan 火神誕) “[people] invited the Daoists to the temples to recite scriptures and perform rituals, which was popularly known as ‘doing the service’ (or offering, *da jiao* 打醮).⁸³ These scholars claim to base their information on the local history of Heshi town—*Heshi zhen zhi* 何市鎮志 (unpublished manuscript, date of compilation not provided), Heshi being a place in Changshu county situated not far from Gangkou.

⁷⁹ Li Hanzhong 李漢忠 et al., eds., *Zhongguo Heyang shan'ge ji* 中國河陽山歌集 (Collection of Mountain Songs from Heyang in China; Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue, 2006), p. 73.

⁸⁰ Several these pictures were published in ZHBJ, 1.

⁸¹ Sai Ruiqi, “Wenxue xushi zai minjian xinyang,” pp. 10–11.

⁸² “Heyang baojuan: Shenqing feiwuzhi wenhua yichan de baogao” 河陽寶卷: 申請非物質文化遺產的報告 (*Baojuan* of Heyang: Application for Intangible Cultural Heritage Status; Zhangjiagang Cultural Bureau, 2006).

⁸³ He Zhenqiu 何振球 and Yan Ming 嚴明, *Changshu wenhua gailun: Wu wenhua de dingdian yanjiu* 常熟文化概論: 吳文化的定點研究 (Overview of Changshu Culture: Research on the Point of Reference of Wu Culture; Suzhou: Suzhou daxue, 2001, revised edition), p. 326.

It is known that the Daoist priests of the Complete Perfection (Quanzhen jiao 全真教) tradition are still active in the Gangkou area. These are "Daoists residing at home" (*huoju daoshi* 伙居道士), not affiliated with monastic institutions. Che Xilun has noted that the masters of telling scriptures and the Daoists can both perform funerary rituals in Gangkou; however, if a sponsor invites both of them, they usually perform at different times on the same occasion.⁸⁴ Qiu Huiying gives a hint that the situation in Baimao was similar. However, according to her information, presently the masters of scroll recitation in Baimao usually perform funerary and personal welfare rituals⁸⁵ originally reserved for the Daoists; the reason may be that a family often wants to save money and invite only a scroll recitation team.⁸⁶

The masters of telling scriptures in Gangkou think of themselves as Buddhists, and their audience agrees. The seal they usually put on memorials and other ritual documents says "The Buddha's Light Shines Everywhere" (*Fo guang pu zhao* 佛光普照), which is a common expression in the Buddhist traditions. The memorial written for the Deity Gao's festival labeled the assembly with telling scriptures as a Buddhist service (*Fo shi* 佛事, see appendix 1). At the same time, the masters of telling scriptures are not ordained or affiliated with any official Buddhist institution. Judging by the contents of the texts and rituals they perform, the masters of telling scriptures should be recognized as practitioners of folk (or local) religion rather than Buddhists.

The masters of telling scriptures and the Daoists certainly represent different religious traditions in Gangkou. Besides, according to the information I have, the participation of Daoists in the temple festivals there now seems to be very rare.

At the other two festivals which I witnessed, folk theatrical troupes also performed along with the telling scriptures. One of these troupes was an amateur *tangming* 堂名 troupe,⁸⁷ the members of which performed

⁸⁴ Che Xilun, "Gangkou zhen de zuohui," p. 206.

⁸⁵ Such as the litanies (*bai chan* 拜懺) and warding-off the inauspicious star (*tui xing* 退星).

⁸⁶ Qiu Huiying, "Baimao diqu xuan juan," pp. 194–95, esp. n. 29.

⁸⁷ Wu Xinlei 吴新雷 et al., eds., *Zhongguo Kunju da cidian* 中國崑劇大辭典 (The Big Dictionary of Chinese *Kunqu* Drama; Nanjing: Nanjing daxue, 2002), p. 314, explains the generic name for these troupes, *tangming* (lit. "hall name") as coming from the fact that the names of the troupes ended in the word *tang* (hall). See also *Zhongguo xi*

without make-up and costumes (fig. 8). *Tangming* troupes were very popular in Jiangnan in the late 18th – early 20th centuries. They performed plays in the *qingchang* 清唱 style (without make-up or gestures) from the *Kunqu* 崑曲, *Jingju* 京劇, and *tanhuang* 灘簧 repertoires. *Tanhuang* is a local theater genre that grew out of folk songs and storytelling in Jiangsu and Zhejiang around the turn of the nineteenth century.⁸⁸ The *tangming* repertoire includes many stories popular in other genres of drama and storytelling in the Lower Yangtze valley. Some stories, such as those of The Pearl Pagoda (mentioned above), The White Snake (*Baishe zhuan* 白蛇傳), He Wenxiu 何文秀, Meng Jiangnü 孟姜女, and Wang Lanying sacrificing to her husband (*Wang Lanying ji fu* 王蘭英祭夫),⁸⁹ are used both in telling scriptures and *tangming* performances, but it is hard to establish any connections between the versions used in these two different traditions. Texts telling the same stories in both genres may be derived independently from the *tanci* 彈詞 or other performative traditions since similar stories are also popular in a variety of these traditions (for the case of The Pearl Pagoda, see below). *Tanhuang* drama borrowed many melodies from scroll recitation as it developed along with the latter in the same area.⁹⁰

The performance practice of *tanhuang* was originally very similar to that maintained in *tangming* performances. *Tanhuang* later developed into full-fledged theatrical forms such as *Xiju* 錫劇 (Wuxi drama) and *Suju* 蘇劇 (Suzhou drama).⁹¹ Originally, *tangming* were professional troupes, but

qu zhi: Jiangsu juan 中國戲曲志: 江蘇卷 (History of Chinese Traditional Theater: Jiangsu Volume; Beijing: Zhongguo ISBN zhongxin, 1992), pp. 809–10.

⁸⁸ On the early development of *tanhuang*, see Jonathan P.J. Stock, *Huju: Traditional Opera in Modern Shanghai* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 33–58 and Zhu Hengfu, *Tanhuang kaolun*, pp. 8–41.

⁸⁹ See for example, Zhu Hengfu, *Tanhuang kaolun*, p. 18.

⁹⁰ On the connections between the music of telling scriptures and of *tanhuang*, see Berezkin, “Scripture-telling (jiangjiang),” pp. 28–29.

⁹¹ *Tanhuang* of Wuxi and Changzhou is discussed in Jonathan P.J. Stock, *Musical Creativity in Twentieth-Century China: Abing, his Music, and its Changing Meanings* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 1996), pp. 72–75. See also, Chen Yibing 陳一冰, “Xiju de xingcheng he fazhan” 錫劇的形成與發展 (The Formation and Development of Wuxi Drama) in *Xiju chuantong jumu kaolüe* 錫劇傳統劇目考略 (Research on the Traditional Repertoire of Wuxi Drama; Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi, 1989), pp. 9–20; and *Zhongguo xiqu zhi: Jiangsu juan*, pp. 124–28. For *tanhuang* in Suzhou see Zhu Hengfu, *Tanhuang kaolun*, pp. 80–108.

since the beginning of the twentieth century, in Changshu and Kunshan these troupes seem to be all amateur. *Tangming* troupes were usually composed of peasants who did not become full-time professional performers and whose performance skills were transmitted from father to son. In this respect, modern *tangming* performers seem to be very similar to the masters of telling scriptures. *Tangming* were quite popular in Changshu and Kunshan in the early twentieth century. We have information, for example, on as many as twenty *tangming* troupes operating in Kunshan alone. Now most of these troupes have disappeared, but local scholars report that nine *tangming* troupes were still active in the Changshu city area in the late 1990s.⁹² The fully dramatized forms of *tanhuang* such as *Xiju* or *Suju* involve professional actors.

At the temple of Deity Liu the *tangming* troupe performed *Heavenly Official* (*Xing tian guan* 星天官), an auspicious play that is the equivalent of the *Dance of Promotion* (*Tiao jia guan* 跳加官)⁹³ and other similar pieces in different theatrical traditions of China.⁹⁴ The content of this piece was ideally suited for the festival. The performance took place simultaneously with that of telling scriptures.

During the festival in Chengdun an itinerant professional troupe performed Wuxi drama. The actors, in make-up and costumes, enacted scenes from the story of The Pearl Pagoda, and with their arrival telling scriptures stopped for a considerable time. This drama is a very popular piece in the Wuxi tradition of *tanhuang*, and dates back to the adaptation in 1917 of a piece in the "talks on karmic causation" (*shuo yinguo* 說因果) tradition, a local storytelling art which apparently grew out of scroll recitation.⁹⁵

⁹² On the recent history of *tangming* in the Changshu and Kunshan areas, see He Zhenqiu and Yan Ming, *Changshu wenhua gailun*, pp. 349–50; Guan Fengliang 管鳳良, ed., *Yi qu chang cheng: Kunshan yu kunqu* 一曲長承: 崑山與崑曲 (One Song Transmitted Over Time: Kunshan and *Kunqu*; Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), pp. 107–13 and 163–65; and idem., *Yi qiang qing yuan: Kunshan ren lun kunqu* 一腔情緣: 崑山人論崑曲 (Operatic Bonds: People of Kunshan on *Kunqu*; Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), pp. 144–53.

⁹³ The title of the piece performed in Gangkou may be connected to the name of the deity who is featured in *Tiao jia guan*, Luxing tianguan 祿星天官 (god of salary).

⁹⁴ Piet van der Loon, "Les origines rituelles du theatre chinois," *Journal Asiatique* 265 (1977): 155–57.

⁹⁵ See Zhu Hengfu, *Tanhuang kaolun*, p. 253, and *Zhongguo xi qu zhi: Jiangsu juan*, p. 226.

The tradition of staging dramas at temples is quite old in this area. Local histories of Changshu often mention drama performances in conjunction with temple festivals. The *Changshu Gazetteer* of 1687 mentions dramas performed at festivals (*sai* 賽) held to greet deities and “celebrate the green sprouts” (*zhu miao* 祝苗).⁹⁶ The gazetteer of 1795 says that there were “dramas of reverence” (*jing xi* 敬戲), which were performed in order to repay for the deities’ benevolence.⁹⁷ The essay on the folk customs of Haiyu cited above says that dramas were often performed in spring before and after plowing in order to ask deities’ help and thank them; these dramas belonged to the folk genres *tanhuang* and *huagu* 花鼓.⁹⁸ A recent gazetteer of Changshu mentions the existence of stages at old temples, and estimates that before 1949 the number of extant temple stages in the county was about forty.⁹⁹ We can expect that dramas were regularly performed at the temples with stages. However, in modern temples in Gangkou there are no special stages; as mentioned, actors performed just in the temple courtyards. According to my informants, dramatic performances are less frequent than telling scriptures during temple festivals in Gangkou now, but the situation could have been different in the past, before the 1930s.

It seems that in the 1930s and 1940s the performance of *baojuan* at temple festivals in the Suzhou area (including Changshu) became particularly popular and partially substituted for opera (*tanhuang*) performances, more traditional for these occasions, because its music was not as loud as the drums and gongs of opera and thus less likely to attract the attention of Japanese occupation troops.¹⁰⁰ However, one should not assume that the inclusion of the performance of *baojuan* in temple

⁹⁶ Qian Lucan et al., [*Kangxi*] *Changshu xian zhi*, *juan* 9, p. 165. Note the similarity of this expression with the term used for modern spring festivals in Gangkou, *qingmiao she*.

⁹⁷ Yan Rusi et al., *Chang-Zhao he zhi gao*, *juan* 1, p. 24; and Pang Hongwen et al., *Chongxiu Chang-Zhao he zhi gao*, *juan* 6, p. 234.

⁹⁸ Wu Shuangre, *Haiyu fengsu ji*, p. 42. On *huagu* dramas in Jiangsu, see Stock, *Huju*, pp. 39–41.

⁹⁹ Qu Honglie 瞿鸿烈 et al., eds., *Jiangsu sheng Changshu shi zhi* 江蘇省常熟市志 (Gazetteer of Changshu in Jiangsu Province; Shanghai: Shanghai renmin, 1990; revised edition of 2006), pp. 797–98.

¹⁰⁰ *Zhongguo quyi zhi: Jiangsu juan* 中國曲藝志：江蘇卷 (History of Oral Performing Arts in China: Jiangsu Volume; Beijing, Zhongguo ISBN zhongxin, 1996), p. 69.

festivals is a recent phenomenon; there is enough evidence that scroll recitation associated with the temple events existed since long ago in different regions of China (see below).

It is hard, therefore, to say exactly which elements and participating specialists in the temple festivals in Gangkou are carried on from the pre-1949 era, and which are more recent emergent aspects of the tradition. It is obvious that the culture of religious celebrations in modern times is quite diverse, and this diversity certainly has roots in the past of the region.

***Baojuan* Performances at Temple Festivals in Other Areas of China**

The examples of *baojuan* recitation at modern temple festivals in Gangkou discussed above do not represent unique instances. *Baojuan* have been performed on public occasions in other areas of both South and North China.

An example geographically close to Gangkou is the tradition of scroll recitation in Kunshan. Recent reports on this tradition show that temple festivals remain an important occasion there for scroll recitation. Furthermore, local scholars have found mention of this connection between temple festivals and scroll recitation in the local gazetteer *Chenmu zhen zhi* 陈墓镇志 (Gazetteer of Chenmu Town; 1518).¹⁰¹ Thus, *baojuan* performances at temple celebrations should have appeared at the time of the very beginning of the spread of this art to the Yangtze valley. Almost nothing is known about the development of scroll recitation in Kunshan in the subsequent centuries; however, we know that this art was very popular in that area at the turn of the twentieth century: many performers of *baojuan* who were famous in the Suzhou area at that time came from Kunshan.¹⁰² One should note that similarly with telling scriptures in Gangkou, scroll recitation in Kunshan has its entertainment aspects. Since the 1940s performers have made use of the accompaniment of string orchestras, which I can find no evidence of in telling scriptures in Gangkou temples. Performers of *baojuan* in Kunshan primarily recite texts with secular subjects, i.e., "secular scrolls."

In Wujiang, scroll recitation is also often included in the program of temple festivals. Sai Ruiqi describes the performances of *baojuan* by specially invited scroll recitation teams in two different temples of Deity

¹⁰¹ *Yulian huan: Jinxi xuanjuan*, p. 24.

¹⁰² Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 367–76.

Liu: the so-called “Buddhist temple of Sizhou” (泗洲禪寺) in Zhuangjiayu 莊家圩 village of Luxu 蘆墟 town,¹⁰³ and a temple in Zhaojiagang 照家港 (a.k.a., Lunniu 輪牛) village of Hengshan 橫扇 town.¹⁰⁴ An important difference between Gangkou and Wujiang temple festivals is the differing functions of the performances in these two areas. While in Gangkou telling scriptures has the main function of greeting deities, in Wujiang it has mostly an entertainment function. In Wujiang masters of scroll recitation now do not perform *baojuan* about deities (though they have them and perform them on private occasions); they recite only secular scrolls, though they also invite and see-off the deities as parts of their program. In Wujiang the performance of *baojuan* appears subsidiary to the singing of sacred songs (*shen ge* 神歌) by special singers (*shen ge xiansheng* 神歌先生), also organized in groups. They sing in front

¹⁰³ On this temple festival in the past (before the 1950s), see also Zhang Fanlan 張舫瀾, Miyata Yoshiya 宮田義矢, tr., “Ryū Mōshō densetsu to Gokō Shōka’u Mōshōkai chōsa” 劉猛將伝説と吳江莊家圩猛將會調査 (The Legend of Liu Mengjiang and the Survey of the Festival of Mengjiang in Zhuangjiayu of Wujiang), in Satō Yoshifumi 佐藤仁史 et al., eds. *Chūgoku nōson no shinkō to seikatsu: Taiko ryūiki shakaishi kōjutsu kirokushū* 中国農村の信仰と生活: 太湖流域社会史口述記録集 (Beliefs and Life in the Chinese Village: Collection of Oral Records of Social History in Taihu Lake Basin; Tōkyō: Kyūko shoin, 2008), pp. 71–92. The author only briefly mentions scroll recitation in this piece (p. 81).

¹⁰⁴ On temple performances of scroll recitation in the Wujiang area, see also Satō Yoshifumi 佐藤仁史, “Hitotsu senkan geijin no katsudō kara miru Taiko ryūiki nōson to minkan shinkō: Joen kiroku ni motozuku bunseki” 一宣卷藝人の活動からみる太湖流域農村と民間信仰: 上演記録に基づく分析 (Folk Beliefs in the Village of Taihu Lake Basin from the Perspective of Activities of One Master of Scroll Recitation; An Analysis Based on Performance Records), in Ōta Izuru 太田出 and Satō Yoshifumi 佐藤仁史, eds., *Taiko ryūiki shakai no rekishigakuteki kenkyū: Chihō bunken to genchi chōsa kara no apurōchi* 太湖流域社会の歴史学的研究: 地方文献と現地調査からのアプローチ (The Historical Study of Society in Taihu Lake Basin: From the Perspective of Fieldwork Survey of Local Sources; Tōkyō: Kyūko shoin, 2007), pp. 256–62; and Satō Yoshifumi 佐藤仁史, “Kōnan nōson ni okeru senkan to minzoku, seikatsu: Geijin to kuraianto no kankei ni chyakumoku shite” 江南農村における宣卷と民俗、生活—藝人とクライアントの関係に着目して (Scroll Recitation in the Customs and Life of the Village in the Lower Yangtze Region: With Attention to the Connections between the Performers and Clients), in Satō Yoshifumi 佐藤仁史 et al., eds., *Chūgoku nōson no minkan geinō: Taiko ryūiki shakaishi kōjutsu kirokushū* 中国農村の民間藝能: 太湖流域社会史口述記録集 2 (Folk Performing Arts in the Chinese Village: Collection of Oral Records of Social History in Taihu Lake Basin 2; Tōkyō: Kyūko shoin, 2011), pp. 53–74.

of the deities' images in the temples, and also perform offerings.¹⁰⁵ Scroll recitation appears along with the dances also performed on the temple grounds.¹⁰⁶ Rather than being the ritual, it mainly complements rituals performed inside the temple. The theatrical movements and string accompaniment of *baojuan* performances in Wujiang resemble the characteristics distinguishing Kunshan area scroll recitation laid out above. Sai Ruiqi does not mention dramatic performances and Daoist services during the temple festivals in Wujiang now.

Based on the situation in Wujiang temple festivals, Sai Ruiqi came to the conclusion that sacred songs are more ancient constituents of folk ritual, while *baojuan* performances entered temple celebrations later and stayed on the periphery.¹⁰⁷ It is hard to prove whether this is true or not, but comparing the traditions in Kunshan, Wujiang, and Gangkou demonstrates the diversity of temple festivals in the Suzhou region, and the different balance of ritual and entertaining elements in *baojuan* performances in different local traditions.

Local specialists who studied scroll recitation in rural areas of Suzhou (including Changshu county), Wuxi, Changzhou 常州, and Yixing 宜興, report that temple festivals were among the most important occasions for performances in the past, but that temple performances have become rare since the 1950s.¹⁰⁸ A recently published report by Qiu Huiying claims that *baojuan* performances in Baimao town of Changshu do not take place during temple festivals. In Baimao masters of scroll recitation can perform in the temples, but usually they only go there when for some reason performances cannot take place at the believers' houses. They do not distinguish between temple and private assemblies. The joint performance

¹⁰⁵ Sacred songs have diverse forms. For example, in Zhaojiagang a litany devoted to Deity Liu, *Cibei Liu wang bao chan* 慈悲劉王寶懺 (Litany of the Compassionate King Liu), is performed during the annual tour of inspection by Liu's statue. As Sai Ruiqi noted, it is not a *baojuan*, but resembles them, and probably should be viewed as an intermediary text between sacred songs and *baojuan*. See his "Wenxue xushi zai minjian xinyang," pp. 68–69 and 47–48.

¹⁰⁶ Zhang Fanglan mentions that in the past *tangming* orchestras and theatrical troupes also performed during the festivals in Zhuangjiayu; see his "Ryū Mōshō densetsu," pp. 80 and 85.

¹⁰⁷ Sai Ruiqi, "Wenxue xushi zai minjian xinyang," pp. 44–45.

¹⁰⁸ *Zhongguo quyī yinyue jicheng: Jiangsu juan* 中國曲藝音樂集成：江蘇卷 (Compendium of the Music of Oral Performing Literature of China: Jiangsu Volume; Beijing: Zhongguo ISBN zhong xin, 1994), p. 1399 and He and Yan, *Changshu wenhua gailun*, p. 353.

of several teams of masters of scroll recitation in the temple that Qiu Huiying observed was done for the special needs of several families who commissioned it; rituals for personal welfare were staged and the performance's effect was not aimed at the whole community.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, the present situation with *baojuan* performances in Baimao contrasts greatly with that in Gangkou. The decline of performances during temple festivals in Baimao can be the result of the anti-religious campaigns and destruction of temples which started in the 1950s and continued until the 1990s. Those campaigns, however, because of several factors such as differing attitudes among the local officials in charge, popularity of tradition, and number of surviving performers, affected different regions differently.

In the Jingjiang tradition, telling scriptures at temple festivals was also popular before 1949. According to the information of old performers of *baojuan* called *Fotou* 佛頭 (literally, "Buddha's head") there, telling scriptures was an important element of the village temple celebrations, called "the incense times" (*xiang qi* 香期). Those were usually the birthdays of deities (*sheng dan* 聖誕). For example, the 2nd day of the second lunar month and the 16th day of the sixth lunar month were the festivals of the Earth God, the 13th day of the fifth month was that of Guandi, the 24th day of the sixth month was that of the Thunder God (Lei zu 雷祖), the 19th of the second, sixth and ninth months were those of Guanyin (these dates were considered to be the birthdays of princess Miaoshan, the earthly reincarnation of Guanyin, and of her two sisters, all three of whom are featured in Precious Scroll of Incense Mountain).¹¹⁰ As we can see, some festivals corresponded to those celebrated in Changshu (see the section on spring festivals in Gangkou above). However, the tradition of temple-affiliated telling scriptures in Jingjiang declined in the 1950s, presumably because of the destruction of village temples. Now *Fotou* in Jingjiang perform exclusively in private houses.

Scroll recitation also has been performed at temple festivals in some areas of Hebei, Shanxi, and Gansu provinces. Folk bands in Hebei villages called "music associations" (*yinyue hui* 音樂會) still perform *baojuan* at public celebrations. For example, in South Gaoluo 南高絡 village of Laishui 涑水 county folk musicians perform *Houtu baojuan* 后土寶卷 (*Baojuan of the Earth-Empress*) during the festivals of the village-

¹⁰⁹ Qiu Huiying, "Baimao diqu xuan juan," pp. 199–201.

¹¹⁰ Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, p. 285.

protector deities, marking the end of the New Year activities.¹¹¹ This is one of only a few *baojuan* preserved in performance there. In this *baojuan*, Houtu appears as one of the female sectarian deities,¹¹² however, now its performers are not sectarians.

Stephen Jones has reported *baojuan* recitations as one of the activities at temple fairs in Gushan 孤山 village of Yanggao 陽高 county in Northern Shanxi. A group of amateur lay sectarians¹¹³ perform *baojuan* inside the temple officially known as the Temple of the Holy Mother of the Five Dragons (Wulong shengmu miao 五龍聖母廟). Unfortunately, the titles of these *baojuan* are not specified. Significantly, sectarians recite these scriptures along with the performances by two other groups: folk musicians play opera excerpts outside the temple, and Daoists perform their rituals inside the temple and in the courtyard.¹¹⁴ In another place in Shanxi, Jiexiu 介休 county, some old folk masters of scroll recitation still perform the *Kongwang fo baojuan* 空王佛寶卷 (*Baojuan of Buddha the King of Emptiness*) on temple grounds. Local scholars report that the monks of Buddhist temples on Jin Mountain (錦山 Jinshan) now invite

¹¹¹ The full title of this text is *Houtu niangniang lingying cibe yuanliu baojuan* 后土娘娘靈應慈悲源流寶卷 (Precious Scroll of the Origin of Miraculous Mercy of the Earth-Empress). See Xue Yibin 薛艺兵, “Hebei Yixian, Laishui de ‘Houtu baojuan’” 河北易縣、涑水的后土寶卷 (The *Houtu baojuan* of Laishui of Yixian in Hebei), *Yinyue yishu—Shanghai yinyue xueyuan xuebao* 音樂藝術—上海音樂學院學報 (Musical Art—Journal of the Shanghai Musical Conservancy) 2000.2: 31–37; idem, *Shensheng de yule: Zhongguo minjian jisi yishi ji qi yinyue de renlei xue yanjiu* 神聖的娛樂: 中國民間祭祀儀式及其音樂的人類學研究 (Entertainment of the Gods: Research on the Anthropology of Chinese Popular Sacrificial Ritual and Music; Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua, 2003), pp. 319–67; Stephen Jones, *Plucking the Winds: Lives of Village Musicians in Old and New China* (Leiden: CHIME Foundation, 2004), pp. 243–306; Wang Yanhong 王延泓, “Nan Bei Gaoluo baojuan yanjiu” 南北高洛寶卷研究 (Research on *Baojuan* in Southern and Northern Gaoluo), master’s thesis, Zhongguo yishu yanjiu yuan, Beijing, 2006.

¹¹² On the contents of this text, and its versions, see Xue Yibin, “Hebei Yixian, Laishui de ‘Houtu baojuan,’” pp. 33–34 and Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 541–45.

¹¹³ They may be affiliated with the Teaching of Vast Yang (Hongyang jiao 弘陽教) spread in this area, but Jones does not specify that this is the case.

¹¹⁴ Jones, *Shawm Bands in Shanxi*, pp. 77–78.

masters of scroll recitation to perform for the tourists.¹¹⁵ *Kongwang fo baojuan* is dedicated to a local holy man who lived on this mountain, and was presumably composed by sectarians around the 17th century.¹¹⁶ This is also the only preserved text in performance in Jiexiu. However, despite this evidence on the existence of public performances, masters of scroll recitation in Jiexiu (who are not professionals, unlike those in Gangkou) traditionally perform in household settings.¹¹⁷

It also seems that masters of scroll recitation also performed *baojuan* at temple fairs in Wuwei 武威 city of Gansu province before 1949,¹¹⁸ but after then *baojuan* performances in Gansu survived only in private settings.

Based on the information given above, one can see that many *baojuan* still performed in North China were originally products of sects,¹¹⁹ but in the twentieth century most of the performers of *baojuan* at temple celebrations there were not associated with sectarian organizations (except for the case in Yanggao county). In this aspect they are very similar to the masters of telling scriptures in Gangkou, who are not associated with any type of sect now.

One can see that *baojuan* have been performed on public occasions in many places in China. Although *baojuan* performances associated with temple celebrations existed in several places, they mostly declined in the 1950s. Thus, telling scriptures in Gangkou is a quite unique example of this kind of *baojuan* performance, one that has survived to the present on a fairly broad scale.

¹¹⁵ Li Yu 李豫 et al., *Shanxi Jiexiu baojuan shuochang wenxue diaocha baogao* 山西介休寶卷說唱文學調查報告 (Report of a Survey of Oral Performing Literature of *Baojuan* in Jiexiu in Shanxi; Beijing: Shehui kexue wenjian, 2010), p. 113.

¹¹⁶ Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 422 – 23.

¹¹⁷ Li Yu et al., *Shanxi Jiexiu baojuan*, pp. 113–15. The authors of this book insist that in the past the performances of other *baojuan* were also connected with official Buddhist establishments (nunneries), but the modern evidence for this is very scarce.

¹¹⁸ Tan Chanxue 譚蟬雪, “Hexi de baojuan” 河西的寶卷 (Precious Scrolls in Hexi), *Dunhuang yuyan wenxue yanjiu tongxun* 敦煌語言文學研究通訊 (Newsletter on Research on the Language and Literature of Dunhuang) 1986.1: 12.

¹¹⁹ On sectarian *baojuan*, see Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Scriptures from the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

The Status of the Art of Telling Scriptures and its Performers

Chinese and Western scholars usually regard *baojuan* texts and their performances as a kind of folk literature or popular literature. If one accepts this definition, performers of *baojuan* are folk artists (*yiren* 藝人) or more precisely storytellers.¹²⁰ One should also note that the representation of masters of telling scriptures as storytellers rather than ritualists certainly has been safer under the modern Chinese state, which has been very suspicious about religious activities. This definition should have made more likely government cultural institutions' interest in the revival of this tradition in Gangkou area. However, the evidence of the private performances of telling scriptures in Gangkou suggests that the performers may be regarded as religious professionals. As was mentioned in the introduction, they perform some life-cycle rituals at funerals, anniversaries, and children's festivals.

The primary religious characteristics of *baojuan* performances and performers in the past are testified to a certain extent by the local historical materials. The only mention of scroll recitation that I was able to find in the gazetteers of Changshu county is in the critical account of folk practices of healing with the use of the supernatural written by the famous governor of Jiangsu, Yuqian 裕謙 (1793–1841), in the gazetteer of 1904.¹²¹ There, scroll recitation appears in a list along with divination using incense smoke (*kan xiang* 看香),¹²² "painting on water" (*hua shui* 畫水; healing with the use of charms), summoning the soul of a sick person (called in that area "announcing joy" [*jiao xi* 叫喜]),¹²³ "borrowing longevity" (*jie shou* 借壽) for a sick person, and a kind of funerary ritual called "barrier of the dead" (*guan wang* 關亡).¹²⁴ One should assume that in the past performances of *baojuan* were generally regarded as a ritual activity. The evidence of modern temple performances also demonstrates

¹²⁰ See Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 207–208 and Bender, "A Description of 'Jiangjing,'" pp. 111–12 and 119.

¹²¹ This passage refers to the whole Suzhou sub-region.

¹²² Mediums who specialize in this type of divination (*kan xiang ren* 看香人) are active in Baimao now. They can also serve as performers of *baojuan*, but the more common situation is for mediums and masters of scroll recitation to co-operate in organizing private religious meetings, see Qiu Huiying, "Baimao diqu xuanjuan," pp. 189–92. I do not have information as to whether such mediums exist in Zhangjiagang.

¹²³ Wu Shuangre describes this practice in his *Haiyu fengsu ji*, p. 48.

¹²⁴ Pang Hongwen et al., *Chongxiu Chang-Zhao he zhi gao*, juan 6, p. 235.

the religious role of masters of telling scriptures in Gangkou. Analyzing the rituals performed by them at temple festivals, one is immediately prompted to compare them to religious specialists active in Chinese folk culture.

The most obvious parallel would certainly be the Daoist priests who perform rituals of communal offerings. The basic similarities would include the invitation and sending-off of the deities, offerings to them, recitation of scriptures, and presentation of the written memorial. All these elements have been described in detail by the scholars who study modern Daoist rituals and those of similar religious groups.¹²⁵ Masters of telling scriptures in Gangkou also perform some rituals in private performances that are very similar to that of the Daoists in different parts of China, such as offerings to the officers of hell and salvation of the souls of the deceased from hell, “untying the knots” (*jiejie* 解結), and “breaking the Pool of Blood” (*po xue hu* 破血湖). Similar rituals have been well-documented for the Daoists in Taiwan.¹²⁶ The basic meaning of the ritual of asking pardon from the Ten Kings of hell (*bai shi wang* 拜十王) in telling scriptures corresponds to that of the recitation of litanies (*bai chan* 拜懺) and dispatching the writ of pardon (*fang she ma* 放赦馬) in the Taiwanese Daoist tradition.¹²⁷ The Daoist priests in the Gangkou area

¹²⁵ See, for example, Kristopher Schipper, “The Written Memorial in Taoist Ceremonies” in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 309–24; Ōfuchi Ninji 大淵忍爾, *Chūgokujin no shūkyō girei: Dōkyō hen* 中国人の宗教儀禮: 道教篇 (Chinese and Religious Ritual: Daoism Volume; Tōkyō: Fūkyōsha, 2005, revised edition); John Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History* (New York: Macmillan; London: Collier Macmillan, 1987); Kenneth Dean, *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults*, pp. 99–163; and Kenneth Dean, *Lord of the Three in One: The Spread of a Cult in Southeast China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp.185–226. Written memorials are also used in the Buddhist traditions, see Gao Mingde 高銘德, *Zhongguo fojiao, daojiao wenshu daquan* 中國佛教道教文疏大全 (Complete Collection of Chinese Buddhist and Daoist Memorials; Taipei: Jinyuan shuju, 1997); Wang Kui 王馗, *Fojiao xiang hua: Lishi bianqian zhong de zongjiao yishu yu difang shehui* 佛教香花: 歷史變遷中的宗教藝術與地方社會 (“Xiang hua” Buddhism: Religious Art and Local Society in the Midst of Historical Change; Shanghai: Xuelin chuban she, 2009), pp. 70–83 and 95–105.

¹²⁶ Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual*, pp. 187–188 and 175; Ōfuchi, *Chūgokujin no shūkyō girei*, pp. 389 (542) and 479–89 (637–47); on *jiejie* in particular see Isabelle Robinet, *Méditation taoïste* (Paris: Dervy livres, 1979), p. 213 ff.

¹²⁷ Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual*, pp. 178–79, 188, and 202–15 and Ōfuchi, *Chūgokujin no shūkyō girei*, pp. 420–35 (578–93) and 339–43 (496–501).

perform rituals similar to those of the masters of telling scriptures; for example, they also ask pardon from the Ten Kings, "destroy hell" (*po diyu* 破地獄), and submit related petitions and memorials during funerary services. One can regard these rituals and text recitation as basically equivalent in the telling scriptures and Daoist traditions in Gangkou, though they differ in their balance of ritual action vs. verbal narrative, as explained by the practitioners of these two traditions.

Those familiar with descriptions of Daoist services will notice that they are in the majority of cases much more complex than the telling scriptures services, especially those conducted during the temple festivals. This makes it possible to interpret the telling scriptures performances in Gangkou as imitations of Daoist services, although, as was argued above, they represent the particular form of the folk (or local) religion in Jiangsu.

The question of the interaction of different religious traditions in Chinese popular religion is quite complex. In order to interpret the development of a telling scriptures service in present-day Gangkou I would like to refer to the recent model suggested by Charles D. Orzech in his study of co-existing similar Buddhist and Daoist rites of feeding the hungry ghosts (*fang yankou* 放焰口) and universal salvation (*pudu* 普度) in China. He employs the model of translation to characterize the relations between the two phenomena.¹²⁸ It is reasonable to look at the relations of telling scriptures and Daoist ritual from the same perspective. As we have seen, their basic functions are similar, but they do not substitute for each other: both can be performed on the same occasions, but in different spaces or times. One can wonder why the masters of telling scriptures have used the Daoist structure rather than the Buddhist liturgical frame as the frame for non-Daoist texts. The answer may be that the Daoist services were readily available for the commoners in the Gangkou area and more understandable than the Buddhist services. As we have seen, the Daoist priests were folk practitioners who took on the role of religious specialists in that community, just as peasants had become masters of telling scriptures. Buddhist monks, who lived in monasteries, should be more distant from the peasants than the Daoist priests. We can expect that the educational level of the masters of telling scriptures in the past was quite low. We can suppose that the masters of telling scriptures modeled their rituals after folk Daoist services. Both sets of practitioners co-existed in

¹²⁸ Charles D. Orzech, "Fang Yankou and Pudu: Translation, Metaphor, and Religious Identity," in Livia Kohn and Harold D. Roth, eds., *Daoist Identity* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2002), pp. 213–35.

the same area and even co-operated with each other. The masters of telling scriptures borrowed some of their texts from the Daoist tradition; an example would be the *Wu lei jing* 五雷經 (Five Thunder Scriptures), collected from performers and published in a collection of *baojuan* texts from Zhangjiagang (although they obviously are not *baojuan*).¹²⁹ Those texts were certainly borrowed by the masters of telling scriptures from the local Daoist priests.

Telling scriptures is more mundane than Daoist or Buddhist ritual. The reasons for the appearance and growth of this practice are the popular and entertaining qualities of these services. They are comprehensible for the audience of commoners (often illiterate), because of their emphasis on telling stories and the use of local language. Although telling scriptures has its own unique idiom, the alternation of “dedicated” (specialized) registers¹³⁰ of sung and spoken narration, its language is quite simple and still understandable even for the younger local people. From this perspective, *baojuan* in Gangkou are indigenous scriptures, produced and employed specifically in the context of folk religion. In this sense they parallel the scriptures that deal with the hagiographies of popular deities in Southeast China, which have local variations and often are intended to be recited by Daoist or Buddhist priests or lay scripture-recitation associations.¹³¹

If one regards the masters of telling scriptures as religious specialists, they should belong to the category described by Paul R. Katz as “specialists who operate out of households and are employed by individuals, families, or entire communities without being granted control over temples.” This category includes Daoist priests, yinyang masters, spirit mediums, geomancers, and fortune tellers.¹³²

At the same time, we should note that the masters of telling scriptures have an intermediary status between professional entertainer and religious specialist. Firstly, unlike the Daoist and Buddhist priests, they do not have an ordination tradition. Secondly, we should place them in the context of village religion, where professional entertainers co-operate with the priests.

¹²⁹ ZHBJ, 2: 1362–76.

¹³⁰ On this term as used in folklore theory and as applied to telling scriptures in Jingjiang, see Bender, “A Description of ‘Jiangjing,’” pp. 110.

¹³¹ Dean, *Taoist Ritual*, pp. 7 and 79.

¹³² Paul R. Katz, “Introduction” to the special issues on Religious Specialists and Local Communities, *Minsu quyi* 153 (2006): 9.

Generally speaking, one can divide the people who are usually involved in the temple festivals and community celebrations in most areas of China into masters of ritual on the one hand and professional entertainers on the other.¹³³ These groups usually cooperate in the organization of religious events. While in the south the Daoist or Buddhist priests often serve as the ritual specialists, in the north the temple festivals are usually led and organized by the local people, with no priests involved (see below). The ritualists provide the general guidance of the festival, while the entertainers perform music, operas, skits, and dancing of different kinds in order to please the gods. A conspicuous example would be the cooperation of the masters of ceremonials (*zhuli* 主禮) and the professional actors-entertainers (*yuehu* 樂戶) during the large-scale temple festivals (*sai* 賽) in southeastern Shanxi.¹³⁴ Another example would be the already mentioned interaction of lay Daoists and shawm musicians in other areas of Shanxi. In South China, the Daoist priests often co-operate with the actors.¹³⁵ In Wujiang temple festivals, scroll recitation teams mainly take the role of entertainers while performers of sacred songs act as the ritualists. In Gangkou, however, the masters of telling scriptures perform the functions of both ritualists and entertainers, which is an outstanding example of the fusion of these two groups.

We do not know the exact circumstances of the appearance of the masters of telling scriptures, and perhaps will never know, because of an almost complete lack of data on them in the historical sources. However, one should assume that they have existed in the area for a long time.¹³⁶ In

¹³³ For the North of China, see Johnson, *Spectacle and Sacrifice*, pp. 187–302 and Overmyer, *Local Religion in North China*, pp. 58–82; for the South, see John Lagerwey, "Popular Ritual Specialists in West-Central Fujian," in Wang Ch'iu-kuei et al., eds., *Proceedings of the International Conference on Society, Ethnicity and Cultural Performance*, vol. 2 (Taipei: Center for Chinese Studies, 2001) and Dean and Zheng, *Ritual Alliances*, pp. 165–66. See also *Minsu quyī* 153–54 (2006) (special issues on Religious Specialists and Local Communities, I–II).

¹³⁴ Johnson, *Spectacle and Sacrifice*, pp. 219 – 35.

¹³⁵ See, for example, for Fujian: Dean, *Taoist Ritual*, p. 50–51 and Dean and Zheng Zhenman, *Ritual Alliances*, pp. 151–54; for Hunan: Luo Yong and Lao Gewen, eds., *Gannan diqu de miaohui*, pp. 1–71; and for Guangdong and adjacent territories: Tanaka Issei 田仲一成, *Zhongguo jisi xiju yanjiu* 中國祭祀戲劇研究 (Research on Sacrificial Theater in China), Bu He 布和, tr. (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 2008), pp. 63, 98–99, and 115–16.

¹³⁶ The mention of Chongsu township (*xiang* 鄉) in the memorial written for Deity Gao's festival (see appendix 1) should testify to the early origin of telling scriptures in

the modern tradition of temple and religious community gatherings the masters of telling scriptures in Gangkou have certainly replaced the priests of popular religion. This is quite similar to the modern situation in the North of China. There is evidence there of the involvement of the Buddhist monks and Daoist priests in some community rituals until the 1920s and 1930s, but now their participation in temple festivals is very rare.¹³⁷ The leadership of lay ritual masters instead of the Daoist and folk Buddhist priesthood is often considered to be the major difference between the modern situation with religious festivals in North and Southeast China;¹³⁸ however, this conclusion cannot be entirely applicable, because of the vast diversity of local rituals and customs even within a small geographical area.

The merging of ritual with storytelling/musical performances is also noted for other parts of China, which makes the Gangkou case not unique. In northern areas of Zhejiang province and several towns now under the administrative control of Shanghai, an area close to Gangkou and sharing many similarities, masters of ritual called “great protectors” (*taibao* 太保) originally performed only offerings to the deities (including those at *she* celebrations in the temples), but not storytelling. Instead, professional storytellers were hired for the festivals. However, later *taibao* started to perform texts called “celebration books” (*she shu* 社書) or “sacred books” (*shen shu* 神書) themselves, thus also partially replacing ritual with storytelling.¹³⁹ In Laishui county in Hebei, folk musicians of music associations perform rituals making offerings to deities in addition to their

modern Gangkou: the gazetteer of Changshu county of 1904 says that the division of Changshu into townships (*xiang*) was abolished in 1726. The Changshu gazetteers of the 16th–17th centuries prove the existence of a Chongsu township in the territory now occupied by Gangkou township (*zhen* 鎮). The memorial seems to preserve the memory of a very old administrative unit, which should mean that telling scriptures arose when that administrative unit was still in use or remembered.

¹³⁷ Overmyer, *Local Religion in North China*, p. 58. In some areas of Shanxi the Daoists and Buddhists played minor roles compared to folk ritualists. See Johnson, *Spectacle and Sacrifice*, pp. 79 and 83.

¹³⁸ Johnson, *Spectacle and Sacrifice*, p. 268.

¹³⁹ Gu Xijia 顧希佳 et al., “Taibao yu zuoshe” 太保與做社 (*Taibao* and Folk Festivals), *Zhongguo minjian wenhua* 中國民間文化 (Chinese Folk Culture) 7 (1992): 209.

main function as entertainers.¹⁴⁰ The situation with storytellers in Northern Shaanxi seems to be similar. There, as Stephen Jones has reported, storytellers perform during temple festivals. Not only do they tell stories, they also display the images of gods and pray to them,¹⁴¹ much like the masters of telling scriptures in Gangkou. These considerations strongly suggest the possibility that storytelling based on *baojuan* interwove with and eventually basically substituted for rituals in present-day Gangkou.

Information about performances of *baojuan* in different areas of China supports the idea that the masters of telling scriptures in Gangkou are specialists combining both ritual and entertaining functions. As we have already seen, the musicians in Hebei can perform *baojuan*. On the other hand, masters of scroll recitation in Baimao now usually do not perform secular *baojuan* (called *bai xiang* 白相 or *xian juan* 閑卷), though they possess such texts, and mainly focus on the rituals.¹⁴² They tend to be more ritualists than entertainers and, as already noted, have assumed roles once performed by Daoists. In a special tradition in western Guangxi, folk Daoist priests, "masters of demons" (*mogong* 魔公), also performed a number of narrative *baojuan* till the 1950s.¹⁴³ Therefore, there is different balance of the ritual and entertaining duties in different local traditions of *baojuan* performances.

The participation of the different groups of specialists in the temple celebrations in Gangkou and even the overlapping of their roles are also typical for similar events in other parts of China. Vincent Goossaert came to the conclusion that in North China different specialists could perform a variety of liturgical functions in popular rituals, despite extensive variations in their training and degree of self-cultivation.¹⁴⁴ Different groups of specialists can interact and even possibly compete with each other during religious events (see, for instance, the passages on *baojuan* performers in Wujiang and Gushan above). The division between the

¹⁴⁰ Jones, *Plucking the Winds*, pp. 243–306 and Wang Yanhong, "Nan Bei Gaoluo baojuan yanjiu," pp. 38–46.

¹⁴¹ Jones, *Ritual and Music of North China: Shaanbei*, pp. 33–34, 81–82, and 84–86.

¹⁴² See Qiu Huiying, "Baimao diqu xuan juan," pp. 217.

¹⁴³ See Wang Xiyuan 王熙遠, *Guixi minjian mimi zongjiao* 桂西民間秘密宗教 (Secret Folk Religion in Western Guizhou; Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue, 1994), pp. 517–21 and Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan yanjiu*, pp. 77–80.

¹⁴⁴ See Vincent Goossaert, "Resident Specialists and Temple Managers in Late Imperial China," *Minsu quyi* 153 (2006): 58–59.

space allotted to different kinds of performances, when they take place together during the Gangkou temple festivals—for example, during the festival in Shuangtang village telling scriptures was performed inside the temple building while *tangming* performed in the open in the temple courtyard—suggests the differences in status of the specialists involved in the activities, which is quite common during temple festivals in other places in China.

Conclusion

The telling scriptures performances during the temple festivals in the Gangkou area constitute important evidence of the survival of traditions of *baojuan* performance in modern China. Telling scriptures in Gangkou is a unique modern case of a large-scale employment of *baojuan* recitation during community ritual events, which has been documented as occurring in other areas of China but that is almost extinct in most of them now. Besides, telling scriptures in Gangkou has significant differences in purpose and function when compared with the performances of *baojuan* on temple grounds in nearby Wujiang and Baimao. Telling scriptures at temple festivals in Gangkou represents a significant aspect of *baojuan* performances that is poorly documented in historical sources and also not yet explored by modern scholars of living *baojuan* traditions. Furthermore, the leading role of the *baojuan* performers (masters of telling scriptures) in the modern Gangkou temple celebrations prompts us to re-think and re-define their roles in the religious life of the community. The masters of telling scriptures make an interesting group of specialists in that they combine both entertainment and ritual functions, which stands out compared to the ritual specialists in most other areas of both north and south China. In this paper, I have also raised some questions, such as variations between ceremonies during the temple festivals and the relationship of *baojuan* performers with the Daoist priests and folk entertainers (actors of local genres) that I still cannot answer in full because of the lack of sufficient data. The answers to these questions can provide us with clues to help explain the formation and development of telling scriptures, a tradition not well documented in historical sources.

**Appendix 1:
The Memorial from Deity Gao's Festival**

With the silent blessing of the deities' authority, we bow [and present] this memorial of the reverently organized Benevolent Assembly of the Righteous and Martial King Gao.

The saint facing south bestows prosperity and peace throughout the four seasons.

The Righteous and Martial King Gao sends down auspicious signs and well-being throughout all eight times of the year.¹⁴⁵

All who have cleansed themselves will obtain [divine] response [to their requests].

Accordingly, we pray to the Buddha and reverently organize this Benevolent Assembly of the Great Peace with offerings of paper [money] in Huxia ward of Yuanyang village of Chongsu township (originally under the jurisdiction) of Changshu county of Jiangsu province on the territory of the Great King Yao and other great king earth gods of each area. The friends in goodness of the four directions gather together to recite the name of Amitâbha, plant [the sprouts] of happiness, and cherish the [benign karmic] causes, provide prosperity and call down auspicious signs. The various members of the different surnames, with pious intentions and sincere thoughts, bow before the Deity and proclaim their names: [here follows a list of the names and ages of more than two hundred persons; their ages range from 7 to 87].

The various members of the different surnames at the assembly as listed above bow together!

The Buddha's light shines and protects the long peace. It is said: "Those who follow the way of self-perfection, no matter whether they be male or female, old or young, rich or poor, honored or humble, all store up merit through doing good works!"

We bow to the grace of heaven and earth for supporting us, we rely on the virtue of the deities' and buddhas' protection, every year and every month, there will not be any disasters or regrets. In the eight times of the year [i.e., throughout the year] we should repay [such grace]!

Today, in the springtime, we have reverently organized this festival at the temple of Deity Gao, the benevolent assembly of the great peace. Good men, pious women, children and so on from the four directions with

¹⁴⁵ These are the eight most important of the traditional twenty-four "solar terms" of the lunar calendar. They can also be understood as representing all twenty-four solar terms and thus the entire year.

all their hearts desired to recite scrolls, chant the name of Buddha Amitabha, praise and revere the Buddha-patriarch and the spirits. They ask for the warding off of calamities and the elimination of difficulties, the establishment of prosperity, and the approach of auspicious signs. Together they celebrate health and well-being, peace in all four seasons, the safety of drivers who travel on the roads, the flourishing of business and the growth of wealth, the fulfillment of desires and the success in all things for the entire family; the longevity of the people and bumper harvest of the crops. Let the children make progress in their studies, be lucky throughout the four seasons, have their names inscribed on the golden list¹⁴⁶ and meet with no obstacles!

Today, on the twentieth of the [lunar] month [we organized] a Buddhist service of the great peace with the submitting of [ritual] money, [there is] great merit in this!

Scroll recitation began with *Precious Scroll of [Guanyin in] White Robes* and [continued with] *Precious Scroll of the Pious and Virtuous [Woman]*—every phrase wards off calamities.

We sincerely recited *Precious Scroll of Deity Gao* and *Precious Scroll of the Stove Emperor*—every word eliminates sins.

We chanted [*Scroll of Eight Immortals*] *Wishing Longevity*—it wards off disasters and gives rise to happiness.

We completely prepared pure incense, bright candles, and vegetarian offerings, burned money, and properly carried out the offering.

All of us pay reverence to the Celestial Emperor, High and True; welcome the Deity who is facing south; pray to the Great Supreme [One] for the well-being of people and prosperity of families, etc. For this reason those who present this memorial (see above) pay reverence below the golden lotus [seat] of the Namō Bodhisattva Guanshiyin of Great Compassion in the ward of the Great Deity Righteous and Martial King Gao, enfeoffed as the Celestial Immortal, Prince of Miraculous Aid; and to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas present at the assembly in the Buddha hall.

In accord with the rules we present this written memorial on the twentieth day of the third [lunar] month [April, 15] of the *jichou* year of the sexagenary cycle [2009].

The memorial is complete. The people of all the various surnames at the assembly with repeated bows offer it up!

¹⁴⁶ Originally referred to the list of those who passed the highest level of the imperial civil service examinations.

Appendix 2:
Summary of the Storyline of
[Precious] Scroll of Deity Gao¹⁴⁷

This text tells the story of three generations of military officials of the Gao family, who lived in the latter half of the Five Dynasties period (907–960) into the beginning of the Song dynasty (960–1279). After an opening poem, we are told that in the reign of Liu Chong 劉崇, emperor of the Northern Han dynasty,¹⁴⁸ when the empire was in great disorder, there was a wealthy country squire named Gao Wanchun 高萬春 who lived in the village of Zhaojiazhuang 趙家莊 in the prefecture of Jinan in Shandong province.¹⁴⁹ He and his wife, Ms. Liu, did not have children, despite their already being in their forties. After they performed all kinds of meritorious deeds and prayed to the Emperor of the Eastern Peak (Taishan), Ms. Liu dreamt that an old man presented her with a peach of immortality, and later she gave birth to a boy.¹⁵⁰ This boy, named Gao Xingzhou, starts school when he is seven and so impresses his teacher, a monk named Jindao 金刀 (Golden Knife; later his name is given as Jinqiang 金槍 [Golden Spear]), that he decides to teach the boy everything he knows, including the military arts. Gao Xingzhou marries the daughter of another country squire, and their marriage is a good one, but before long his father dies. Gao Xingzhou completes the three years of mourning for his father and then answers a summons for good men from the emperor of the Northern Han, Liu Zong 劉宗 (perhaps a mistake for Liu Chong).¹⁵¹ The emperor is so impressed with Gao that he is immediately made commander-in-chief and ordered to defend the strategic Tong Pass (Tongguan 潼關). Gao Xingzhou has two sons, Gao Huaide 高懷德 and

¹⁴⁷ Also known as *Scroll of the Commander-in-Chief* (*Dudu juan* 都督卷). The summary is based on the manuscript copied by Hu Zhengxing 胡正興 (born 1934) from Zhuangjing 莊遷 village of Gangkou town, as edited and published in ZHBJ, 1: 119–22.

¹⁴⁸ The Northern Han dynasty (951–979) was one of the “Ten States” of the Five Dynasties period. Liu Chong reigned from 951 to 954. Gao Huaide’s father, Xingzhou, was born in 885. There are many fantastic and anachronistic details in the text, which betray its folk origin.

¹⁴⁹ According to his official biography, Gao Huaide’s family came from Zhending county in modern Hebei province, not Shandong.

¹⁵⁰ Stories about the miraculous circumstances of a protagonist’s birth are common in narrative *baojuan*.

¹⁵¹ Historically, Gao Xingzhou and Gao Huaide never served the Northern Han.

Gao Huailiang 高懷亮, to whom he passes on the skills he learned from Jindao/Jinjiang. They are even said to surpass their father.

Gao Xingzhou becomes worried when he sees that the king of Zhou¹⁵² is stronger than his lord, the king of the Northern Han. This leads him to inspect the stars that signify the fate of his ruler and himself, and in the process he finds out that his own fate and that of the Northern Han is not good but Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤, the king of Song, will become the new emperor. After discussing the situation with his wife, Gao Xingzhou orders his sons to surrender to Zhao Kuangyin and then dies.

When Zhao Kuangyin attacks Tong Pass, Gao Xingzhou's wife and two sons surrender it to him and give him the testament Gao Xingzhou wrote just before he died. Moved, Zhao posthumously appoints Gao Xingzhou as commander in chief. He then appoints Gao Huaide general of the vanguard and takes him with him, leaving Gao Huailiang and his mother to guard Tong Pass.

When the Northern Han decides to attack Zhao Kuangyin,¹⁵³ Gao Huaide is given command of the army and sent to fight the Northern Han, whom he routs in a battle at Gaoping Pass (Gaoping guan 高平關). His army is welcomed by the people. Before long the Northern Han surrenders. Gao Huaide is then sent to attack the Southern Tang.¹⁵⁴ He and his army are so awesome that the ruler of the Southern Tang surrenders without fighting. After these victories, Zhao Kuangyin awards Gao Huaide the title of Righteous and Martial King Gao, the Prince of Miraculous Aid. Gao Huaide summons his mother and brother to the capital, and the family is re-united.

Because of Gao Huaide's merits, Zhao Kuangyin decides to marry his own younger sister to Gao,¹⁵⁵ which he does, after getting his own parents' approval for the match. The text goes out of its way to say that Gao Huaide's mother is very grateful for this honor. Both sons of Gao

¹⁵² This seems to be a reference to the Later Zhou dynasty (951–960), one of the Five Dynasties, which in reality was an enemy of the Northern Han.

¹⁵³ This is a reference to the victorious campaign of the Song against the Northern Han. It took place in 979, and historical sources testify that Gao Huaide participated in it. The text says that a Nanjun wang Li Ji 南君王李積 also led troops against Zhao Kuangyin at this time and was defeated in battle. I have not been able to identify who this figure is supposed to be.

¹⁵⁴ In reality, the campaign of the Song against the state of the Southern Tang took place in 975. The official biography of Gao Huaide does not mention that he participated in the campaign.

¹⁵⁵ This is a true historical fact.

Huaide, Gao Lin 高林 and Gao Feng 高風,¹⁵⁶ are said to be very talented and we are told that they also became high-ranking officials, and that the descendants of the family served as officials generation after generation.

The *baojuan* ends with a verse of auspicious content that says that Deity Gao saves common folk from disasters, granting peace and prosperity year after year and month after month. Other deities and buddhas are said to be pleased with the recitation of the *baojuan*, and are described as joining Deity Gao in raining down blessings.

¹⁵⁶ There are no mentions of these sons of Gao Huaide in his official biography.



Fig. 1. The interior of Deity Gao's temple. Photo by author.



Fig. 2. Scripture hall for Deity Gao temple festival. Making the offerings. Photo by author.



Fig. 3. Memorial envelope (on the right) in the scripture hall. Photo by author.

兒童學業進步四季禮
 消於今月之二十日納紙太平佛事功德於內
 開宣白衣寶卷 孝賢寶卷 句句消愆
 誠宣高神寶卷 灶皇寶卷 言言滅罪
 誦壽 消災降福 具備
 清香明炷素供之儀 灼化金資 齋伸供養
 咸奉
 天帝高真 迓迎 南朝神聖 仰干
 太上人泰家昌壽 頌至疏音 右疏上奉
 南無大悲現世音菩薩蓮下
 勅封天仙靈濟侯烈武王高大神聖下
 佛堂會上一切諸佛菩薩 昭格 伏乞
 太歲 甲午年三月二十日 具疏
 在會眾姓人等百拜上呈

Fig. 4. Memorial for the Deity Gao temple festival (final page). Photo by author.



Fig. 5. Scripture telling in the scripture hall for Deity Gao's festival. Photo by author.



Fig. 6. Consecrating the red strings at the temple for the Chief Supervisor in Chengdun village. Photo by author.



Fig. 7. Scripture telling at the temple for Deity Liu in Chengdun village. Photo by author.



Fig. 8. A *tangming* troupe at the temple for Deity Liu in Shuangtang village. Photo by author.