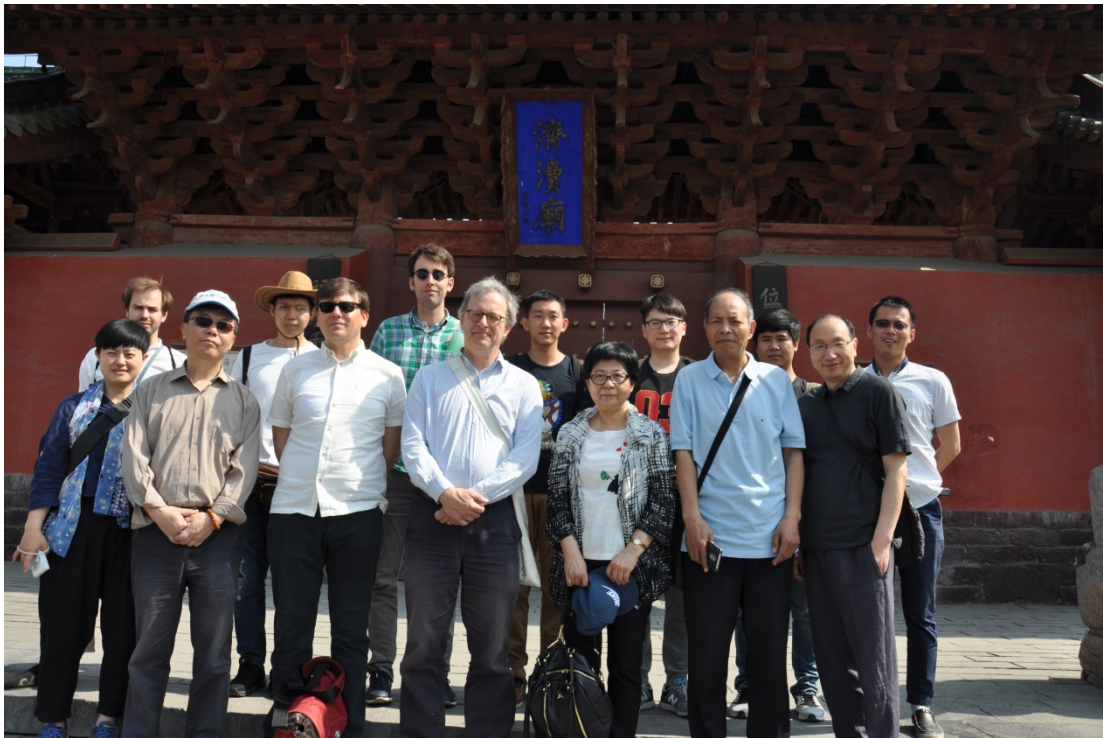


Jiyuan: landscape, inscriptions and the past

Barend J. ter Haar (Oxford University)

With the support of the SSHRC a small group of scholars and graduate students went to Jiyuan 濟源, in western Henan, to collect inscriptions. The group was certainly successful, both in obtaining better versions of inscriptions that we already knew about and collecting a wealth of inscriptions whose existence had gone unnoticed even by the local staff of the Cultural Affairs Bureau. Our principal purpose was collecting inscriptions on and in the Temple of River Ji (*jidu miao* 濟瀆廟) and on the Daoist sites of Wangwu Mountain 王屋山. I focus here on doing research and the importance of imagining the past, rather than more concrete (and hopefully original) analytical results. To me thinking through the problem of imagining the past and the wonderful conversations with colleagues, students and local people—as well as some 200 or so late sixteenth century votive inscriptions containing names, places and amounts of the donations—were the most important results of our expedition. Since this kind of experience is rarely preserved, but remains part of our oral lore destined for direct colleagues, local student and relatives, I thought should write down some of my impressions during and after this visit, organized topically.



The field team (photograph by Liu Jie)

Our lost sense of historical distances and physical effort

In terms of modern transport, the city of Jiyuan and its surroundings can no longer be considered peripheral. One can fly into Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou from most major airports in the world. From there one changes planes to Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan province, and a further bus or taxi drive of several hours brings one safely to any hotel in Jiyuan. The speed and relative comfort of travel—although we still complain of course, having different standards from the past—easily distort our sense of distance. The opening up of Jiyuan by means of motorized transport does this as well. In one single day one can travel from a comfortable hotel in the city centre to visit the surrounding hills and mountains, take a cable car up Wangwu Mountain and climb a staircase of few hundreds steps, and then be back again in our hotel with a shower and comfortable bed within a single day. There is no need to bring food or drinks, for on the mountain there is a restaurant. Besides, one will be back in town before dinner thanks to one's air-conditioned taxi or minibus. I am not complaining, for any other solution would have been very difficult with my personal back pains.



Cheating with transport (the cable car up Wangwu Mountain) (photograph by BtH)

My first and most important task during our roughly one and a half week stay in Jiyuan has therefore been to reimagine distance, both in terms of resources (such as food, drink and means of transport) and the time as well as physical effort required to cover it. This was easiest in terms of climbing Wangwu Mountain, since I have done enough mountain walks in earlier years to be able to reimagine that such a mountain would have been days of work and considerable effort, given the need to carry up food and water. The worship of Heaven on top of this mountain or long term residence in its Daoist monastery since the Tang dynasty were considerable feats of resource mobilisation that are easily overlooked today. Translating our motorized travel over the hills and mountain sides into some imagined traditional

travel is not impossible, although we can probably never imagine the efforts of the servants of our elites who did the hard work of transporting food and water on a regular basis, as well as carrying people up in chairs, moving building materials and furniture, and so forth. What I recommend to every historian is to spend at least some of his or her or their holidays walking, preferably with a backpack and in the summer heat. One might almost recommend this as an obligatory part of graduate training. Certainly in Western research, we are still lacking a good sense of distance in terms of travel time in the different periods of premodern China and for different types of people, goods and information.



Something that is much easier to imagine: impressive sights of a numinous nature (imagine the cable car is not there and think of lots of dirt and sweaty clothes) (photograph by BtH)

A second task was situating the city and its various centres of worship inside and nearby in terms of imperial topography. Nowadays, the name of the city (and former county), “the sources of the Ji-[River]”, make little sense, but once upon a time this river still existed and it started nearby. Being on site made a big difference to our (or at least my own) ability to reimagine the past. We were able to see water springing from the ground, even today, on the site of this centuries old temple for worshipping Ji River and the mythical Northern Sea (*Beihai* 北海) in order to pray for rain/water. Everything here was new, restored or at least much later than the Tang and Song periods, and yet being there gave a sense of connectedness.

Most likely the original source of Ji River was the melting water from the nearby mountains and hills that went underground first and then welled up again, as it still does (but in decreasing quantity) on and near the temple site. The river coincided in part with the Yellow River in the Northern Song. It stayed when the Yellow River took its southern course in the Song and Jin periods, but disappeared when the river moved back in 1855 and took over its bed. It was absolutely exciting to see the water appearing

from the ground, with people washing their clothes in it. Of course, the more important story here as in most parts of northern China is really the growing lack of water. Water is pumped up from deep under the ground to feed the local industry, but that water too will disappear. In earlier imperial times, local water largely meant surface water or wells fed by rain, but in Jiyuan at least some wells were fed by underground water from the mountains. It seems to have been much more abundant and this is an important element of what we need to reimagine when thinking about the area and about the cult for the River Ji that we were studying during our visit.

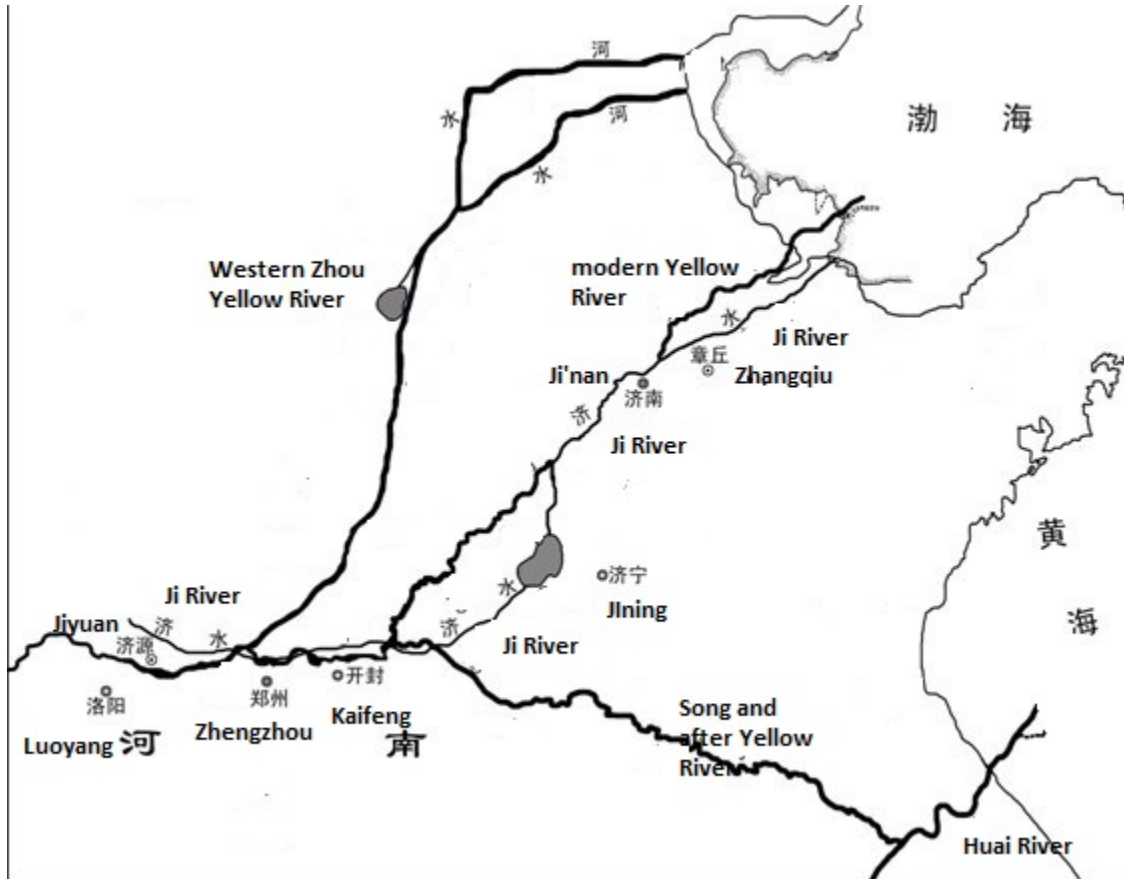


Everywhere in the region the rivers today are largely dried up (photography by BtH)

Learning about this lost river, and the transport that it will have facilitated, explained something mysterious from my own recent research on the cult of Lord Guan (*guangong* 關公), namely the early founding of a temple for Lord Guan in Zhangqiu 章丘 in the north of Shandong in 1113. Moreover, a local inscription already notes a Lord Guan temple in Jiyuan itself for the 1160s (in my little database of early Lord Guan foundations a temple is noted only for 1242, based on an anecdotal source). Jiyuan itself is immediately across the mountains from Xiezhou 解州, where this cult was already prominent in the 11th and early 12th century. Thus, it seems highly likely that a transport route existed from nearby Xiezhou across the mountains through to Jiyuan and then following the Ji River to Jining 濟寧 (the modern name for Rencheng 任城, where an “old” temple for the deity already existed and had fallen long into decay by 1324) and passing by Zhangqiu to enter into the sea. For the salt merchants of southern Shanxi this would have been a logical route for their trade to the regions we now know as

Henan and Shandong, and temple foundations would have resulted naturally from their journeys. Being in the place itself made it so much easier to see such geographical connections.

Reconstruction of the Ji River in earlier days (edited by BtH)¹



An unexpected bonus of our stay for me was the realization how close Jiyuan really was to Luoyang on the other side of the Yellow River, although again modern transport and modern bridges probably create a somewhat distorted sense of closeness. Unless people crossed by boat, the Ford of Meng (*mengjin* 孟津) would have been a traditional crossing point and travel would certainly have been much more time-consuming. Although we came to collect inscriptions, it might be a worthwhile effort to relate the inscriptions historically to buildings and transport, as well as religious or administrative sites and private residences. The landscape has a history and the very different presence of water in the past must have been an important part of it, certainly in Jiyuan. A first impression is that the area was very much connected to the Tang metropolises and much less so the more distant city of Kaifeng, the northern Song Eastern Capital or Bianliang. Maybe a closer study of local inscriptions, both Daoist (our focus on this trip) and Buddhist (ignored during our trip, although rich as well), could provide some answers here. What this means is that the modern feeling of visiting a county located on the margins (making it suitable for military industry in the modern era!) was probably not true of the Tang and before. Even

¹ Reworked on the basis of the map in <http://www.jyts.com/?action-viewnews-itemid-455>.

during the Song and succeeding Jin as well as Yuan dynasties, the presence of a major river would have meant that it was still connected to the outer world.

As I already noted, we made the trip to the top of Wangwu Mountain with the assistance of a modern cable car and convenient stairs made out of “clean” concrete, although it was still tiresome enough for the elderly among us like me. We got a much better inkling of the site the following day. In our minibus we went to a religious site that was located on the other side of the valley and had been visible from Wangwu Mountain. It was called the Grotto of the Queen Mother (*wangmudong* 王母洞). We went up by a detour, which I would be unable to reproduce in text and was quite time-consuming even by car. We walked the last part, but workers were already building an access road to open the site up to tourists as part of the overall Wangwu Mountain package. As I will explain, we were quite lucky that this was not yet complete for we still had the site more or less to ourselves. At the very end of our ascent we encountered a lady of anywhere between 40 and 50 years of age with a backpack, who claimed to have walked down from Wangwu Mountain and up to our location on the other side of the valley in roughly two hours. Clearly, modern transport has to follow roads on the outside of the beautiful natural site and for once this was not quicker. The temple complex consisted of several layers. We proceeded from the bottom to the top, which was the actual grotto and surprisingly cumbersome to get to. There was a small temple built under a huge mountain overhang. On the right hand side above the temple was the entrance to a real grotto, but entering it without proper speleological preparations would have been suicidal.



View down from the grotto (photograph by BtH)

At this point I want to add some observations that came only in the months after our trip, but have some bearing on our imagination of the past as connected to Jiuyan. During the research for a paper on

northern Chinese temple cults, I revisited (on paper!) the cult of King Tang 湯王 that had originally started in Yangcheng 陽城 on the other side of the mountains, in southeastern Shanxi.² Its most likely site of origin is not any of the fictional graves of this king in northern China, but a lake of supposedly immense depth on top of small mountains to the southwest of the county capital. Already in the early 11th century the deity was widely worshipped here for his Holy Water and this pilgrimage extended over the counties and prefectures on both sides of the mountains, including Jiyuan. The pool itself was thought to be connected to the Ji River in Jiyuan. Thus, we can see here a holy geography around water that extended over a considerable distance when we consider how much time and effort travel at the time would have taken.

Re-locating inscriptions

It should surprise few historians of China that inscriptions matter as historical evidence, but re-locating them in their proper historical context in the field today is much more complicated than it might seem. For most of us the inscription is primarily a carrier of narrative information, and we generally rely more on the front side with the proper essay than on the other parts of the stone. This trip brought out again how important it is to take a much broader view of these objects.

An inscription in stone usually is a three-dimensional object located in a potentially meaningful place. Precisely because most people at most times would have been unable to read its contents, its appearance and location must have mattered. Although inscriptions have often been moved over time, and even more so those which have survived the vagaries of time today, their physicality is still very much in evidence today. While their physical quality is difficult to transfer into words, it must have been very much on the minds of those who first erected the stone slabs (through payments and/or providing information to the authors and calligraphers of the texts, and of course to the stone cutters and the people who moved the objects into their final places). Many of the inscriptions are on huge stone slabs, although others are much more modest and some of the most interesting ones we collected (through photographing) during our visits only had one side and were inserted into walls. All stone inscriptions, however, would have lasted a long time. They were placed in visible (and visitable) locations, and even when the inscriptions might get dirty and/or be damaged (ranging from scratches to pieces breaking off) they would remain tangible presences.

The conventional inscriptions on stone slabs standing alone would have four sides. The front side (*beiyang* 碑陽) would normally be directed at the prospective audience (visitors to the temple). It would start with a title of the inscription and or the location (and institution), and contain basic information (in varying sequences) on the formal compiler of the text, possibly even of the calligrapher and stone cutter, and the occasion for the erection of the stone. A longer text might provide all kinds of additional information. Here it is important to keep in mind that the inscription was always a normative genre, telling how people wanted the occasion and the location or institution to be remembered, rather than providing the kind of descriptive information we prefer today. More seriously is a problem that I experienced a lot in writing about the White Lotus movement of the Song and Yuan period, and more

² Barend J. ter Haar, "The rise of northern Chinese regional temple cults", paper for "The Emergence of a Temple-Centric Society, AoE Historical Anthropology of China Conference, CUHK, 28-30 September 2017".

recently in writing about the deity Lord Guan. Authors writing about the White Lotus halls would feel no compunction in giving very different religious information than one suspects was true for the actual believers in question. Similarly, when writing about the cult of Lord Guan much information on local beliefs and stories was left out (including oral folklore), with the authors usually waxing about the historical figure based on historical sources instead of local traditions. I only discovered such discrepancies by comparing these texts with other types of sources, showing that the narrative texts on the inscriptions are not necessarily reliable. They were normative monuments both on a physical and a textual level, with empirical information only as a secondary result for the good reader.

When inscriptions are published in collected works and local gazetteers, this is usually limited to the text and the name of the author. Even specialized collections of inscriptions will generally only include the textual part of the front side, which means the narrative as well as the titles and names of the signatories. But an inscription as a stone monument also often contained extensive adornments, such as two or more dragons playing with a pearl on top of the inscription or another type of ornament relevant to the intended location and institution. The stone slab might be placed on a giant turtle. These additional elements further confirm the nature of the inscription as a monument, rather than merely a source of information for posterity. The author of the inscription may, but may also well not be connected to the location and the institution. It will rarely be mentioned in the inscription itself, but quite possibly he was paid for his job (*runbi* 潤筆) and based himself on a sheet with information provided by locals. What continues to surprise me is how rare are inscriptions that are primarily devoted to pictures. The visual dimension of a cult was taken care of by statues, wall paintings and the general adornment of the temple, but there was little room for it on the inscriptions. A picture would have been an object of worship and this is something that these inscriptions never, or at least only rarely, were. Instead they commemorated an occasion, which was generally the building or restoration of a temple or part thereof, or less frequently an important ritual.

The back sides (*beiyin* 碑陰) of inscriptions are often ignored, but potentially quite interesting. Not all inscriptions will have a back side containing writing, but when they do we usually find long lists of names. If so, this is an indication of the collective nature of such enterprises, because money, grain, labour or otherwise had been contributed by a large group of local or regional donors. Although we may not learn precisely how these people were brought together, even the mere fact of such a large group contributing means that there were local mechanisms for creating cooperation beyond smaller geographical units. In a number of instances we even learn what kind of people these were (for instance their professions or social backgrounds) and where they came from geographically. Sadly, we usually have no way of ascertaining their personal backgrounds in other sources, since most historical evidence in local histories is limited to people with examination degrees. Oral history might help with the recent past, but it seems unlikely that this goes back beyond the late Qing period.

In one especially interesting case in Jiyuan, the back of an inscription for a stone bridge from the 1160s had been reused in the fifteenth century for the Temple for the River Ji that included a map of the then temple complex. Even on the side of the inscription were further pictures and texts—an absolute rarity. One suspects that in this second life the inscription was placed in such a way that the older inscription was no longer visible, but this can no longer be ascertained as it now stands in a special pavilion in the

main courtyard. The frequent relocation of inscriptions, especially in the recent past as a result of political upheaval and economic development, means that it has become more difficult to see the stones in their original physical context. New contexts are also interesting and relevant—and we paid considerable attention to them during the field visit—but the historian in me would love to know more about the old contexts as well. Again some reimagining is needed.

Maybe I can quote here the oldest description that I have found of this site, by top Jin-Yuan official and intellectual Yuan Haowen in his *Sequel to the Record of the Listener*. I will discuss it and other evidence I have found in local gazetteers more extensively when I get to the work of analysing some of the inscriptions on the use of the pool in a ritual context; here I only present my first tentative translation.³

The Temple of the Source of the Ji River was erected in the Sui period. Behind the temple is a big pool. The city/county/local people see it as the “son of the sea”. They offer it alcoholic drinks and underworld money or other kinds of sacrifices. They throw all of it in this sea-pool. Every year towards the end of spring the paper ash floats up from the bottom of the water. They call it a Great Offering of the Sea. The water also has times that it is pure and transparent, so you can regularly see the objects on the bottom of the pool. Sometimes the wine goblets or umbrellas/parasols and fans (sic!) float towards the water surface. They call it Divine Donations. Even when they are heavy such as silver cups and perfume boxes, they also float up. Those who come to watch stand around the water. Wherever the objects arrive the people get them. They ladle it out with a long bamboo sieve. They pay their respects for the donation and leave. The wine goblets all have inscriptions with dates and names. When you drink from it, it is said that it often [still] has a taste/smell. 濟源廟，隋時建。廟後大池，邑人以海子目之。獻酒及冥錢，或他有所供，悉投此海池。每歲春暮，紙灰從水底出，謂之海醮。水亦有澄徹時，池底物歷歷見之。或時水底酒尊、傘扇浮游水面，謂之神賜。雖重若銀盃、香合，亦浮。觀者環水而立，物所至，人得之，以長漉籬挹取，拜賜而去。酒尊皆有鐫記，年月、姓名。飲之往往有味云。

Assuming that this process continued over the centuries, this would also explain why in modern times so few objects were found from the pool. Whenever underground water (probably melting water from the nearby hills and mountains, hence the specific mention of the “end of spring” or roughly April) welled up, this was strong enough to bring heavy objects to the surface that were then taken out by the local population. According to the local exhibition only a jade slab was found in modern times, so either the excavation report is incomplete or all other precious objects had long since disappeared.

³ Yuan Haowen, *Xu yijian zhi* (Beijing, 1986) 1: 21.



A platform bordering the pool for throwing sacrifice into the water (photograph by anonymous source)

One can think of further aspects to the history of these stone inscriptions, which might be relevant even though hard to investigate in practice. When a large number of stones is investigated in one go, as we did to some extent during our trip, it becomes clear that the quality of the stones also varied. This raises the question whether one could investigate the quality and provenance of the stone, which might be a source of information on local trade and transport if done on a sufficiently large scale.

One especially remarkable find were the literally hundreds of votive inscriptions that we found in temple walls from the Yuan period onwards. The oldest ones that I saw were incorporated in the walls of the big Buddhist temple in Jiyuan and dated from the Yuan. Otherwise, we photographed large collections on two halls of the Yangtai Palace 陽臺宮, an important Daoist institution at the foot of Mount Wangwu, and on a gate structure on the very top of the same mountain. All of these votive inscriptions went back to the late Ming period. I saw similar, but much smaller sets, in several other religious buildings which we visited briefly, such as a Temple for Emperor Guan just outside Jiyuan and another Daoist institution that was largely derelict. All of these votive inscriptions had been completely ignored by past researchers and we were even told that there simply were no inscriptions in these locations. Clearly, their prosaic nature (names, places and the size of the donation) meant that they were not experienced as relevant sources. In my view they were the most important find of our trip and I hope to analyse them in future articles.

Keeping in mind the living religious landscape today

Some of the places that we visited were still alive, albeit barely, and others were already dead. Western students of living religious culture on the mainland are often elated how much still exists, but like many previous visits this brief fieldtrip once again brought out how limited this restoration of traditional religious culture is outside of Fujian. I will briefly relate some of my experiences here, in an anecdotal way since we did not carry out proper fieldwork and I was unable to make full notes.



We tend to focus on what has survived, but most temples are gone or in ruins (photograph by BtH)

As far as I could judge, the site on top of Mount Wangwu is religiously dead, although I would not be surprised if a Quanzhen monk will be stationed there (again?) at one point. The order is clearly (re-?) claiming local religious sites that were historically connected to Daoist tradition. As an academic I am agnostic on whether this is good or bad, although I obviously would have preferred to have had religious continuity from the Qing dynasty onwards or more. The present situation is also a bit misleading, as we can clarify with the example of the Temple of the Ji Stream (*jidu miao* 濟瀆廟), as the Temple for the Source of the Ji River is called today. It would seem that already before “liberation” (1949) part of the temple had been reused for other purposes, including revolutionary meetings. After 1949 a secondary school was located here and one of our Chinese colleagues even went to school here for a year. In the 1990s the modern buildings were removed and the temple was slowly restored. During our visit the precise history of the earlier defrocking of the complex and its gradual restoration (which is still going on) was not entirely clear. What is clear is that the temple had been managed by Daoist priests for a long time already (one inscription mentioned a Daoist priest as a manager around 1800) and that they were back in charge again. They had been away during the Cultural Revolution, when everything had been closed down, although it seems that some (old?) people living nearby had kept an eye on the temple.

Every day, but especially on the first and fifteenth of the moon month, people would still come to pray, burn incense, lit firecrackers, and offer sacrifice in the palace of the Temple of the Jade Emperor, an old temple complex in a wing to the left of the main site. We visited several times, and during one visit we witnessed a middle aged (anywhere from 30 to 50 years of age, by my estimate) female medium and a small group of customers in one of the halls. The various people worshipping were not very young, but not terribly old either, indicating a living practice. Two Daoist priests were living in the temple complex, in halls in a wing to the right of the main site. Since this was the main religious site within the city of Jiyuan, one suspects that people came because of the presumed numinous qualities of the site as a whole, rather than the specific historical location.



Weapons out of wood and booklets to take away for free (photography by BtH)

In the smaller townships around the city other temples had also survived and were (still) active (again). There was a Buddhist monastery dating back to the Yuan in which Buddhist rituals and lay gatherings were still held. We visited several Lord Guan temples. One of them had been moved recently during an

expansion of a local road, but it was still active and the location of a local market. The most intriguing detail here was the presence of traditional ritual arms that had been moved from another temple that was recently taken down. Clearly, someone still cared for these objects. Here we also found locally printed religious texts, including a digest of the *Longhua jing* 龍華經, which I know in its full form as a messianic text from the early Qing. At another temple for the same deity in Zhicheng Township 軹城鎮 just outside Jiyuan we met several women, one of whom was an older lady who had already been “numinous” (*ling* 靈) since she was a small child of four or five. More recently she had cultivated in a small hall behind the temple for 100 days in the evening, and assisted by a teacher (*shifu* 師傅). They counted part of the exercises in terms of the number of candles that were burned, which reminded me of the use of incense sticks to count time during Chan meditation. Her teacher was now circa 70 years of age. He had been “mad” (*feng* 瘋) 30 years ago, but recovered by self-cultivation and now had female pupils. On our very last day in the field, we encountered a similar case of a lady who had a mental breakdown after her first (and only) child. We were unable to follow up the nature of the breakdown, which might simply have been a postnatal depression. What happened is that she left her child and family behind, and became a Daoist practitioner in a temple somewhere. As far as we could judge during our brief conversation, she was quite stable now and had been very active in restoring the rather derelict Daoist institution where she had been living for a few years now (not the place she originally went to). The way in which depressions and other temporary mental problems was positively translated into religious experiences and vocations can of course be traced back many centuries.

When we visited Yangtai Palace at the foot of Wangwu Mountain, I was unable to take full notes during our interesting conversations. There was a very active community of Daoist monks and nuns here, which had even established an official Daoist seminary. According to our informant there were now some 80 monks on the mountain itself and they had seven monasteries. One of these is the Fengxian Belvedere in Jiyuan city itself, which was better protected during the Cultural Revolution and where several of the monks of this network now guard the temple and provide simple rituals. They live in a house nearby. The community at the Yangtai Palace is well-organised and still expanding. They possess numinous treasures, such as giant *ge* roots (*gegen* 葛根), which are said by them to be very good for medicinal purposes, and something they called Taisui 太歲.⁴ We were asked to split in two groups and wash our hands beforehand, after which we were led into the special room where this object was being kept. Too many visitors at the same time would have disturbed it too much. When workers on the steep road through the hills first found this, lots of bad things were happening at the time. They brought it to the monastery, where the monks prayed for it and recited scriptures. After this, the bad things stopped—possibly connected to the road building activities. Whatever it is, it is kept in a huge bronze vessel filled with water of easily a meter in diameter. According to the abbot it is alive and breathes, and will get to a huge age. It is somewhat translucent. They add a little bit of water every year and it has now grown from the original 20-30 cm to its present state, filling up the entire vessel of more than a meter in diameter. The community believes that it can get angry and then project its energy outward. We were told that visitors have reported that they felt its energy at some distance already. We were asked to

⁴ In early anecdotal literature when this object is found on earth it is usually described as an amorphous object. The Taisui is (also) a star that can harm people.

hold our hands above it to feel its breathing. The water from the vessel is supposed to have healing properties. I am not sure whether I got all the details right, but as so often the most important part of this experience for me was the realisation that what I read about in century-old texts is still happening today, in China as much as in our own cultures. People continue to create new holy places and numinous objects. The abbot, like more abbots whom I have encountered over the past years, was a very enterprising man. In this case he was a former businessman from Shanghai, who had found his calling here.

A few days later we visited the Grotto of the Queen Mother. Apart from an appreciation of the natural beauty of the site or the cumbersomeness of access, and of course the inscriptions that obsessed us throughout our field visit, the most important experience for me was a ritual being performed in one of the halls of the temple. The entire temple was clearly still active, with small groups of people coming in to burn incense and bring simple offerings. There is also a Daoist monk residing in the hall, who can perform simple rituals. In one of the halls, four people were gathered. They were a single customer, who was a middle aged older lady from a non-identified place, and three other people (two male and one female, all of middle age, one of the men a bit older) from nearby Jiyuan. At first only the lady and one younger man sang in the local language (sadly I did not understand much of it), accompanied by clappers (*kuaiban* 快板) and the wooden fish (*muyu* 木魚), in a kind of sing song style (definitely not sutra recitation, it sounded more like songs with the same line length throughout). They remained standing throughout on the left side of the altar (when looking at the deities); the younger man burned yellow paper (money?) at various points during the recitation. The older man sat on the other side on a bench and at a certain point he seemed to be inspired (possessed?). The customer was told to kneel at various points during the ritual. They later explained that this was a ritual to pray for her good fortune. They had driven here together from Jiyuan; how the first contact with the customer was made remained unclear to me.



Two of the local ritualists with their customer sitting on the left (photograph by Liu Jie)

Whilst driving around through the countryside we passed by a temple hall that was being restored and once belonged to a Daoist temple 清虛宮, with more temples around it. By now only the hall and a modern stage in front of it were left. The most interesting experience here was our meeting with a very old man in his eighties. He did not want to have his picture taken, because that would take his soul away. We obviously complied. The local inscriptions had all been taken away in the 1960s to build a bridge nearby, a fate that has destroyed many inscriptions all over China (whether for a bridge, roads, pig pens or otherwise).

Within the outskirts of Jiyuan we visited a Lüzu Temple 呂祖廟 in Chengliu Township 承留鎮. The temple was closed, but somebody knew who the keeper was. Soon an older lady on a scooter arrived from her little shop nearby. As it turned out she was also a descendant of the family of Confucius, like one of our colleagues. More to the point, she told us how she had taken over as chair of the temple committee three years ago from a very old (+80) predecessor. She proudly told how they had driven out the Daoist priest under her leadership, according to her because he charged too much for his rituals and cheated. They were also engaged in a struggle with a local hospital that had been built on the terrain of this temple, in order to regain control over the land. Although they had, again according to her, won the lawsuit, the hospital would not leave. Near the temple had originally been quite a large number of temples, now all gone.

Maybe I should end on something that we consciously overlooked, but was still very present in parts of the city, which is Islam. Since our focus was on Daoist inscriptions (and whatever we encountered in that context) we largely ignored both Buddhist and Islamic institutions. State cults such as those at the

Temple of the Ji River (to the river and to the Northern Sea) or Daoist locations such as those on Wangwu Mountain did not function in isolation from other religious institutions. Moreover, the people supporting one cult probably also participated in other cults. When I wandered around, I witnessed a large and flourishing Islamic community. Since I did not come equipped with the proper field forms that any informant now needs to fill out to indicate his/her/their willingness to us using the information, I cannot include any information here beyond the anonymized picture of the entrance of their mosque.



The entrance of a local mosque in Jiyuan photography by BtH)