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Thomas David DuBois
Mark Bender
Kun Shi

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Edited by
Ma Xisha and Meng Huiying

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PART I

POPULAR RELIGION

Translated by

Chi Zhen
Thomas David DuBois
INTRODUCTION

Thomas David DuBois

It can be a hard task to describe the big picture view of religion in China. The most natural place to begin is with the three canonical beliefs of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism. Focusing on these three teachings provides some obvious advantages: each one is a more-or-less concrete entity with a founder, scriptures, and discrete intellectual genealogy. This tactic also represents an important and lasting political reality: since the time that doctrinal Buddhism became firmly established in the fifth and sixth centuries AD, the governments of China’s various dynasties interacted with religion (not always with approval) largely in terms of these three big teachings. While the teachings of Confucius came to be synonymous with the imperial state itself, Buddhism and Daoism were incorporated differently, enjoying approval and even support, in return for accepting state regulation of their doctrine and affairs. The present-day Chinese state roughly follows an elaboration of this policy, with officially sanctioned bodies representing Buddhism and Daoism, as well as Christianity and Islam. So to a large extent do scholars, including the editors of this series, who have published separate volumes on each of the canonical religions.

But working with the canonical teachings also has some very important shortcomings. For one, it artificially separates them. While Buddhism and Daoism each constituted a discrete and self-contained intellectual world, they also interacted with each other: even the classic canons of Buddhist and Daoist scripture show how easily ideas, concepts and even deities crossed the lines between the two teachings. More importantly, lived religion freely integrates what it calls the “three teachings.” Both visually and in scripture, Confucius, Laozi and the Buddha are commonly portrayed together, and their statues frequently share the same space in temples and shrines. A Buddhist temple in China that did not have some representation of Daoist deities or Confucian moral exhortations would be the exception, rather than the rule. Conversely, a great deal of religious practice falls between the three canonical teachings. Most of China’s lived religion: temple fairs, village processions, local deities, as well as healing, exorcistic and
mortuary ritual—the real stuff of Chinese religious life at all levels of society—are in some ways linked to the canonical teachings, but do not belong exclusively to any one of them.

Half a century ago, the sociologist C. K. Yang (Yang Qingkun) proposed the model of two types of religion in China: the “institutional” religions that we would associate with formal, organized clergies, and thus with the three canonical religions, and the ocean of local and personal practices that he termed “diffused” religion. This model is not perfect—no model is—but it remains a useful way of thinking about the long path from individual devotion to formal and organized religious institutions. History shows us that many factors shape this process. Religious ideas and piety themselves play a large role, but not a total one. Ideas also contend with the good or ill will of states, conditions of economic rise or decline, and a society that may be peaceful or may be unsettled. Moreover, there are many types of institutional religion. The term may mean an organized church, but it may also signify a lay movement, an established tradition of practice, or any generally accepted tradition of ideas. Beyond the three canonical teachings, Chinese religion also incorporates these many other types of institutionalization.

The first part of this volume traces the rise of one of the most unique and important of these institutions, the one that the title identifies as “folk religion.” This term, often translated as “popular religion” (mínjiàn zōngjiào 民间宗教), has a very specific meaning: it is a shorthand used by scholars in China to refer to the particular religious tradition that most Western historians would call “sectarianism,” or more broadly, the “White Lotus Teaching.” (Neither name is precisely accurate, a point to which we will return later.) These terms will certainly be familiar to any student of China’s modern history, most commonly in the context of religious rebellion. Religious groups in the White Lotus tradition are often given credit for overthrowing the Mongol Yuan dynasty, and led the series of domestic military disasters—the Nian and Taiping Rebellions and Boxer Uprising—that laid low the mighty Qing during the nineteenth century. Most will know these groups for their integration of religion and warfare: the use of magical

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**PART I: INTELLECTUAL ANTECEDENTS**

The first chapter by Ma Xisha 马西沙 examines the integration of Manichaeism, which entered China from Central Asia via the Silk Road, into a preexisting tradition of beliefs surrounding the Maitreya Buddha. The Maitreya Buddha has a long history as a salvationist figure in China. As early as the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589), this Buddha was worshipped as the lord of a paradise called the Maitreya Pure Land. This was a postmortem paradise, a repose for individual souls, in what scholars often refer as the “ascending” motif of salvationism. Maitreya was also the central figure of a “descending” motif, in which he was prophesied to come down from heaven and establish a physical paradise on earth. Over time, it was the latter image that came to dominate the worship of Maitreya. Beginning in the Wei Dynasty, a corpus of “false scriptures” elaborated the cosmology of Maitreya worship, including the characteristic tripartite division of time, and the story of the Dragon Flower Assembly, an event which inaugurates the reign of the messiah Buddha. To this, Manichaeism easily added its own conception of the “three times,” as well as its characteristic belief in the antagonistic “two principles” of light and darkness, the idea of original sin, and a harsh devotional regimen. Maitreyan and Manichaean belief systems had fully merged by the Sui Dynasty (581–618), the same time that sources began to report the existence of groups of faithful who wore white robes, buried their dead naked, and conducted secret nocturnal rituals, “meeting at

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night and dispersing at dawn.” Groups that combined the descent of Maitreya with the Manichean “King of Light” (ming wang 明王) were quickly seen as a threat to public order, and banned during the Tang and Song dynasties. But they continued to spread underground, most famously to reappear in the late Yuan as the “Incense Army” (xiàng jun 香军) that participated in the overthrow of the Mongol dynasty.

Lin Wushu 林悟殊 examines the establishment of Manichaeanism in greater detail, focusing specifically on the many names used for Manichaeanism to show the path taken by the teaching as it was driven underground. He has a very difficult task. It is never easy to follow an organization that wishes to remain hidden, but this case is made even more difficult by the fact that Manichaeanism in China was never centralized, and freely broke into splinter groups and local communities. Moreover, many of the names for Manichaeanism that appear in historical sources were coined by outsiders, in some cases by the same forces that sought to eradicate the teaching. Yet another difficulty is the fact that sources themselves are exceedingly rare: one of the more complete accounts is a mere four hundred sixty seven characters, and has already been mined by earlier generations of Sinologists such as Edouard Chavannes, Paul Pelliot and Wang Guowei 王国维. Lin combs over every available scrap of evidence, including stele and Dunhuang fragments, to determine what terms contemporary believers would have used referred to themselves, their religion, and their founder. To demonstrate the many problems inherent in tracing an organization through its changing name, he raises the example of two other foreign religions, Zoroastrianism and Nestorian Christianity. Through this analysis of names, Lin shows how Manichaeanism was transformed in China, especially after 841, when the teaching was outlawed in conjunction with the Huichang persecution of Buddhism. During this time, Manichaeanism became known by a wide variety of pseudonyms, most notably the “Teaching of Light” (ming jiao 明教), as well as by a variety of euphemisms such as the “people of the double collar crossings,” some of which were given by outsiders, others used by the teaching itself in order to avoid detection.

Part 2: Formation of Tradition

The next two chapters move forward to the Ming, the point at which many of the diverse ideas in this tradition began to take on a more
clear, organized form. The impetus for this change was certainly not a more favorable political climate. Teachings such as Manichaeism had been suppressed during the Tang, and even if some were briefly rehabilitated, the role that groups such as the “Incense Army” had played in organizing resistance to the Yuan had convinced Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋, their erstwhile ally and founding emperor of the new Ming dynasty, to outlaw them even more strictly than before. Rather, the chapter by Lin Guoping 林国平 shows that this change was due at least in part to an intellectual shift: the consolidation of a tradition of ideas into a coherent theology. Lin examines the transformation of Ming literatus Lin Zhao’en 林兆恩 from Confucian intellectual to religious leader during his lifetime, and into a cult figure after his death. Lin Zhao’en is well known for his synthesis of Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist elements into a single teaching, one that followed upon the “heart-mind learning” of Wang Yangming 王阳明. Initially, Lin spread his ideas only among fellow literati, but his fame and his teachings soon began to spread, buoyed in no small part by the role Lin played in spending his own fortune to alleviate the suffering caused by pirate attacks on the Fujian coast. By the 1580s, Lin had developed a widespread reputation for morality and benevolence, an extended network of missionaries and temples devoted to his teaching, and a large number of followers, many of whom revered Lin as a divine figure. Lin’s apotheosis accelerated after his death. At the same time, his “three-in-one” teaching (Sanyi jiao 三一教) continued to evolve, as new generations of followers added elements such as Buddhist karma and Daoist incantation. Alarmed by its rapid spread, early Ming emperors banned the teaching, but even this did not stop the ideas and apotheosis of Lin Zhao’en from continuing to evolve locally in Fujian.

The subsequent chapter by Ma Xisha traces the evolution of one of the most influential early organizations: the Luo Teaching (Luo jiao 罗教), and its offshoot society called the Green Gang (Qingbang 青帮). Ma uses a combination of Qing archives and sectarian scriptures, known as “precious scrolls” (baojuan 宝卷) to trace the origins of the Luo Teaching to its founder, Luo Jing 罗静, a soldier detailed with the task of transporting grain from the south to the frontier garrison

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at Miyun, near Beijing. After Luo’s death, his teaching broke into branches, which continued to spread among the sailors who plied the riverine grain transport system along the Grand Canal. In this form, the Luo Teaching gave spiritual comfort to this displaced group, but the real attraction of the teaching was as trade and mutual aid organization. Most sailors on the canal belonged to one of three branches, which provided solidarity, lodging, and occasional opportunities for plunder. The relocation of grain transport from the canal system to the open sea during the early nineteenth century decimated the entire industry of riverine transport, prompting many to reorganize into a smuggling gang called the “Friends of the Way of Tranquility and Purity” (安清道友). This group (the apparently ironic title was actually an amalgam of two place names) would eventually transform into the Green Gang, one of the most famous and feared “secret societies” of the modern era. The point that Ma makes in this chapter is that the entire evolutionary trajectory from Luo Teaching to Green Gang was driven by the financial and social needs of its members. The rise of the organization was less a function of religious evolution than of the economic transformation of Qing society.

Part 3: New Teachings and Organizations

The third section introduces the wave of new teachings that appeared in the nineteenth century. Like Ma Xisha’s chapter on the Luo Teaching, these chapters focus primarily on how the teachings functioned in society, but working with the richer sources of a later period, they are able to present a much more detailed image of who led and joined these groups, and how different sorts of individuals, both insiders and outsiders, interacted with the teachings intellectually, economically and socially. One advantage that scholars in the study of more recent events have over their counterparts in the previous sections is the ability to conduct fieldwork, that is, to interview eyewitnesses or their descendants, and occasionally to see the remnants of ideas and practices that still survive in villages today. Among earlier chapters, Lin Guoping had employed fieldwork to sketch out the remnants of the cult of Lin Zhao’én. Two chapters in this section use this sort of data to even greater effect.
The first chapter is Han Bingfang’s 韓秉方 examination of the Yellow Cliff Teaching (Huangya jiao 黃崖教). Like the discussion of Lin Zhao'en's mid-Ming Three-in-One Teaching, this chapter traces the process by which the eclectic ideas of a Confucian literatus came to absorb a variety of religious ideas and practices, and later became the core of a religious and social movement. The ideas that would eventually come to be known as the Yellow Cliff Teaching were formed by the mid-Qing scholar Zhou Taigu (周太古), who like Lin Zhao'en, saw each of the three teachings not as competing entities, but as various expressions of a greater truth. In a theme that was echoed by many of his contemporaries, Zhou Taigu saw his synthetic theory not as a personal innovation, but as the authentic essence of the three teachings, particularly of Confucianism. He thus traced his intellectual lineage through a line of scholarly luminaries, including Zhu Xi, Mencius, and finally to Confucius and the Duke of Zhou. Zhou’s teaching was banned during his lifetime, but like the Three-in-One and Luo Teachings of previous chapters, continued to evolve as separate movements after the death of the founder. Many of these branches died out, but some survived, most notably the Taigu School that moved with its leader Zhang Jizhong 張積中 to establish a utopian community in the mountains of central Shandong province. This community maintained a strict hierarchy of religious authority, a communal ritual regimen, and all of the moral admonitions of a Confucian society, but also took the practical step to arm itself against intrusion from the outside. Their seriousness of purpose cannot be doubted: when government troops moved to dislodge the community in 1866, members fought to the death, and when hope of resistance was lost, many of the remaining members committed suicide.

The second chapter comes from Lu Yao’s 路濤 pathbreaking work on the Yihetuan 义和拳 (Society of Righteousness and Harmony). This group is better known in English as the eponymic Boxers of the Boxer Uprising, an episode that was of pivotal importance to the history of modern China. It marked the death knell of the long-decaying Qing dynasty, and ended with the occupation of Beijing by foreign troops. The political significance of this event has left the earlier origins of the Yihetuan movement deeply mired in controversy. One view that was common to the nationalist scholarship of an earlier era, and has more recently been expressed by Western scholars as well, was that the Yihetuan was primarily an anti-foreign movement, goaded into
action primarily by the callousness of Catholic missionaries operating in Shandong. Another view casts the Yihetuan as another expression of a more enduring tradition of underground militant organizations, one that that shared the religious orientation of groups such as the Luo Teaching or the Yellow Cliff Teaching. Lu Yao falls firmly into this latter camp. He begins by tracing the origins of the Yihetuan to a style of martial arts called the Plum Blossom Fists (Meihua quan 梅花拳), and to the "martial field" (wu chuang 武场) of the Li Trigram Teaching (li gua jiao 离卦教). From there, Lu continues to trace the axis of militarized religion back to groups that flourished in the transition from Ming to Qing, to demonstrate that the Yihetuan did not merely resemble these earlier organizations, it was in fact directly descended from them. In this way, he shows how the late nineteenth century Yihetuan was a continuation of much earlier instances of religious violence, notably the Wang Lun 王伦 Rebellion of 1774, and Lingqing 临清 Rebellion of 1813. Of course, this chapter is only concerned with the origins of the Yihetuan, leaving readers to look elsewhere for the story of its spread and evolution during the uprising itself. Here, it is interesting to refer to earlier chapters, which show the once-unified Luo and Three in One Teachings (not to mention the Manichean tradition) splintering into sects and schools. The Yihetuan underwent a similar process, but much more quickly. The lightning fast transformation of the Yihetuan into a mass movement in 1899 was not a splintering, so much as a river bursting its banks. Once it was loosed, the violence of the movement took on a life of its own, propelled by religious or anti-foreign ideals, but also by economic motives and personal grudges.3

Zhou Yumin’s 周育民 seventh chapter examines the rise of another well-known religious teaching, the Yiguandao 一贯道, or Way of Penetrating Unity. Like many of the chapters in this volume, this piece seeks to unravel the genealogy of an underground organization—no easy task even in the present day. In this chapter, the task is further complicated by the subsequent history of the Yiguandao. While

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2 For example, the Yihetuan bands who destroyed coal mines and railroad tracks in southern Liaoning were composed largely of former workers. Li Zhitong 李治亭, et al., ed. *Dongbei tongshi* 东北通史 [A complete history of the northeast] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guojia chubanshe, 2003): 595-600.
the Yihetuan has been praised by nationalist historians as a patriotic organization, the Yiguandao has trod a more tortuous path: it rose to national prominence as an apocalyptic sect during the 1930s, was crushed in a 1951 campaign, but has since come to flourish in Taiwan and Southeast Asia. Given all that has transpired in the subsequent history of the Yiguandao, understanding its early origins becomes all the more important. As with the Yihetuan, the fundamental question is whether the teaching rose as a response to uniquely modern pressures (in the case of the Yiguandao, this would be the brutality of the Japanese occupation of northern China from 1937–1945), or whether it evolved out of an earlier organization. Here again, a close examination of the historical sources reveals it to be the latter. But the Yihetuan is not merely a point of comparison: Zhou demonstrates that the two movements were concretely linked through a common ancestor in the mid-Qing Blue Lotus Sect (Qinghian jiao 青蓮教). As the other chapters in this section demonstrate, the wave of teachings seen in the late Qing and early Republic were themselves nothing fundamentally new. Rather, what was new was the ability of these organizations to organize on a large and increasingly public scale, and conversely, the decreasing ability of strict hierarchies of patriarchs to maintain unity and order within the teaching. The same process that allowed the Yihetuan to transform into a mass movement also produced a sea of lesser movements such as the early Yiguandao that easily merged, split and cooperated with other teachings.

The final chapter by Yu Songqing 喻松青 is something of a departure from the others in this section, and indeed from the volume as a whole. While earlier chapters trace individual ideas or teachings, this chapter examines “secret popular religion,” (minjian mimi zongjiao 民间秘密宗教) and specifically the place of women within it, as a single, evolving social phenomenon. It begins by examining the presentation of women in scripture: including both moral admonitions for women’s behavior, and the elaborate of female deities, most notably the characteristic sectarian deity, Eternal Venerable Mother (wusheng laomu 无生老母, a name that literally translates as the “unborn mother” but more correctly connotes her transcendence of birth and death.) Beyond the importance of maternal deities, Yu notes that teachings in this tradition often held a special attraction for women devotees, and moreover that women frequently rose to positions of real power in them, both as teachers and even as military leaders. The source of this attraction was partially a matter of opportunity, but more fundamentally the fact
that these shadowy teachings were an organized rejection of the elite Confucian patriarchy. Certainly the elite themselves saw things this way. In his famous anti-sectarian polemic, "A Detailed Refutation of Heretical Teachings" (Poxie xiangbian 破邪详辨), the early nineteenth-century magistrate Huang Yupian 黃育楩 named the mingling of sexes at illicit midnight meetings as among the worst improprieties committed by these groups. Even if these meetings were not themselves sexually promiscuous, Yu holds that they were nevertheless a threat to the fundamental hierarchy of Confucian society, one which both subordinated and feared women. This essay is interesting not merely because it takes such a unique approach to the topic of sectarianism, but also because it is so overtly political. Originally published in 1985, years before most of the other chapters, it reflects the strong Marxist coloring that ran through an earlier generation of scholarship on religion. Yu is certainly correct that these religions had a special attraction for the dispossessed, and were indeed a threat to orthodox hierarchy. The fact that this essay occasionally wanders into the self-reflexive class-based approach of an earlier era (i.e., the landlord class is definitionally hypocritical and lecherous) need not let it distract us from its scholarly contribution.

Themes and Contributions

These essays comprise the best work of some of the most important scholars in the field. Their contribution is as enormous as it is varied. The first chapters weave a detailed picture of an evolving system of belief, all the more remarkable since both authors were forced to work with such scant evidence: scriptures of which nothing remains but a title, incomplete stone stele, or scraps of documents preserved in the sands of Dunhuang.

As we move forward in time, authors of subsequent chapters have far more evidence at their disposal, but not necessarily an easier task. The tradition of scriptures known as known as baojuan began to form during the early Ming dynasty, and presents the theology and history of the new teachings in their own words. The problem is that such scriptures are heavily stylized, and tend to conform to a fairly well-established set of parameters and conventions. The founding of a teaching, for example, will often be written to include a number of stock elements: the moral decay of the world, the sending of a divine
messenger, and miraculous proof of the founder’s power. Some conventions were specifically meant to disguise a teaching’s movements or structure from outsiders, but even these need not be a liability. In some cases, they constitute a kind of code, which this volume’s authors use to their advantage. One recurring theme is reference to the Eight Trigrams (ba gua 八卦). These eight symbols, each consisting of a combination of three whole or broken lines, are both a system of divination, and an expression of a universal cycle of natural phenomena, such as seasons, colors or compass directions. It was a fairly common practice for religious teachings to base their organization on the Eight Trigrams. The founding patriarch of a teaching would name eight disciples, who were then sent off in the eight directions, each to found a lineage named after the corresponding trigram. Thus the disciple of the Li Trigram would travel to the south, the Dui Trigram to the West, and so on. One example is the Heaven and Earth Teaching (Tiandimen jiao), which was founded by patriarch Dong Shihai (董四海) in Shandong Province during the early Qing. According to scriptures preserved locally, Dong sent the disciple Ma Kaishan (马开山) to the north, the direction corresponding to the Kan 坎 Trigram. This branch extends in a more or less straight line to the north of Shandong, corresponding in part to Ma’s actual travels: to Hebei, Tianjin, Beijing, and into Manchuria. The teaching remains active in these areas today, and still refers to itself as the Kan Trigram. The chapters of this volume delve much more deeply into the clues that are coded into this system. Being expressions of basic universal forces (specifically, combinations of yin and yang), the eight trigrams also correspond to elements such as colors, all of which can give clues to a group’s identity. Thus, from a record of a rebel army that “wore black caps, black clothes and shoes, so that they looked like ghosts” Lu Yao concludes that this group belonged to the Kan Trigram, which corresponds not only to the direction north, but also to the color black. Moreover, it is likely that the official who wrote the original record himself did understand the significance of this color, but to a sect insider, such references were commonplace.

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Sources that preserve the views of outsiders, such as criminal investigations, local gazetteers, and the writings of literati, also become more plentiful during this period. Such sources come with limitations of a different sort. As much as scriptures, these writings are also heavily coded, albeit often in a way that hides more about the sects themselves than it reveals. Government accounts, for example, are by nature concerned with criminality, and thus portray religious groups primarily in terms of deviant, treasonous or heretical behavior. This problem is not unique to China: historian of Spanish religion William Christian once compared the use of Inquisition records to “trying to get a sense of everyday American political life from FBI files.” What these chapters reveal is how enduring this official code, what we may think of as the language of orthodoxy, has proven over the course of many centuries. Phrases such as “abstaining from meat and worshiping demons” (chicai shimo 吃菜事魔) appear in nearly every account of banned teachings, and on their own tell us very little apart from the expectations of the writer and his audience. The same may be said for stock concerns about the illicit mixing of sexes at nocturnal meetings, expressed in set phrases such as “gathering at night and dispersing at dawn.” The first chapter in this volume recounts the claim of Song dynasty Manichaeans that: “Those who do not keep the two sexes separate are considered devils, and those who do not allow men and women to touch hands while giving and receiving are considered Manichaeans. Manichaeans will not eat food that has been cooked by a woman.” This strong defense suggests that the group was facing down charges or at least rumors of deviant sexual behavior that (like theft and sorcery) so often among the stock charges levied against any suspicious religious teaching. Interestingly, the exact phrase about not touching hands while giving and receiving also appears in the last chapter, as well. I would argue that part of what makes the evolving

tradition of “popular religion” a discrete institution is precisely the continuity of how and why it was criminalized by the imperial state. In this sense, the tradition continues. The charges raised during the movement to crush the Yiguandao in the 1950s, and more recently, the campaign to suppress Falungong 法轮功 almost always returned to sexual promiscuity, specifically the charge that sect leaders routinely kept brainwashed female followers in a state of sexual slavery.

This brief discussion of sources all points to one of the greatest obstacles to understanding this religious tradition: the problems of naming and terminology. Barend ter Haar has been the most insistent and incisive critic of the categories used in sources. The most notable and problematic of these is the aforementioned “White Lotus Teaching” (bailian jiao 白莲教), a term that was employed by sources, and until relatively recently by scholars to refer generally to the entire religious tradition covered in this volume. The problem is that historically, no White Lotus Teaching, as such, ever existed. Ter Haar’s point is that the use of the term in sources (and thus in official discourse) was more than merely a shorthand convention, it was a way of collapsing this very broad range of groups and teachings into a single category, while at the same time painting it with a single criminalizing brush. In that way, references to these teachings as White Lotus are essentially synonymous with the equally ubiquitous “heresy” (xie jiao 邪教, literally a “crooked teaching,” sometimes translated as “heterodoxy”). Neither term is in any way revealing about the teaching itself, although both are unequivocal statements of official attitudes. “Heresy” was more than just a pejorative, it was a legal category that if applied to a teaching demanded (according to Ming and Qing penal codes) execution for leaders and exile for followers. Thus, while the actual criminal investigations that followed upon an outbreak of religious violence, or occasional treatises such as the Detailed Refutation of Heterodox Teachings (fuxi xiangbian 破邪详辨) might attempt to examine or discuss the teachings in detail, other sources such as local gazetteers were happy to speak in general terms precisely because what was important to them, the criminality of these groups, was summed up very nicely in terms such as “White Lotus.” Something very similar could be said for

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the use of terms like “superstition” (mixin 迷信) by official publications during the twentieth century and today.

The problems of naming and the accuracy of terminology are a recurring theme in many of the essays. Thus, chapters build their arguments around questions such as what exactly was meant by terms such as “Father of Light,” or whether religions recorded with different names in the sources were in fact the same organization. But it also raises the question of the choice of terms used in the study of religion. The “folk religion” title of this volume is one variation of many terms employed by Chinese scholars. Others would include the “secret popular religions” used by Yu Songqing and many others, or the “secret societies” (mimi jieshe 秘密结社, mimi shenhui 秘密社会) that also runs through a broad swath of historical scholarship. It need hardly be said that even if scholars are themselves more sympathetic to these religions than the generations of imperial officials who styled them heresies, the effect is still largely the same: naming a tradition essentially creates, in retrospect, a religious institution. The problem lies in the fact that using a term such as “popular religion” suggests a degree of uniformity and coherence that might have been appropriate in the case of the later teachings, but cannot be written to retroactively include the Ming Luo Teaching or Song Manichaeism into a single line of evolutionary destiny. Such implications do not come from the essays themselves, but rather by their combination into a single volume, and should be taken into account by the reader.

The pitfalls of translation are further complicated by the layers of meaning implied by the English language terminology. It is common, for example, to translate jiao 教 as “sect,” and the so-called White Lotus tradition as “sectarianism.” Some, however, have objected that terms such as “sect,” themselves suggest an air of illegality, and could be taken to imply an illegitimate offshoot of a properly authorized religion. The language used in English translation thus has the danger of simply repeating the pejorative biases of the original Chinese. However, our purpose in this volume was simply to reproduce the Chinese original as faithfully as possible, and not to edit the English in order to fit Western scholarly conventions. “Jiao” thus appears as “teaching” or occasionally as “sect,” as we felt context better suggested. Nor did we alter or comment on those places where a Chinese approach might grate against Western scholarly sensibilities: such as when Lin Guoping asks whether the Three-in-One Teaching was a religion “in the
strictest sense,” or when Yu Songqing includes the perspectives of class struggle. Beyond the obvious fact that we as translators would have no right to do so, we feel that the whole point of this series is to introduce Western readers to the ideas of Chinese scholars, not just their data.

Finally, although I was given the honor of writing the introduction, I would like to express my thanks to my good friend and collaborator Dr. Chi Zhen for having done the hard work on the translation. My own contribution to this effort paled in relation to his, a fact that I gratefully acknowledge here. For entirely selfish reasons, I would also like to thank Brill for inviting me to participate in this project. I had already read many of these classic essays in their Chinese original, but this project required much closer and more detailed attention than I had ever been able to devote to them before. I have learned an immense amount in the process, and hope that the readers of this volume will gain as much from it as I have.