

The FROGBEAR project is supported in part by funding from the  
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

## **The Jidu God contra the Dragon King: State Domination and Local Autonomy of Water God in Late Imperial China**

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2024.4

Favourable weather with moderate rainfall was probably the most urgent desire of large populations of Chinese peasants in premodern times. Rain not only plays a decisive role in agricultural production in an agrarian state but also directly or indirectly influences dynastic stability and political legitimacy. For the state and local society controlling rain (both rainmaking and rain-stopping) was always a main divine function of numinous water gods and deities. The water gods who can control rain can be divided into two groups, official and communal.

Official water gods were those who are derived from Confucian texts and ancient tradition, institutionalised in the state ritual code, and sacrificed to by the government; for example, the Gods of Four Waterways, the Gods of Four Seas, the Master of Rain, the Gods of *Sheji* 社稷 (Gods of the Earth and Cereals) and the God of *Jiugong guishen* 九宮貴神 (Noble Gods of the Nine Palaces). In imperial China performing state sacrifice concerning the Four Waterways was one of the most common and significant official methods of praying for rain. Among the gods of these sacred rivers the sources informing us about the Jidu God 濟瀆神 (God of the Ji River) are the richest. The frequent diversions of the Yellow and Huai rivers, and changes of sacrificial sites of the Yangtze River, resulted in the loss of many local records. By contrast,

although the Ji River completely disappeared in history from the division period, a considerable number of stele inscriptions concerning imperial sacrifice to the Ji River and the Jidu God are still preserved in the Jidu Temple 濟瀆廟 (temple of the Ji River).<sup>1</sup> The first half of this paper seeks to clarify diverse official methods of controlling rain and, particularly, examines how state rites functioned at a local level, as well as investigating the role of the Jidu God in local society.

The category of communal water gods includes all national and regional gods who are thought to be equipped with the extraordinary superpower of controlling water to save people from drought and flood. For example, the Dragon Kings, Lord Xiao 蕭公 and Lord Yan 晏公 in Jiangxi Province 江西省 (Wang Yuanlin 2016: 427-440, 2020: 105-116), Auspicious and Numinous Lady 靈應夫人 (*lingying furen*) in Shaanxi Province 陝西省 (Qin and Bujard 2002: 26-29), Tai Dai 台駘 in Shanxi Province 山西省 (Miller 2007: 39-40).<sup>2</sup> Some of them, like the Auspicious and Numinous Lady, Lord Xiao and Lord Yan, were granted titles by the court and officially added in the roll of state sacrifice. But most regional water deities were not recognised by the central government and were thus often criticised as “licentious cults” 淫祀 (*yinsi*) or “heterodoxy” and even wiped out by local governors because they were seen as threats to local society.<sup>3</sup>

In late imperial China the Dragon King was the most influential communal water god. As an exotic water god originally from India, the Dragon King underwent a process

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<sup>1</sup> The Jidu Temple is the only extant official temple of the Four Waterways.

<sup>2</sup> Both Lord Xiao and Lord Yan were deceased officials, and they were granted official titles in the Qing dynasty. The Auspicious and Numinous Lady was said to be the second daughter of Emperor Yao, Nüying. She was also thought to be the goddess of the Xiang River (see Chapter 4). Tai Dai was a descendant of Shao Hao 少昊 and a chief officer of water management. He was honoured as the God of Fen River 汾河.

<sup>3</sup> For the study of licentious cults, see Kleeman, 1994, pp. 185-211.

of sinicization and gradually became popular in the community.<sup>4</sup> However, the official water gods, like the Jidu God, still played an important role, and the state ritual was never replaced by the popular devotion to the Dragon King in local society. In the second half of this chapter, I shall take the Jidu God and the Dragon King as examples to analyse the interaction of official and communal rites. By examining the government's distinct attitudes towards official and communal water gods, I investigate how the state used religion to exert control over local communities and how those communities tried to achieve local autonomy over rainmaking.

### 1 Official Rainmakers and Methods of Controlling Rain

Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), one of the most famous poets in the Song dynasty, addressed the following official prayer for rain after a prolonged drought (西路闕雨於濟瀆河瀆淮瀆廟祈雨祝文 “*Xilu queyu yu jidu hedu huaidu miao qiyu zhuwen*”) in three of the four temples of Great Rivers (the Jidu 濟瀆廟, Hedu 河瀆廟 and Huaidu 淮瀆廟):

伏以水旱之事，山川所司。農服穡以有秋，天密雲而不雨。愧我不德，瀆於有神。願為三日之霖，大慰一方之望。國有常報，我其敢忘。

The mountains and rivers should have taken the responsibility of avoiding flood and drought. The peasants are eager to gather in the harvest of autumn. However, there is no rain but heavy clouds. I confess my loss of virtue and feel guilty for the gods. Hope to have three-days of copious rain to save the desert region. I will never forget to pay a debt of gratitude.

-*Sushi wenji*, Vol. 44.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “The Dragon King” (*longwang* 龍王) was a Chinese translation of “naga”, which was originally an Indian water god. I will return to this later.

<sup>5</sup> My translation. The exact time of writing the prayer is unknown, but it has great possibility that Su Shi addressed it in the Yuanyou years 元祐年間 (1086-1094). The text is found in the *Sushi*

Su Shi's prayer provides further evidence that it was commonly acknowledged, by the well-educated Confucian officials and literati, that the gods of the sacred mountains and rivers were in charge of rain. Offering sacrifice to them was the most important and effective way of making or stopping rain. When there was a drought or flood the gods of sacred mountains and rivers would be the first resort of government.

The official methods of controlling rain can be dated back to the Shang dynasty. For example, in the Shang dynasty, black sheep were often offered as sacrifice to pray for rain (Wang 2013: 172-180).<sup>6</sup> In the Shang and Zhou dynasties the cruel practice of "ritual exposure of a shaman" 暴巫 (*puwu*) was another way of rainmaking (Schafer 1951: 130-133).<sup>7</sup> My research shows that, in addition to offering sacrifices to the gods of the sacred mountains and rivers, there were at least five types of official method of controlling rain in imperial China. Each of these methods is described below.

### 1.1 The Yu Ritual

The Yu Ritual 雩祀 (*yusi*) is one of the earliest known rites for invoking rain. We know about it from Shang oracle-bone inscriptions. The character, *Yu* 雩, according to the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, the oldest extant Chinese dictionary, compiled by the Eastern Han scholar Xu Shen 許慎 (30 A.D. -124 A.D.), refers to a rainmaking dancing rite to entertain the Yan Emperor 炎帝 (i.e. *Chidi* 赤帝) in the summer.<sup>8</sup> The

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wenji 蘇軾文集 (*Collected Writings of Su Shi*), no. 3, p. 1294.

<sup>6</sup> According to Wang Tao, the colour of sacrificial animals had special meaning: black is often associated with water in the Shang. See Wang Tao, 2013, pp. 172-180.

<sup>7</sup> Before Edward Schafer, Chen Mengjia used Shang oracle-bone inscriptions to investigate a rainmaking ceremony called *chi* 赤, which is similar to the ritual of exposure of shamans. See Chen Mengjia, 1936, pp. 485-576.

<sup>8</sup> “夏祭，樂於赤帝，以祈甘雨也”。In the *Shuowen jiezi*, 1963, p. 242. For Jeffery Snyder-Reinke, *Yu* 雩 was used interchangeably with the characters *wu* 舞 and *zouwu* 奏舞 to refer to dances performed in times of drought to bring rain (Snyder-Reinke 2009: 38). It is still unclear what actions are involved in the ceremony, but to be sure, in addition to dancing, *Yu* ritual contains many procedures and had multiple functions. In the *Chunqiu gongyangzhuan zhushu* 春秋公羊傳註疏, the Eastern Han scholar He Xiu 何休 (129 A.D. -182 A.D.) stated the *Yu* ritual: “it involves eight

Yu sacrifice, although it had a Shang shamanic origin, was regarded as a formal rainmaking sacrifice in the *Zhouli*.<sup>9</sup> According to the chapter of *Yueling* 月令 (*Proceedings of Government in the Different Months*), officials hosted the Yu sacrifice in the second month of summer (仲夏月):

命有司為民祈祀山川百源，大雩帝，用盛樂。乃命百縣，雩祀百辟卿士有益於民者，以祈穀實。農乃登黍。

Orders are given to the (proper) officers to pray for the people and offer sacrifice to the (spirits of the) hills, streams and all springs. (After that) comes the great summer sacrifice for rain to God, when all the instruments of music are employed. Then orders are given throughout all the districts to sacrifice to the various princes, high ministers and officers who benefited the people; praying that there may be a good harvest of grain. The husbandmen present (the first fruits of) their millet.

-*Liji*, chapter of *Yueling*<sup>10</sup>

In the Zhou dynasty the Yu ritual became very common. A lot of institutions participated in this ritual. Moreover, there was an exclusive tax to sustain the Yu sacrifice, which was called “*yulian*” 雩斂.

The Yu ritual is frequently mentioned in pre-Qin texts.<sup>11</sup> The formal Yu Ritual practised by the Zhou was abolished and replaced by another Yu rainmaking ritual in the early Han dynasty.<sup>12</sup> In the Tang dynasty, according to the *Kaiyuan li*, the Yu Ritual

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boys and eight girls dancing and shouting” (雩，旱請雨祭名。不解大者，祭言大雩，大旱可知也……使童男女各八人，舞而呼雩，故謂之雩), in the *Chunqiu gongyangzhuan zhushu*, 1999, p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> The original text is “若國大旱，則帥巫而舞雩”, in the *Zhouli*, chapter of *Chunguan zongbo*.

<sup>10</sup> The text is found in the *Liji*, chapter of *Yueling*.

<sup>11</sup> “Yu” appears over twenty times in the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (*Spring and Autumn Annals*).

<sup>12</sup> The original text is “漢承秦滅學，正雩禮廢。旱，太常祝天地宗廟”, in the *Tongdian*, vol. 43, p. 1201. The Emperor Wudi of Liang had tried to standardise the Yu ritual, but the new rite was not adopted by successive dynasties. See Lei, 2009, pp. 299-300.

was held in the fourth lunar month.<sup>13</sup> Compared to the Zhou Yu Ritual, the Tang government deliberately got rid of the shamanic elements. The Song government carried out this ritual, but it was only performed when drought occurred. Therefore from the Song to the Qing dynasty, there was no regular Yu Sacrifice. In 1742 the Yu sacrifice was institutionalised when imperial censor Xu Yisheng 徐以升 (? - 1738) sent a memo to the Emperor Qianlong 乾隆帝 (r. 1735-1796) to suggest that an altar dedicated solely to perform the Yu sacrifice should be erected within the city walls (Snyder-Reinke 2009: 53-54). Since then there co-existed two kinds of Yu ritual, a regular Yu Ritual 常雩 (*changyu*), which was performed in the fourth lunar month every year; and a great Yu Ritual 大雩 (*dayu*) that was conducted only during drought.

## 1.2 The *Jiugong guishen* Sacrifice

The cult of the *Jiugong guishen* 九宮貴神 (Noble Gods of Nine Palaces), formed in the Tang dynasty, had a tight connection with Daoism. The cult was enlisted in major sacrifice by the Emperor Xuanzong of Tang in 744. The concept of “nine palaces” 九宮 (*jiugong*) originated in the *Luoshu* 洛書 (*Writing of the Luo River*).<sup>14</sup> The promotion of the *Jiugong guishen* to the highest level of state rites during the reign of Xuanzong aimed to create new official gods for controlling water. As the *Jiutang shu* wrote,

九宮貴神，實司水旱，功佐上帝，德庇下人。冀喜穀歲登，災害不作。

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<sup>13</sup> Jeffery Snyder-Reinke argued that “in the Song dynasty, it (the Yu sacrifice) began to be performed at the round altar 圓丘 for imperial sacrifices” (Snyder-Reinke 2009: 52). This is wrong. According to the *Xianqing li*, the Tang Yu sacrifice was already performed at the round altar during the years of Xianqing 顯慶年間 (656-661) of the Tang dynasty.

<sup>14</sup> The *Luoshu* is one of the two mysterious cosmological diagrams in ancient China. The other one is the *Hetu* 河圖 (*Diagram of the Yellow River*). The *Luoshu* is a chart that was composed of nine groups of dots, representing the numbers from 1 to 9. Both the *Hetu* and *Luoshu* are employed to explain the correlation of the hexagrams of the *Yijing* 易經 (*Book of Changes*) with the universe and human life. For the study of the *Jiugong guishen*, see Xiong, 1996, pp. 273-279; for the study of the *Luoshu* in Chinese religion and philosophy, see Cammann, 1961, pp. 37-80.

The Noble Gods of Nine Palaces take responsibility for flood and drought. They assist the High Lord and protect the people. Hope there be harvest and no disaster occurs.

-*Jiutang shu*, chapter of *Liyi zhi*<sup>15</sup>

During the Tang dynasty the *Jiugong guishen* Sacrifice was held in the first month of each season. Because it was listed in major sacrifice, the emperor was required to be present and to serve as the chief leader of the ritual. The Song government continued to sacrifice to the Noble Gods of Nine Palaces and kept them in the list of Major Sacrifice (Pi 2008: 151). But later on, as the Song government grew increasingly disconnected from Daoism, the rite was transformed into a regular imperial sacrifice (Pi 2008: 151-152). After the Song dynasty this cult was seldom mentioned in official records.

### 1.3 Sacrifice to the Master of Rain, the Count of Wind and the Gods of the Earth and Cereals

The Master of Rain 雨師, the Count of Wind 風伯 and the Gods of *Sheji* 社稷 (the Earth and Cereals) were also official rainmakers. The rituals were listed in medium sacrifice in the Tang state ritual system. The *Kaiyuan li* preserves a volume of the complete procedures of sacrifice to the Master of Rain and Count of Wind (vol. 28). In the *Quantangwen* 全唐文 (*The Whole Collection of Tang Literature*), an imperial decree in the 8<sup>th</sup> century (*Qianguan ji wuyue sidu fengbo yushi zhao* 遣官祭五岳四瀆風伯雨師詔 *Edict of Distribution of Officials' Sacrifice to the Five Marchmount, Four Great River, Master of Rain, and Count of Wind*) clearly pointed out the relation of rain and the Master of Rain and Count of Wind:

且潤萬物者，莫先乎雨，動萬物者，莫先乎風。眷彼靈神，是稱師伯，雖有常祀，今更陳祈。

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<sup>15</sup> My translation. The text is found in the *Jiu Tangshu*, chapter of *Liyi zhi*.

For those who fertilise a myriad of things, no one precedes rain. For those who move a myriad of things, no one precedes wind. The spirits of them are called Master and Count. Although there existed regular sacrifice previously, it should be renewed.

-*Quantangwen*, vol. 29.<sup>16</sup>

According to the *Kaiyuan li*, the governors of each prefecture 州 and county 縣 are obliged to host a regular sacrificial ceremony on behalf of the central government as a part of governmental work. The Tang state cults of the Master of Rain, Count of Wind and God of Earth and Cereals were inherited by the successive dynasties till the end of the Qing dynasty.

#### 1.4 Official rainmaking methods

Officially issued rainmaking methods 官頒求雨法 began to appear from the time of the Song dynasty. In 999, during the reign of Emperor Zhenzong 宋真宗 (r. 997-1022), the court adopted a series of measures for making rain to terminate a severe drought. In addition to offering sacrifice to the above mentioned official rainmakers, the Song government first issued an official rainmaking method called “Li Yong’s Rainmaking Method” 李邕祈雨法. The *Songshi* preserves a full description of its process. The core is to make small clay dragons according to the *wuxing* philosophy.<sup>17</sup> To secure the rationality of Confucianism, a well-educated Tang local governor, Li Yong tried to prevent shamans and spiritual media participation in this ritual. As the *Songshi* wrote,

長吏齋三日，詣龍所，汲流水，設香案、茗果、饗餌，率群吏、鄉老  
日再至祝酹，不得用音樂、巫覡。

<sup>16</sup> My translation. The text is found in the *Quantangwen*, 1983, vol. 29, p. 333.

<sup>17</sup> The *wuxing* are not static, however, five dynamic and interacting forces. These five elements consist of Water 水, Fire 火, Wood 木, Metal 金, and Soil 土. See Fung Yu-lan, 1948, pp. 131-133.



The *Zhangli* (minor official of county) should fast for three days before he goes to the place of dragons with water, fruit, food for sacrifice; then lead the fellow officials and local gentlemen to pour wine on the libation. Music and shamans are not permissible.

-*Songshi*, chapter of *Lizhi*<sup>18</sup>

If we compare the chapter of *Qiuyu* 求雨 (*Rainmaking*) in the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (*Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals*), written by Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (192 B.C.- 104 B.C.), the famous Han Confucian scholar, we see that Li Yong's rainmaking method was based on it.<sup>19</sup>

After the promotion of Li Yong's rainmaking method in 999, the Song government promulgated another two official rainmaking methods, including "Drawing Dragon for Rain Method" 畫龍祈雨法 and "Lizard Rainmaking Method" 蜥蜴祈雨法 (Pi 2008: 155). In late imperial times "Master Ji's Rainmaking Method" 紀慎齋求雨法 was also often used in local society.<sup>20</sup>

### 1.5 The Yong Ritual

As one of the most important rituals for stopping rain 止雨, the Yong Ritual 禁祀 (*yongsi*) first appeared in the Confucian classics. In the *Liji*, chapter of *Jifa*, the Yu

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<sup>18</sup> The text is found in the *Songshi*, chapter of *Lizhi*.

<sup>19</sup> The *Chunqiu fanlu* is a work of the New Text tradition, which describes the ethical and political principles found in the *Chunqiu*. It interprets through the medium of the *Gongyangzhuan* 公羊傳 and corroborates in terms of the *yin-yang* and *wuxing* beliefs that were prevalent at the time. The *Chunqiu fanlu* has been regarded by some as the fullest expression of what was adopted as the orthodox doctrine of state in 134. B.C. (Loewe 1993: 77). Dong is best known for helping to persuade the Emperor Wudi of Han to institutionalise Confucian teachings as state ideology in the second century B.C., but he was also instrumental in linking the social and political ideology of Confucianism with the metaphysical claims of *yin-yang* philosophy. In other words, Dong was a ritualist who integrated traditional Chinese cosmogony, religion and Confucianism. For the study of Dong Zhongshu and his work the *Chunqiu fanlu*, see Loewe, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> See Snyder-Reinke, 2009, pp. 119-148.

and Yong Rituals are regarded as the chief methods of controlling rain.<sup>21</sup> There was a story about this ritual in the *Zuozhuan*:

鄭大水，龍鬥于時門之外洧淵，國人請為禱焉。

Once upon a time there was a great flood in the Zheng state. (People saw) dragons' fighting in the *youyuan* pond (which located outside of the Gate of the capital). Then the Zheng people requested performance of the Yong Ritual.

-*Zuozhuan, Zhaogong shijiunian*<sup>22</sup>

In pre-Qin texts the character *Yong* 禱 refers to a ritual exorcism for stopping rain or a great flood.<sup>23</sup> The Yong Ritual consists of three basic steps: first, use thread to tie imperata grass; second, clean a place as a site of ritual; third, use wood to point in the direction of flood. According to the *Zhouli*, the Great Invocator 大祝 (*dazhu*) presides over the ritual. The Yong Ritual was absent in official texts for a long time, but it was again institutionalised in the Tang dynasty.<sup>24</sup> After reviewing the five official methods used to control rain, we now turn to discuss one of the most important official rainmakers, the God of the Ji River, or the Jidu God.

## 2 Divinity on Stele: The Jidu God as An Official Rainmaker

The Jidu Temple 濟瀆廟 or The Temple of the Ji River impresses tourists for its ancient magnificent halls and pavilions.<sup>25</sup> With over 30 buildings constructed from the

<sup>21</sup> The original text is “雩禱，祭水旱也”，in the *Liji jijie*, 1989, pp. 1194-1196.

<sup>22</sup> The text is found in the *Zuozhuan, Zhaogong shijiunian* 昭公十九年 (*The Nineteenth Year of Duke Zhao*). See Yang Bojun, *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu*, 1981, p. 1405.

<sup>23</sup> The original text is “設絛蕝為營以禳之”，in the *Shuowen jiezi*, 1963, p. 26.

<sup>24</sup> Here is a complete process of the Yong sacrifice in the Tang: “若霖雨不已，禱京城諸門，門別三日，每日一禱。不止，乃祈山川、岳鎮、海瀆；三日不止，祈社稷、宗廟。其州縣，禱城門；不止，祈界內山川及社稷。三禱、一祈，皆準京式，並用酒脯醢。國城門報用少牢，州縣城門用一特牲”。 The text is found in the *Jiutang shu*, chapter of *Liyi zhi*.

<sup>25</sup> The full name of the Jidu Temple is “Jidu Beihai Temple” 濟瀆北海廟 (Temple of the Ji River and North Sea), as it was also the site of offering state sacrifice to the North Sea from the Tang

Song to Qing, the Jidu Temple is the only surviving and largely intact architectural structure connected to sacrifice to the Four Waterways.<sup>26</sup> Historically it was the site of sacrifice to the Ji River and the North Sea. The Jidu Temple was established in 582 A.D., during the reign of Sui Wendi 隋文帝. Two years later the county of Jiyuan 濟源縣 was established. The name of “*jiyuan*” literally means “source of the Ji River”.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately there are no Sui and Tang architectural structures remaining except for a broken wall. Extant structures were mostly built in the Ming and Qing dynasties, while the earliest can be dated back to the Song dynasty. Like the majority of traditional Chinese temples, it is composed of rectilinear complexes of building all cardinally orientated to the south (Wheatley 1975: 147-158). See Figure 2.

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dynasty. See Yu Xiaochuan and Cao Guozheng, 2014, pp. 41-46; Yao Yongxia, 2014, pp. 148-162.

<sup>26</sup> Following the axis from the south, there are Gate of Qingyuan dongfu 清源洞府門 (Gate of Pellucid Headstream Grotto, see Figure 1), Gate of Qingyuan 清源門 (Gate of Pure Source), Gate of Yuande 淵德門 (Gate of Profound Virtue), Chamber for the Jidu God 寢宮, Gate of Linyuan 臨淵門 (Gate of Approaching the Chasm), Dragon Pavilion 龍亭, and Lingyuan Pavilion 臨淵閣 (Pavilion of Approaching the Chasm), and so forth. The Yuxiang Place 御香殿 (The Palace of Imperial Incense) and the Tianqing Palace 天慶宮 (Palace of Celestial Celebration) are located at the west and east wings respectively. The Yuxiang Palace was used to rest imperial commissioners and the Tianqing Palace is a Daoist temple which consists of the Hall of the Jade Emperor and houses for the Daoist priests who are in charge of the temple. It was only two years later in 584 that the Tianqing Temple was erected beside the Jidu Temple. Because the Jidu Temple is near Mount Wangwu 王屋山, which is listed in Daoist sacred landscapes and regarded as the First of Ten Great Heavenly-Grottos 十大洞天之首. Thus it attracted large numbers of Daoist priests after it was founded. Daoist priests served in the state ritual to Jidu to seek for approval from the court. Because the ruling class in the Tang dynasty advocated Daoism, they supported and satisfied Daoist priests' requests. Then, a series of Daoist temples were built up around the Jidu Temple, including Ziwei Palace 紫微宮, Yangtai Palace 陽臺宮, Shifang Temple 十方院, Lingdu Temple 靈都觀, Ying'en Palace 迎恩宮 and other temples that have now vanished.

<sup>27</sup> The county of Jiyuan is the modern city Jiyuan 濟源市, in Henan Province 河南省.



Figure 1 Front gate of the Jidu Temple (Gate of Pellucid Headstream Grotto 清源洞府門), photo by Li Teng, 2017.07.

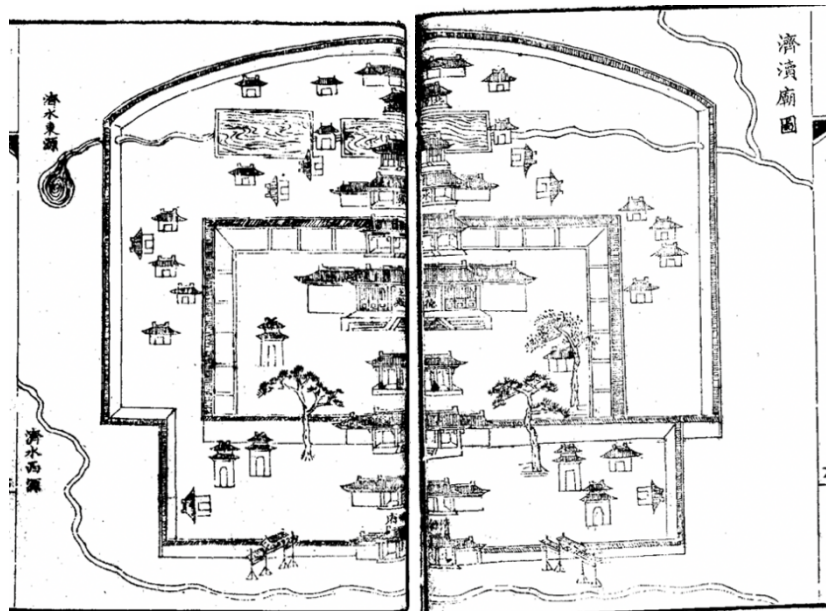


Figure 2 The map of the Jidu Temple in the Qing dynasty, in the *Jiyuan xianzhi*, 1976, pp. 64-65.

In the Jidu Temple there are more than 160 stele inscriptions (from the Tang dynasty to Republican period).<sup>28</sup> The *Jiyuan xianzhi* 濟源縣志 (*Local Gazetteers of*

<sup>28</sup> Some of steles were transferred to the Jidu Temple from Mount Wangwu. Half of them concern the imperial sacrifice to the God of the Ji River. The latest academic investigation of the Jidu Temple in the summer of 2017 (which is sponsored by SSHRC and University of British Columbia, led by Prof. Jia Jinhua; I also joined in) shows that there are in total 163 pieces of stele inscriptions in the Jidu Temple. See the website, <https://frogbear.org/portfolio-item/cluster-2-1-authenticity-and-authority/>.

*Jiyuan*) and *Xu jiyuan xianzhi* 續濟源縣志 (*A Supplement of Jiyuan Gazetteer*) also preserve some lost stele inscriptions. In general, according to the contents, preserved stele inscriptions in the Jidu Temple and local records can be divided into five types:

1. Imperially composed invocations and prayers (御制祭文 or 御制祝文). These official edicts are addressed to the Jidu God of rain on behalf of the emperor (or, the Son of Heaven). Most of them were carved in the Ming and Qing dynasties.
2. Records of tossing Dragons and Tablets after a state-level Daoist ritual 投龍簡記碑. There are at least six stele inscriptions picturing this rite. Interestingly, all of them are dated in the Yuan dynasty.
3. Records of the restoration of the Jidu Temple by missionary or local officials 重脩濟瀆廟碑.
4. Legendary and efficacious stories of the Jidu God and his supernatural power 濟瀆神靈驗故事碑.
5. Steles commemorating the merit and virtue 功德碑 (*gongdebei*) of local people for their donation to the Jidu Temple.

According to these stele inscriptions and local records, from the Tang dynasty, the Gods of the Four Waterways (the Hedu, Jiangdu, Huaidu and Jidu) are not only regarded as the most reliable official rainmakers, but also as symbols of political legitimacy and regional protectors of local society and saviour of local people. We shall now discuss these divine functions in turn.

Making rain was considered to be the most important divine function of the Jidu God. Almost all the Ming-Qing imperially composed invocations and prayers to this god are issued as prayer for rain. For example, in the sixth year of Jiajing 嘉靖六年 (1527), because of a prolonged drought the Jiajing Emperor of Ming 嘉靖帝 (r. 1522-1566) ordered the major local officials of Henan to sacrifice to the Jidu God for rain. Here is the inscription of this event:

國有兇荒索鬼神而祭之，禮也。顧惟大河南北，自冬俱春雪雨全無，  
歷茲九夏□□為雹，□麥未成既歉，自穀播種尤艱，下民嗷嗷，有司用□，  
靡神不舉……

惟神清濟之流，發源王屋，利澤生民，功莫大焉。往歲事禱，恆獲嘉  
應，茲特敬恭，竭誠□官□告□□□幣昭假於神。享祀一方，殄恤捍禦，神  
之職也。尚其默運化機，沛以井雨，俾侍□□□民庶攸賴。

The state will turn to offering sacrifice to the gods and ghosts when  
disasters and famines happen. This follows the rite. From last winter to this  
spring it did not snow or rain at all in the area of north and south banks of the  
Yellow River……the wheats were not fully grown, which led to a poor harvest.  
Seeding was particularly hard, and people are still starving. Officials had tried  
to sacrifice to some gods but received no response……

The Jidu God purifies the Ji River which originates from Mount Wangwu.  
The river fertilizes the lands and benefits all beings. The sacrifices to the Jidu  
God in past years always gained good results. So, I (the Son of Heaven, emperor)  
ordered the official...to offer the silk to you. It is also your duty to protect the  
district. Hope that the Jidu God makes rain to save people.<sup>29</sup>

In imperial China the Jidu God was also used to promote imperial teachings, which  
secured him a political function. A Song stele *Chongxiu jidumiao bei* 重脩濟瀆廟碑  
(*Stele of Restoration of the Jidu Temple*) clearly points out:

惟神上應天命，陰助皇化，膏澤調順，神之職也；多稼豐登，神之力  
也。感我德政，歆我祀事，故生民泰然。

The Jidu God follows the mandate of heaven and promotes imperial

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<sup>29</sup> This inscription of *Qiyu gaowen* 祈雨告文 (*Imperially Composed Invocation for Rain*) is  
absent in all other collections of stele inscriptions but it is perfectly preserved in the Jidu Temple.  
The full text is recorded by Yao Yongxia's book. See Yao Yongxia, 2014, p. 220.

education in the celestial realm. The Jidu God takes responsibility for fertilising lands and controlling rain. It is also the Jidu God's power that makes a good harvest. Thanks to the benevolent government and the pleasing sacrifices to the Jidu God, the people enjoy a peaceful and rich life.<sup>30</sup>

This stele was erected in 973 and was written by the early Song politician Lu Duoxun 盧多遜 (934-985). From Lu's words the Jidu God is not only a water god in charge of favorable weather and good harvest but also a protective god who helps to promote imperial education and state power. The purpose of Lu's inscription is to demonstrate the orthodoxy of the Song after the Song Taizu's conquest of the state of Southern Han 南漢.<sup>31</sup>

In the Song dynasty the Jidu God was regarded as a protector who quelled banditry and secured local people by controlling rain, which won him an officially granted title of "loyal and protective" 忠護 (*zhonghu*). This event was carved on a stele (see Figure 3). Here is the story:

濟瀆廟清源王，利澤溥博，陰福吾氏屬者。寇發鄰郡，將犯縣境，邑人奔走禱于爾大神，雷雨迅興。沁河有湯池之險，旌旗歎列南岸，象羽林之嚴。賊徒褫魄以咸奔，閭里按堵而相慶。奏函來上，休應昭然，嘉歎不忘，宜崇美號，庶答靈貺，式慰民心，來格來歆，一方水賴，可特封：

<sup>30</sup> The text is found in the *Jiyuan xianzhi*, 1976, pp. 665-666.

<sup>31</sup> In November of the fifth year of Kaibao 開寶五年 (972), when the Song court institutionalized state sacrificial system, and then the Emperor Taizu of Song 宋太祖 ordered Li Fang 李昉 (925-996), Lu Duoxun, Hu Meng 扈蒙 (915-986), and other nine ministers to write fifty-two tablet inscriptions about great mountains and rivers and the emperors of the past dynasties were accomplished. Seventeen inscriptions are currently preserved and all of them describe the achievements of sacrifice, the contribution of the emperors and the of building temples for them, which showed a unified writing characteristic and the emperor's intention of pursuing a long-term political legitimacy and social stability. The original text is "太祖平湖南，命給事中李昉祭南嶽.....廣南平，遣司農少卿李繼芳祭南海.....又命李昉、盧多遜、王祐、扈蒙等分撰岳、瀆祠及歷代帝王碑，遣翰林待詔孫崇望等分詣諸廟書於石", in the *Songshi*, chapter of *Lizhi* and Zhao Lei, 2018, pp. 147-153.

清源忠護王。

The King of Pure Source in the Jidu Temple takes advantage of his power to benefit the local people. When the bandits of the neighbouring county prepared to invade the border of Jiyuan County, local people ran to pray to you, the Jidu God. Thunder and rain arrived very quickly. The Qin River immediately had an inaccessible stronghold. Orderly banners suddenly appeared at the south bank, which looked like a strict troop. It seemed that all the bandits were deprived of their soul and they fled away. People in communities stopped them and then celebrated the victory. A memorial was presented to the emperor. The emperor ordered the officials to praise the efficacy of the Jidu God. And the court should grant a great official title to respond to the miracle and comfort local people. The Jidu God shall be granted “Loyal and Protective King of Pure Source”.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> This story is found in the *Jiyuan xianzhi*, p. 673 and Yao Yongxia, 2014, p. 208.





Figure 3 Rubbing of stele inscription of *Imperial Decree of the Loyal and Protective King of Pure Source* (濟瀆清源忠護王誥), from Prof. Kong Qingmao's collection.

In the Yuan dynasty the Jidu God was offered sacrifice by the Mongolian government for the sake of exterminating a locust plague. According to the stele inscription of *Huangtaizi yanwang sixiang beiji* 皇太子燕王嗣香碑記 (*Record of Pilgrimage of the Crown Prince of Yan*), in 1272, the crown prince of Yan, Borjigin Zhenjin 孛兒只斤·真金 (1243-1285) sent Daoist priests to practice *the Great Ritual Offerings to the All-Embracing Heaven* 羅天大醮 (*luotian dajiao*) in the Jidu Temple. To borrow the great supernatural power to fight against the serious plague of locust from the Jidu God, this ritual was exclusively offered to him.<sup>33</sup> Because locust plague

<sup>33</sup> The original text is “皇太子以蝗妖滅息年谷豐登，代命祀於濟瀆”，in the *Daojia jinshilue*, 1988, p. 1102. For the study of this inscription, see Sakurai and Yao Yongxia, 2012, pp. 23-39.

usually occurred as a consequence of severe drought, rain was needed. The real intention of offering sacrifice to the Jidu God in this case was to eradicate the locusts by praying for rain to relieve the drought.<sup>34</sup> Having examined the function of the Jidu God, we now turn to its rival, the Dragon King.

### 3 The Dragon King: The Most Important Communal Water God

The Dragon King 龍王 (*longwang*), whose name originates from the concept of “long” 龍 in early Chinese mythology and whose cult is influenced by Buddhism and Hindu folk belief disseminated from India was transformed into a popular communal water god after the Song dynasty. Although the Dragon King has a strong connection to the creature of *long* (a kind of auspicious animal which was generally regarded as benevolent, powerful, worshipful and lucky and also one of the twelve zodiac animals 十二生肖), it is not a kind of “long”. From the earliest times, the Chinese *long* was thought to live in the waters. For example, in the chapter of *Quanxue* 勸學篇 (*An Exhortation to Learning*) of *Xunzi*, Xunzi 荀子 (also, Xun Kuang 荀況, fl. the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.) said: “If you accumulate enough earth to build a high hill, rain and wind will flourish because of it. If you accumulate enough water to fill a chasm, dragons and scaly dragons will be born within it”.<sup>35</sup> The Tang poet Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772 A.D. - 842 A.D.) also wrote: “It matters not the height, if an immortal resides in a mountain it

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<sup>34</sup> The most famous god for eradicating locusts is General Liu Meng 劉猛將軍. Liu Meng was a real general in history, although stories about him differ. He became a god in the Qing dynasty. In 1724, the Emperor Yongzheng ordered shrines to be built to him throughout the whole country because of his efficacy in eradicating locusts in the Jiangnan area. Until now, the General Liu Meng is still worshipped in parts of Jiangsu Province 江蘇省 and Zhejiang Province 浙江省. On the Study of the General Liu, see Elvin 1998: 217-218 and 2006: 417-419; Kolb 2004: 49-87; Hamashima 2008: 49-61; Bello 2018: 49-80; Chen Guoan and Qiu Zhaoyuan 2020.

<sup>35</sup> The original text is “積土成山，風雨興焉；積水成淵，蛟龍生焉”，in the *Xunzi jijie*, pp. 7-8. I here adopt John Knoblock’s translation. See Knoblock, 1988, p. 138.

becomes famous. It matters not the depth, if a dragon lives in a body of water it becomes magical”.<sup>36</sup>

Archaeological discoveries reveal that, as David Pankenier pointed out, “dragon images are virtually ubiquitous in the East Asian cultural sphere and have been in China since the Neolithic” (Pankenier 2013: 38).<sup>37</sup> Being a kind of watery creature, the Chinese dragon is associated with clouds, thunder, rain, and the watery abyss beneath the earth in Chinese mythology. During the Han dynasty the Chinese dragon underwent a process of deification and taxonomy. There is an explicit definition of “long” in the chapter of *Shuidi* 水地篇 (*Treatise of Water and Earth*, no. 39 of the *Guanzi* 管子),<sup>38</sup> as following:

龍生於天，被五色而游，故神。欲小則化為蠶蟪，欲大則藏於天下。

欲尚上則凌乎雲氣，於下則入乎深泉。變化無日，上下無時，謂之神。

The dragon in the water is mantled in the five colours and hence is a divine power, *shen* 神. When it wishes to be small it becomes as a silkworm; when it wishes to be large, it can take the entire subcelestial realm as its cover; when it wishes to ascend it rises with the cloud-energy, *yunqi* 雲氣; when it wishes to

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<sup>36</sup> The text is “山不在高，有仙則名，水不在深，有龍則靈”. This is the first sentence of Liu Yuxi’s *Lou shiming* 陋室銘 (*Inscription of A Crude House*). In the *Quantangwen*, 1983, p. 6145.

<sup>37</sup> A “snake and fish body” dragon image was found in the relics of Yangshao Culture 仰韶文明, which is dated back to 5000 BCE to 3000 BCE (Du and Huang 1998: 121). Also, a “C shape” jade dragon was unearthed in Inner Mongolia 內蒙古, a site of Hongshan Culture 紅山文明 (4700-2900 BCE, see Li Jingheng 2018: 8-13). In Taosi 陶寺, a late Neolithic city of Longshan Culture 龍山文明 (2500-1900 BCE) in Shanxi Province 山西省, dragon appeared in pottery plates (Li 2018: 13-17, Pankenier 2013: 17-37). All of unearthed relics with dragon image identify its variant origins of aquatic animals, including snake, fish, alligator, and so forth.

<sup>38</sup> The *Guanzi* is an ancient Chinese political and philosophical text which bears the name of Guan Zhong 管仲 (725 B.C. – 645 B.C.), a famous minister who helped the Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (r. 685-643 B.C.) to achieve hegemony in the 7th century BCE. It is one of the largest of early Chinese politico-philosophical texts, exceeding 135,000 characters in length. As for the time of compilation, according to Michael Loewe, some chapters may date from as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., while others clearly belong to the early Han period, perhaps as late as the middle of the first century B.C. (Loewe 1993: 244).

descend it enters the deep springs. Its transformations are not fixed by days, nor its ascending and descending by hours. Thus it is called divine power, *shen*.<sup>39</sup> According to the *Shuowen jiezi*, the definition of dragon is “the leader of fish and insects; it can be invisible or visible; it can be small or huge; it can be long or short; in the *chunfen* day (vernal equinox), it ascends sky; in the *qiufen* day (autumnal equinox), it descends to the hidden chasm”.<sup>40</sup>

In ancient China, the dragon was thought to be a real creature, an aquatic animal which could be tamed by humans. A dialogue between Wei Xianzi 魏獻子 and Cai Mo 蔡墨 in the *Zuozhuan* narrates the relation of dragons and humans in early times.<sup>41</sup> According to this passage, dragons are, “bestowed by the Lord-High on rulers of conspicuous virtue who displayed reverence toward the spirits”, and “a certain individual initially acquired the secret knowledge of how to tend dragons” (Pankenier 2013: 44). This dialogue also reveals the inner connections between the Chinese dragon and the spiritual nobility of the Xia dynasty, with an early integration of water control and state leadership.<sup>42</sup> The rise of hydraulic agriculture, institutionalised religions (Chinese Buddhism and Daoism) and state rites changed the Chinese dragon. No longer simply a symbol of fertility, dragons became avatars of environmental uncertainty (Courtney 2018: 96). The tight connection of cloud and rain to dragons is continuously emphasised, which became one of the most significant features the Dragon King in imperial times.

The Dragon King has been given many special religious meanings. His image varies in Buddhism, Daoism and popular religion. Zhao Qiguang notes that there are at

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<sup>39</sup> The text is found in the *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 2004, p. 827. The English translation is adapted from John Hay. See Hay, 1994, p. 132.

<sup>40</sup> The original text is “鱗蟲之長，能幽能明，能細能巨，能短能長，春分而登天，秋分而潛淵”，in the *Shuowen jiezi*, 1963, p.764.

<sup>41</sup> This dialogue was translated by David Pankenier. See Pankenier, 2013, pp. 40-44.

<sup>42</sup> In South China’s religious tradition, as mentioned by the *Chuci*, dragon is often regarded as a carriage 坐騎 (*zuoqi*) of the divine people.

least five distinctions between the Dragon King and *long*:

Firstly, the mythological dragon is associated with hydraulic despotism, while the Dragon King is connected with hydraulic agriculture. Water manifests itself as only one component part of the mythological dragon's multiple implications. It is, however, the only implication of the Dragon King, who does not suggest sky, nationality, emperorship, spiritual nobility, or cultural continuity. Secondly, the mythological dragon is symbolic and abstract, while the Dragon King is concrete and supposedly responsive. Thirdly, the mythological dragon is associated with Taoist and Confucian visions of the world which originated in China. The Dragon King is influenced by Buddhism and Hindu folk beliefs disseminated from India. Fourthly, the mythological belongs to classic Chinese mythology, the Dragon King to folk religion and local legends. Finally, and most importantly, the mythological dragon is a celestial supreme being, while the Dragon King is both a constructive rain-god and a destructive flood-devil. That is to say, the mythological dragon shows only positive implications; the Dragon King displays both positive and negative factors (Zhao 1992: 104).

In the local society of late imperial China, particularly in Northern China, there is no doubt that the Dragon King was the most important water god. As Sawada Mizuho observed: "the Dragon King cult exceeded other water god worships in late Qing times" (Sawada 1982: 541).

There is no Dragon King in early Chinese texts. The popularity of the Dragon King cult is closely bound up with the spread of Buddhism.<sup>43</sup> The Dragon King is a

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<sup>43</sup> Much earlier before the spread of Buddhism to China in the Eastern Han, dragon was already associated with rainmaking in the Shang dynasty. As Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 pointed out, making the earth dragon 土龍 (*tulong*) had been regarded as a means of praying for rain in the oracle-bone inscriptions (Qiu Xigui 1983: 194-205). In the Han dynasty Dong Zhongshu advocated the idea of "using dragon to make rain" (以龍致雨) by institutionalizing a process of rainmaking in *Chunqiu fanlu*. Although Wang Chong 王充 (27-97) criticised Dong Zhongshu, he also admitted the function of earth dragon in making rain (in the no. 47, chapters of *Luanlong* 亂龍 and *Lunheng*

combination of Chinese dragon and Indian naga. In Hindu tradition naga is linked with the bringing forth of water. For Akira Sadakara the naga was a personified snake, in particular the cobra, the object of a widespread cult (Sadakara 1997: 173).<sup>44</sup> For Lowell Bloss the naga was a folk snake-like deity possessing the power of rain (Bloss 1973: 37). Richard Cohen argued that “the naga was a local deity of controlling rain and became a protective deity after it was tamed by the Buddha” in his study of Cave 16 at Ajanta (see Figure 5.4).<sup>45</sup> After it was enrolled in Buddhism naga is normally seen as “protector of the Dharma” 護法, among the Eight Legions 八部眾 (i.e. Eight Legions of Devas and Nagas 天龍八部). And the core duty of naga is to protect Buddhism and bring rain.

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論衡). This tradition was absorbed into the *Kaiyaun li* in the Tang dynasty and became a part of state rites.

<sup>44</sup> John Strong expanded the meaning of naga and pointed out, “the designation of naga is given to candidates for ordination”. See Strong, 1992, p. 192.

<sup>45</sup> As Cohen wrote, “Nagas play an ambiguous role in Buddhist mythology. Powerful creatures who dwell in a glorious but debased existence underground or in rivers, nagas control patterns of fertility and destruction through their power over rains, which may be sweetly life-giving or torrential and deadly. Nagas’ power is distinctly localized, and in Buddhist stories they protect their turf fiercely. Indeed, nagas were among the Buddha’s staunchest adversaries, soon after the awakening. Shakyamuni proved his power to a group of ascetics by spending the night in the lair of a fire-breathing naga and taming the beast without causing it harm”. See Cohen, 1998, p. 374.



Figure 4 Ajanta Caves, cave no. 16, “The Naga King and Queen Couple”. Gupta Period.  
3<sup>rd</sup> Century BCE. Maharashtra, India.

<https://www.pinterest.ru/pin/339669996874679890/>.

With a large number of sutras translated during the Wei-Jin times, the Indian naga spread to China. A lot of sutras from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century mentioned naga and its stories. For example, the *Lotus Sūtra* 妙法蓮華經 (*Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*), the *Foshuo hailongwang jing* 佛說海龍王經, the *Longwang xiongdi jing* 龍王兄弟經, the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* 大方廣佛華嚴經 (*Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra*), the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* 大智度論 (*Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*), the *Dīrgha Āgama Sūtra* 長阿含經. The “naga” was officially translated as *longwang* 龍王 (Dragon King). Thanks to the wide reading of these sutra among monks and elites, the notion of Dragon King gradually spread to the masses.

It is possible that Daoism integrated the Buddhist notion of the Dragon King and the traditional Chinese dragon. According to Andreas Berndt, the first Daoist scriptures

on the Dragon King were written during the period of the Six Dynasties 六朝 (220-589), but more were produced in the Tang dynasty and after, later than the Buddhist sutra (Berndt 2012: 75). Daoism transformed the Dragon King to a Daoist protector. The first Daoist Dragon King, namely, “Dragon Kings of the Four Seas” 四海龍王 first appeared in a 5<sup>th</sup> century Daoist scripture, the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* 太上洞淵神呪經 (*Scripture of Divine Incantations of the Abyssal Caverns*) (for the images of Dragon Kings of the Four Seas, see Figure 5.5).<sup>46</sup> In addition to the Dragon Kings of the Four Seas the Dragon Kings were also bound up with other elements like five directions and five phases 五行 (東方青帝青龍王, 南方赤帝赤龍王, 西方白帝白龍王, 北方黑帝黑龍王, 中央黃帝黃龍王), mountains (五嶽龍王), medicine (醫藥龍王), hell (地獄龍王), city (城市龍王) and so on, consisting of more than fifty kinds of dragon king. The scripture mentioned some features of various Dragon Kings, including flying in the sky (浮空而來), spouting water (吐水萬石), protecting the land and swiping ominous things (隨方守鎮, 掃除不祥). Since then the statues of Dragon Kings emerged in Daoist temples.



<sup>46</sup> This Daoist scripture is kept in the *Zhengtong daoang* 正統道藏, HY 335.



Figure 5 The Dragon Kings of Four Seas 四海龍王. Ming Mural. The Pilu Temple 毗盧寺, Shijiazhuang 石家莊, Hebei Province 河北省.

From the Song dynasty the Dragon Kings became nationwide water gods that were deeply rooted in local communities. Dragon King worship existed in almost every county in late imperial times. Among the common people Dragon Kings were believed to live in the various kinds of water, such as rain, rivers, ponds, lakes, canals and even in wells. From the Ming dynasty, paralleling the rise of the Dragon King cult in monasteries, some fictions that were influenced by Daoism (e.g., *Journey to the West*, *Canonization of the Gods*, and *The Full Biography of Hanxiangzi* 韓湘子全傳) depicted a variety of vivid images of the Daoist Dragon King. Some Dragon Kings were admitted by the central or local government because of their efficacy. For example, the folk Dragon King of the Yellow River, whose official name was “the Fourth Son Golden Dragon Great King” 金龍四大王 (*jinlong sidawang*), was admitted by the central government during the Jingtai years 景泰年間 (1450-1457). The Golden Dragon cult originated as an ancestral cult dedicated to an apotheosised Southern Song patriot from the Hangzhou area (Dodgen 1999: 815). In the Qing dynasty this cult reached its peak with government patronage for temples constructed in administrative centres along the Yellow River.<sup>47</sup> Official recognition of the Dragon Kings and their wide appearance in oral and written traditions supported the further expansion of their worship in local society in late imperial times.

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<sup>47</sup> According to the *Jinlong sidawang cimulu* 金龍四大王祠墓錄 the purpose of state sacrifice to the Fourth Son Golden Dragon Great King was to pray for the safety of the river. From his first Qing official title “*xianyou tongji*” 顯佑通濟 in the second year of Shuanzhi 順治二年 (1645) to his last title “*puyou*” 溥佑 in the fifth year of Guangxu 光緒五年 (1879), the Fourth Son Dragon Great King received eighteen titles. And the last title contains as many as forty-four characters. For the Fourth Son Golden Dragon Great King cult in the Ming-Qing state ritual code, see Wang Yuanlin and Chu Fulou, 2009, pp. 209-214.

## 4 Two Choices: Local Autonomy and State Domination of Water Gods

In late imperial China people in local communities had a choice of water gods. Unlike official rainmakers, they would often prefer a regional but more popular water god, even though worship of some local water gods was regarded as licentious by officials. Generally speaking, the local Dragon King always took priority over other water gods because of his perceived efficacy. This is what I call “local autonomy of water god”.<sup>48</sup> The devout faithful, either as individuals or through collective action, tried to establish reciprocal, symbiotic relations with the gods, providing offerings and allegiance in return for protection and divine favour (von Glan 2004a: 179). However, the late imperial government never gave up promoting the official water gods, like the Jidu God, because they represented Confucian values and dogma. Thus the official gods remained an effective means of preaching imperial education and constructing political legitimacy in local communities.

### 4.1 Official Virtue or Magical Efficacy?

People’s choices of a variety of water gods reveal two types of ritual power: “official virtue” 德 (*de*) and “magic efficacy” 靈 (*ling*).<sup>49</sup> In late imperial China, official rain prayers emphasised the principle of “virtue”, whereas the popular rain makers emphasised the principle of “efficacy”.<sup>50</sup> The development of an agrarian

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<sup>48</sup> In his study of storytelling in pre-modern China, Barend ter Haar proposed the concept of “autonomy of local people”. He shed light on how effectively non-literate common folk used oral communication in formulating an “autonomy of people”. He argued that “understanding the autonomy of local people, in deciding what to do, is an important dimension of local history”. See ter Haar, 2006, p. 346. I borrow this term and expand its use into the context of Chinese religion in late imperial times.

<sup>49</sup> Steven Sangren first proposed the two types of ritual power, including “virtue” 仁 (*ren*) and “magical power” 靈 (*ling*). See Sangren, 1987, p. 2. Kenneth Pomeranz further developed Sangren’s theory by emphasizing “official virtue” 德 (*de*) and “magic efficacy” 靈 (*ling*). Pomeranz better summarized the hidden educational intention of the state’s penetration on local society. See Pomeranz, 1991, p. 65.

<sup>50</sup> Jeffery Snyder-Reinke employed Sangren and Pomeranz’s theory in his book about rainmaking in late imperial China. See Snyder-Reinke, 2009, pp. 83-118.

civilisation in China, especially in the North, depended on water resources. The frequently unexpected droughts inclined people to worship a more practical water god who could bring immediate rain, rather than a state-advocated rainmaker. Thus in contrast to official water gods, these efficacious local water gods like the Dragon Kings became more popular in communal religious practices.

The rainmaking story of the Dragon King of Shengjinggang 聖井崗 (Ridge of the Sacred Well) provides a very good example of people's pursuit of magical efficacy in late imperial local society.<sup>51</sup> The full name of Shengjinggang is "The Dragon King Temple of Ridge of the Sacred Well" 聖井崗龍神廟 (*Shengjinggang longshenmiao*), which is located in the city of Handan 邯鄲市 (in Hebei Province 河北省, 350 miles away from Beijing). According to the local gazetteer *Handan Xianzhi* 邯鄲縣志, the temple was established in 1315 (in the Yuan dynasty) by the local community leaders. Once founded it quickly became a quasi-Daoist temple under supervision of Daoist priests. During the Ming dynasty the temple had received several renovations.<sup>52</sup>

In Shengjinggang, it is said that there is a magic well which never dried up or leaked. Accordingly, it was called "the sacred well" 聖井 (*shengjing*). The main god of Shengjinggang is the "Holy Mother of the Nine Dragon King" 九龍聖母 (*Jiulong shengmu*).<sup>53</sup> Shengjinggang is famous for the efficacy of its prayers for rain. Because

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<sup>51</sup> Surprisingly, as an important sacred site of the dragon king cult, Shengjinggang is neglected in past scholarship except for Kenneth Pomeranz and Hu Mengfei's works. See Pomeranz, 1991, pp. 62-99 and Hu Mengfei, 2020, pp. 25-35. However, neither Pomeranz nor Hu responds to the problem of the relation between official water gods and local water gods.

<sup>52</sup> According to the local history of Handan, the village leader 社長 (*shezhang*) bore the surname of Dong 董. He was supposed to be the leader of the dominant descent family group of the nearest village. During the Ming dynasty the temple was repaired in 1449, 1492, 1552, and 1556, which indicates that the cult of the Dragon King of Shengjinggang was quite popular and it attracted a large number of believers in late imperial times. See the *Handan Xianzhi*, 1976, p. 227.

<sup>53</sup> According to the local legends, the name of "Holy Mother of Nine Dragon Kings" in her lifetime is Fang Bao 房寶. At the age of sixteen, when Fang Bao and her sister-in-law were washing clothes at the bank of the river, a beautiful peach floated to her. After Fang Bao ate it, she got pregnant and

of the semi-arid climate in the North China plain, spontaneous community rainmaking rituals were frequently performed in Shengjinggang during the Ming and Qing dynasties. In periods of drought supplicants had strictly to follow a regulated procedure of rainmaking ritual: firstly, fast before proceeding to the temple; secondly, recited devotional rain prayers before the chamber of the Holy Mother of Nine Dragon Kings; thirdly, remove a metal tablet (掏牌, *taopai*) lying at the bottom of the well and retrieve a bottle of water from the well.<sup>54</sup> If it rained, a new metal tablet and the old one would be thrown in the well.<sup>55</sup> In late imperial times local officials of Handan often participated in this village-level rite to fulfil their duty as “parental officials” 父母官 (*fumu guan*). They also acted as the representatives of state. For the local people in Handan and its environs, the Dragon King of Shengjinggang was the first choice in praying for rain during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

During the Tongzhi years 同治年間 (1861-1875) Shengjinggang was noted by the Qing government and it was added to the Qing imperially sponsored ritual cannon. In the summer of 1867 Beijing suffered a severe drought. Because of the reputation and efficacy of Shengjinggang, Wan Qingli 萬青藜 (1821-1883), the Minister of the Board of Rites 禮部尚書 (*libu shangshu*), was dispatched to offer a state-level sacrifice to the sacred well and the Dragon King of Shengjinggang in the midst of the

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then was turned out of the house by her father. Her brother found her in the deep mountain, seeing a lot of giant snakes gathering around her. Then these snakes flew to the sky with heavy clouds and thunders. Fang Bao died. This story was adopted by local people and the snakes gradually changed to nine dragons. See Ma Jinnan, 1996, p. 103.

<sup>54</sup> There are five kinds of metal tablet, including gold, silver, copper, iron, and tin. The gold tablet is prepared for the emperor; the silver tablet for provincial governor; the copper tablet for the prefecture and county officials; the iron tablet for the communal organizations; and the tin tablet for the local gentry. See Liu Yumin, 2008, p. 297.

<sup>55</sup> The rainmaking ritual in Shengjinggang probably originates from the rites of tossing dragons and tablets. The local rituals of praying for rain changed little from the Yuan dynasty to the late Qing dynasty. Ibid.

drought.<sup>56</sup> When rain fell within three days the old metal tablet was gratefully returned, along with a new golden tablet which was conferred by the emperor. In addition, an imperially granted title of “greatly expanding and advocating the grace” 闡澤宏敷 (*kaize hongfu*) was hung on the top of temple.<sup>57</sup> The golden tablet and title suggested the Dragon King of Shengjinggang was recognised by the government.

After Shengjinggang was absorbed in the Qing state ritual code in 1867, two systems of rainmaking ritual coexisted: popular and official worship. But the Qing government quickly started a crackdown on the old popular worship of Shengjinggang and the previous community rain-praying ritual was converted to an institutionalised rite.<sup>58</sup> This meant the power of rain-praying in Shengjinggang was totally taken over by the government. Shengjinggang therefore witnessed a transformation from communal worship centre to an imperially sponsored ritual site. This transformation, as Valerie Hansen pointed out,

while the effect of the title-granting system may have been to keep the central government responsive to local society, the primary intent of granting titles.....was to harness powerful deities to the yoke of governance. The central government recognised gods for the same reasons the common people did: to encourage them to bring good weather, to prevent famine and drought, to forestall enemy attacks, and, above all, to secure a good harvest (Hansen 1990: 162).

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<sup>56</sup> This event was recorded in the *Handan xian shengjinggang longshen lingying beiji* 邯鄲縣聖井崗龍神靈應碑記 (*Inscription of Efficacy of the Shengjinggang Dragon King in the Handan County*), written by Lu Chaolin 路朝霖, in the *Handan Xianzhi*, pp. 227-229.

<sup>57</sup> See the *Qing shilu*, vol. 49, p. 670.

<sup>58</sup> From the year of 1867 the Qing government continuously dispatched missionary officials to offer state-level sacrifice to Shengjinggang when Beijing experienced severe drought (in 1878, 1878, 1879, 1889, 1899, 1903). For example, in the summer of 1889, the Qing court offered sacrifice to Shengjinggang and it rained within three days. “光緒二十五年己亥夏，河南大旱，自二十四年八月不雨至於今，民情洵懼，疾疫盛行，幸麥收中稔，閭閻藉以支柱，其危甚矣。於是中丞裕公委員赴邯鄲聖井崗龍神廟請鐵牌，六月二十九日至省城，中丞率僚屬跪迎奉安宋門大街太白廟，七月初一即得雨，連降甘澍，歲以有秋”。 It was also kept in the *Inscription of Efficacy of the Shengjinggang Dragon King in the Handan County*, in the *Handan Xianzhi*, p. 228.

From the case of the Dragon King in Shengjinggan, we can draw three conclusions about the Dragon King cult in late imperial local society. First of all, for Chinese peasants, local community is more immediate and tangible: a village, a group of neighbouring villages, or a county. Unlike the Jidu Temple, which is sponsored by the central government, temples of the Dragon King are products not of individual but of group effort, for it is contributions from the community that built most of the temples for the local cults. Hence, as C. K. Yang wrote, the Dragon King is a “collective symbol in the agricultural cults” (Yang 1961:70). Secondly, in contrast to the national gods like Guandi 關帝 and Mazu 媽祖, the Dragon King occupies a low position in the Chinese pantheon. The investigation of rural custom and belief in the North China plain conducted by the research bureau of the South Manchurian Railway Company 南滿洲鐵道株式會社 (Minami-Manshū Tetsudō) from 1940 to 1942 shows that the Dragon King was ranked as a second-level god in a village temple with multiple religious traditions in the Shunyi County 順義縣 (in modern Beijing).<sup>59</sup> Thirdly, people’s worship to the Dragon King is pragmatic. In late imperial local communities, particularly in North China, peasants usually believed that the Dragon King created rain and entirely controlled it by himself (Hsiao 1967: 225; Duara 1988a: 32). If it did not rain after a rain-praying ritual in the Dragon King temple, people blamed the Dragon King. More importantly, local officials were given the assumed authority to coerce the

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<sup>59</sup> These volumes of investigation, which are mostly in Japanese, were called Investigation of Customs in Chinese Villages 中國農村慣行調查 (*Chūgoku nōson kankō chōsa*, Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1952-1958). In recent years, some Chinese scholars in the Central China Normal University are translating the volumes in Chinese. In this temple, although its name is “The Guanyin Temple” 觀音廟, there are as many as thirteen gods in three levels. The first level includes Guandi; the second level includes the Guanyin Niangniang 觀音娘娘, the God of Wealth 財神, the Dragon King, the Earth God 土地神, the Green Sprouts 青苗, the Erlang God 二郎爺, the God Holding a Tower 托塔天王, and the God of Community 圍抱; the third level included the Buddha 佛, the Wenshu Bodhisattva 文殊, the Puxian Bodhisattva 普賢, and the Saint 聖人. The various gods resembling in a village temple suggested a miscellaneous folk belief system in late imperial China. See Ge Zhaoguang, 1987, pp. 327-328.

Dragon King to make rain when a persistent drought was encountered. C. K. Yang depicted a scene of a magistrate publicly thrashing the Dragon King and City God under the hot sun (Yang 1961: 92).<sup>60</sup> This public ritual is the “exposure of the Dragon King” 曬龍王 (*shai longwang*). It suggests, although some efficacious Dragon Kings were added to the imperially sponsored canon, they were still under supervision of the imperial bureaucratic system. Through punishment the state obtained an absolute authority over these local water gods.

The huge demand for rain in the North China Plain pushes some gods who have no connection with water control to take on the divine function of making rain. For example, Guandi is often requested to generate rain. As a famous general in his lifetime, Guandi (Guan Yu 關羽) is regarded as a national martial god and a symbol of “loyalty” 忠 (*zhong*) and “righteousness” 義 (*yi*). In Duara’s words, he is a “superscribing symbol” which enabled the imperial state to create an authoritative image for the sake of sustaining state power upon (over) local communities (Duara 1988b). However, as Barend ter Haar discovered, in some tales Guandi was thought to be the incarnation of a dragon who had been executed at the command of the Jade Emperor 玉皇大帝 (*yuhuang dadi*) for bringing rain out of compassion to a local community sentenced to extinction by the supreme deity (ter Haar 2017: 152). When the local water gods did not satisfy the urgent need of rain, the people turned to a more powerful god, Guandi. This process, as with the people’s preference for an efficacious communal water god, is also an example of “local autonomy of rainmaking”.

#### 4.2 State Domination and Differentiation of Water Gods

The previous discussion has prepared us to address the question of how state power and authority reached local communities in imperial China. In a country as large as China centralised administration is necessarily limited. The weakness of the central

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<sup>60</sup> The torture of the Dragon King and other gods in charge of making rain is probably derived from the Shang’s tradition of exposure of shaman when drought took place. See Schafer, 1951, pp. 130-184.

government is reflected in the fact that the emperor had a completely free hand only in the appointment of provincial governors. The failure of the formal central administration to reach directly down to the local population accounted for villages' self-government and the predominant roles of the extended kinship groups in local social structures (Bendix 1977: 169; Chen 2014: 196). Thus the imperial organisation of traditional agrarian China, as Ernest Gellner summarised, includes "a central dominant authority [that] co-exists with semi-autonomous local units" (Gellner 2006: 14-15).

The divergence of state domination and local autonomy is also reflected in the religion of late imperial China. I have identified two theories that seek to explain how the state used religion to exert control over local communities. The first theory is what might be called "domination (control) through communal religion", according to which the most effective way for the state to impose political control over local communities was to manipulate local rites and cults, either accepting them or suppressing them. The second theory is that the state exerts control over local communities by creating a line of demarcation between state rite and local ritual.

The first theory has been widely accepted in studies of Chinese religion. Scholars have tended to believe that from the Song dynasty, the government strengthened the centralised system, not only for the sake of political unification but also for ideological control. In addition to preaching Confucian values in local society, the state firmly controlled Buddhism, Daoism, and popular religions by means of establishing temples, managing clergy and ritual, and granting official titles.<sup>61</sup> Valerie Hansen first realised the political significance of granting of titles to the deities. For Hansen, the system of granting titles developed primarily as a means of control – because any temple lacking official sanction could be stamped out: only temples with government approval could survive (Hansen 1990: 84).

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<sup>61</sup> Firstly, the government understands the role popular beliefs played in maintaining the social order; secondly, the local elites are eager to connect with the central government via sacrificing local gods for the sake of promoting or maintaining the power of local communities.



In local communities the ways to accept a god were to build a temple and make a statue for him. The titles from the central government confirmed their legitimacy. “Of the many ways of recompensing deities for miracles, only title-granting involved officials each and every time. The officials awarding titles worked on the same assumption as did the devotees who built temples and erected statues” (Hansen 1990: 79). The process of granting titles was “bureaucrats forwarded petition for titles, conducted investigations into a given god’s history of performing miracles, and made recommendations as to whether the emperor should award a title” (Hansen 1990: 79). After the state conferred a title the local people often erected steles to record this event.<sup>62</sup> The process of official acceptance was called “standardisation” by James Watson, referring to the promotion of those “approved” gods (Watson 1985: 293).

Not all the popular gods got official support. The central government suppressed licentious cults no matter how popular they were in the local communities. For example, the early Qing Confucian-scholar official, Tang Bin 湯斌 (1627-1687), who was the newly appointed Governor of Jiangsu 江蘇巡撫 (*jiangsu xunfu*), launched an intensive campaign against the Wutong cult 五通神信仰 in 1685. He explicitly pointed out the reason for suppression, “spurious fakes without any canonical authority” (Glahn 2004: 237). In addition to the economic factor (as a god of wealth), the characteristics of the five gods of Wutong were lust and greedy (Szonyi 1997:113-135, Glahn 2004: 236-238). Both features violated Confucian orthodoxy. Thus, although the strong power of the gods of Wutong was deeply convincing to the people in Jiangnan, the Qing officials and government had to destroy this evil cult because it had challenged Confucian teaching.

Like the Holy Mother of Nine Dragon Kings in Shengjinggang, the rise of communal water gods was mostly because of their supposed magical efficacy. This may

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<sup>62</sup> Existent stele inscriptions in Hebei suggest, the local officials had tried to take some measures to seek for official acceptance of local sacrifices from the central government during the Han dynasty. See Bujard, 2002, p. 334.

explain why the Dragon King cult attracted more believers than official water gods in local society. Just as Hsiao Kung-chuan and James Watson wrote, “official sacrifices did not always compete successfully with popular sacrifices”, “in local communities, the worship to deities was far more important than Confucian dogma(s)” (Hsiao 1967: 226; Watson 1985: 293). When there were needs of people that did not coincide with imperial purposes and the officially established sacrifices did not supply gods that could answer prayer or supplication, people never hesitated to go beyond official channels and worship gods of their own choice (Hsiao 1967: 225-226). Hence, for many scholars, the most effective way for the state to control local communities was to manipulate the gods that were chosen by the people. However, this model fails to explain why communal water gods did not replace official water gods in late imperial China given that sacrifice to official water gods was not only hugely expensive but also less practical and less efficacious.

As the previous chapters show, central government spared no effort in promoting official water gods in local society during imperial times. When there was a severe drought or flood the government first sought help from the official water gods like the Gods of Four Waterways. When the official water gods did not function, the government turned to communal water gods as a second choice. Even though these communal water gods were added to the state ritual system, they were enlisted at the lowest level, namely, the “miscellaneous sacrifice” in the Qing ritual code.

The attitude of the imperial government suggests a second theory to explain how the state uses religion to exert control over local communities. According to the second theory, the state may exert its control over local communities by religious differentiation and thus establish its legitimacy not by manipulating local rites but rather precisely by deliberately creating a sharp line of demarcation between state rite and local ritual.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The concept of “domination by religious differentiation” was proposed by Chen Weigang. According to Chen, it was the most distinctive feature of the Confucian ethical polity. Xunzi furnished an appropriate reference point for examining this feature. Xunzi began with a world of

The fundamental distinction between official popular rituals is the role of *li* 禮. The realm of *li* implicates a body of “objective” norms of behaviour which involved ritual, ceremony, manners, social roles that bound human beings and the spirits together in networks of interacting roles within the family, human society, and numinous realm beyond (Schwartz 1985: 67). As Chapter 2 has demonstrated, the state sacrifices concerning official water gods originated from Confucian texts and some ancient traditions, remaining untouched after they were institutionalised in the Tang dynasty. As a part of the state ritual system based on *li*, the imperial rites of official water gods eschewed the use of Daoist or Buddhist professions, did not include any of the ecstatic behaviour associated with the mediumship or spirit possession common to many popular festivals and rituals (Naquin and Rawski 1987: 90). They are represented by government as “orderly and rational”. The crude ritual of communal water gods is mostly created by illiterate people in local communities, which has obvious limitations and appeals to ignorance. Like the Dragon King cult in Shengjingang, the communal rain ritual and the Dragon King worship before it was added in the Qing sponsored official ritual code is described as “lengthy, participatory, loud, strenuous, and passionate” (Pomeranz 1991: 73). These features, which were seen as weaknesses by Confucian officials and elites, were common in communal cults and rituals in late imperial China.

According to the stele inscriptions in the Jidu Temple, the state tried to sustain a long-term emperor-minister relation 君臣關係 for the sake of ordering the Jidu God to bring rain. After they are institutionalised in state ritual code, the official water gods, like the Gods of Four Waterways are thought to be ministers of the emperor in the

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self-regarding, egocentric individuals in a “state of nature”. Chen argued that the state of nature was and could not be a war of all against all, since egocentric impulses were by nature inexhaustible and know no limits. It was from this insight that the founding sages arrived at the realization that the only way to curb the boundless desires and confine them within proper limits was to create and impose the system of *li*, a clear system of rules of behaviour and institutions characterized by a strict hierarchy and a rigid division of roles between rulers and subjects, father and son, husband and wife, superiors and subordinates. See Chen Weigang, 2014, pp. 201-203.

celestial realm. Therefore the emperor is obliged to issue an imperial edict to order them to make rain.<sup>64</sup> Words such as “it is your duty to make rain” (沛以井雨，神之職也) and “I command you to give proper rain in time” (俾雨賜以時) frequently appear in the Ming-Qing imperial edicts. The emperor, in the name of the Son of Heaven, was bound up with the system of sacrifice and the maintenance of dynastic continuity and in his person was the vital link between the divine cosmos and humanity (Campany 2011: 199). The communal water gods like the Dragon Kings have to subject themselves to supervision by the local magistrate. By contrast, official water gods like the Jidu God do not. They are another kind of bureaucrat.<sup>65</sup> Therefore official water gods cannot be blamed or punished by terrestrial officials even though they sometimes cannot satisfy the need for rain.

This does not mean that the official water gods are not constrained. They are under the supervision of the Son of Heaven. In this sense it will be easily understood why I repeatedly emphasise that the imperial commissioners who are dispatched to offer sacrifice to the Gods of the Four Waterways are in fact acting on behalf of the emperor.

In late imperial China the duty of the official water gods consisted of two parts: firstly, to protect the safety of the drainage basin of each great river (not only to prevent flooding but also to keep the region martially secure); secondly, to make proper rain or stop rain to ensure a harvest in autumn. This variety of duties explains why the presence of local martial, hydraulic and grain officials was often required in these ceremonies. For example, in 1228, the Emperor Aizong of Jin 金哀宗 (r. 1224-1234) ordered a sacrifice to the Jidu God because of a drought. From the stele of inscription we know that, in addition to the imperial commissioner, the local magistrate of Jiyuan with a

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<sup>64</sup> See Yao Yongxia, 2014, pp. 202-223.

<sup>65</sup> According to Max Weber, hierarchy that stipulated the jurisdiction of each office and provided for the supervision of lower offices by higher ones characterized every bureaucracy (Weber 1968: 956-957). As shown in Chapter 3, a hierarchy is clearly apparent in the pantheon of Chinese state religion and state ritual code.

surname of Nalan 納蘭 who was also in charge of the hydraulic and grain affairs (武  
郎將軍行濟源縣令兼官勾河防常平倉事修廟接手官納蘭□□) and his higher officer,  
the governor of Mengzhou 孟州, who was also in charge of martial affairs (昭勇大將  
軍遙授歸德府治中兼同知孟州防禦使事) took part in this event.<sup>66</sup> In addition, a  
Yuan stele inscription from 1290 also mentioned the participation of local agrarian  
officials.<sup>67</sup> This tradition continued to the Qing dynasty. In an imperially composed  
invocation in 1710 the governor of Henan, who was also in charge of transport, grain  
and salt affairs, Zhang Mengqiu 張孟球 (河南布政司分守□□河三府管□省驛鹽糧  
儲連僉事加四級張孟球), acted as the chief subordinate in this ritual concerning the  
Jidu God.<sup>68</sup> To compare, the above officials are seldom present in local ceremonies of  
sacrifice of communal water gods. These communal rituals rely on government  
employees as ritual conductors and actors. The presence of related officials in state rites  
performed in the local temples of official water gods indicates that the state tries to  
penetrate its domination into local society through performing these. More importantly,  
the political legitimacy of the central government was confirmed and reconfirmed in  
these repeated state rites for over one thousand years.

## 5 Conclusion

The movement of ritual innovation in the Tang dynasty not only institutionalized  
and systematised state rites but also created a variety of official rainmakers. The gods  
of the great mountains and rivers were transformed to official personalised gods in the  
state ritual code. They gradually became the most relied on water gods at the state level

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<sup>66</sup> See the *Chongxiu jidumiao ji* 重脩濟瀆廟記 (*Record of Restoration of the Jidu Temple*), in the  
*Jinshi cuibian*, 1985, vol. 158, p. 15.

<sup>67</sup> See Yao Yongxia, 2014, p. 214.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

of an agrarian country. However, the most popular water gods in local communities were the Dragon Kings or other supposedly efficacious local water gods (which varied by region). The making of different choices reflects a huge gap between local autonomy and state domination in local religious practices. Therefore, as many scholars have claimed, the state had to impose political control over local communities by acknowledging communal water gods and granting them titles. This process may be called “transcending communal ritual” 民間信仰的上行.

The state-level sacrifice to official water gods in local temples is a means of promoting political legitimacy. Through these sacrifices the state exerted domination from top to bottom, from the central government to community. This process may be called “descending state rites” 國家禮儀的下行. The stele inscriptions in the Jidu Temple suggest that the central government of each dynasty spared no effort in imposing official water gods on local communities by holding regular sacrificial ceremonies. This chapter has also revealed that, in late imperial China, the state deliberately distinguished official and communal water gods. By the way of religious differentiation the central government sought to further to consolidate its control over local communities and underpin its political legitimacy.