

Angelika C. Messner

Approaching the Sacred in Chinese past Contexts

Summary

Recent scholarship on sacred sites and pilgrimage convincingly demonstrates that the conceptual separation of belief and knowledge as well as the dichotomization of the 'secular' and the 'sacred' both in the case of the Chinese historical and present-day contexts are most inappropriate as a methodological framework. With a strong focus on practice and embodiment and by breaking away from a single discipline approach, my paper is concerned with the question why and how people narrated their own encounters with the Sacred. In the center of my discussion are the mountains as the paragons of Chinese history. They display multiple identities as part of imperial ritual, of mysticism, nature and history, of life, fertility and death and as part of Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist sites of worship and for performing self-cultivation which were used by literati to project something of themselves into the future.

Keywords: Mountains; sacred sites; definitions of the sacred; texts of literati

Die konzeptionelle Trennung von Glauben und Wissen ist irreführend und sollte dementsprechend ebenso wenig als methodologische Grundlage dienen wie die Dichotomisierung von ‚heilig‘ und ‚säkular‘; davon zeugen neueste Forschungsbefunde mit Blick auf die Geschichte von Pilgern und Heilige Orte im chinesischen Kontext. Der vorliegende Beitrag fokussiert Berge, weil ohne sie keine Diskussion um das Heilige in China möglich ist. Mit Blick auf konkrete Praktiken, die auf die Kultivierung des Selbst abzielen und durchgängig mit körperlicher Einleibung (Embodiment) von Vorstellungen des Heiligen verquickt sind, sucht der Beitrag die Frage zu beantworten, auf welche Weise Menschen ihre eigene Begegnung mit dem Heiligen erzählen. Die Berge dienten als Orte kaiserlicher Ritualhandlungen, sie waren und sind mit Mystik, Natur, Geschichte, Leben, Fruchtbarkeit und Tod verbunden, und als Orte konfuzianischer, buddhistischer und daoistischer Verehrung dienten sie Gelehrten als Projektionsmöglichkeit ihres Selbst in die Zukunft hinein.

Keywords: Gebirge; heilige Orte; Definitionen des Heiligen; Gelehrtentexte; Selbst-Kultivierung

I wish to thank Ute Luig for her many helpful comments and suggestions.

Ute Luig (ed.) | Approaching the Sacred. Pilgrimage in Historical and Intercultural Perspective | Berlin Studies of the Ancient World 49 (ISBN 978-3-9818369-3-6; ISSN (Print) 2366-6641; ISSN (Online) 2366-665X; URN urn:nbn:de:kobv:188-fudocsdocument00000027524-4) | www.edition-topoi.org

1 Introduction

The conceptual separation of belief and knowledge as well as the dichotomization of the secular and the sacred are most inappropriate as a methodological framework, both in the case of the Chinese past and present. The same also applies for pilgrimage in China that since earliest times is linked to mountains. Beginning with the third century BC through the periods until the decline of the Chinese Empire in 1911 Sacred Mountains were approached periodically by the emperor for performing the state sacrifices. Moreover, mountains served as sacred places for all those who individually sought for longevity and other forms of self-cultivation. Such pilgrimages epistemologically based on the notion of mountains as inheriting the finest Qi 氣 (“vapor”, “breath” and “finest influences”) which was needed for the bodily and spiritual exercises that in turn referred to the view of the human self as being a sacred space e.g. as a mountain itself. The idea of ‘inner pilgrimage’ promoted the perception of a body-self (*shen* 身) seen essentially as the intrinsic space where the Sacred ‘is located’ and where it can be developed and lived with, as such this was the prerequisite for achieving the state of immortality.

Starting with a short overview on the state of research on religious practices in the Chinese past, this contribution dwells on both the ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ pilgrimage, based on textual evidence from 3rd century AD as well as from the 12th and 17th centuries.

2 State of research

Jesuit scholars and missionaries living in China in late 16th through early 17th century worked hard for gaining acceptance and respect by the Chinese scholar official elite in Hangzhou and at the court in Beijing. Besides studying Chinese to a high level, teaching and writing about mathematics, astronomy and medicine, they appropriated Chinese vestimentary customs from scholar-officials in late Ming-style. They tolerated the formal Confucian imperial rites as well as the ritual practices of honoring ancestors, and hence gained many followers among the Chinese elite. This in turn aroused the envy of less successful congregations in China such as the Dominicans and Franciscans. The latter reported to the Pope in Rome criticizing the Jesuits for not acting as proper Christian missionaries, since they tolerated the Chinese ritual practices by considering them as civil ritual.

Ultimately the Jesuits’ view lost ground during the rites controversy which led to the expulsion of catholic missionaries from China in early 17th century. However their influence on research in Chinese religion and philosophy lasts until today. Their insistence on the “this-worldliness, material and secular” nature of Chinese religious practices was foundational for tolerating the Chinese rites and this rhetorical move had

made them compatible with Catholicism. This perspective was taken up later on by the Dutch Sinologist and historian of religion, J. J. M. De Groot (1854–1921). He characterized the different schools and practices by subsuming them all under the term of (this-worldly) “Universism”.¹ Similarly, the eminent historian of Chinese science and technology, Joseph Needham (1900–1995), classified Chinese religious and philosophical thought in terms of (this-worldly) ‘organizistic thinking,’ referring to the idea that an organism with its integral parts, orders and pattern in their correlations and references together build up one extensive and grandiose pattern.² This should be seen, in Needham’s view, in sharp opposition to Western analytical and ontological perspectives. A few decades later Donald Munro followed up with the term ‘holism’ denoting the Chinese idea that each single action would trigger one or more other actions which again would potentially affect the actions at the beginning of the cycle.³

Likewise reductionist views on Chinese religious thinking and practices were put forward by Chinese scholars. Banning any mythological and metaphysical signs from their realm of research by declaring such signs as superstitious, Chinese historians emphasized the materialistic and ‘this-worldliness’ of Chinese philosophy. Thus they were not interested in research of religious practices.⁴

Beginning with the 1980ies when Chinese sociologists and anthropologists in high numbers started to study folk religious practices, the general perception of these practices changed. Yet, contending themselves with accumulating huge amounts of data this research lacks substantial argumentative and explanatory analysis.⁵ On the other hand researchers of Western provenience decidedly distance themselves from previous views which stated that China would lack religious thinking and practices at all.⁶ Moreover, differently to former views which had reduced the highly complex landscape of Chinese religious practices to a single essential feature, recent research justly dwells on the high variety of religious practices.

Until the end of the 19th century the Chinese language did not provide one single comprehensive term for religion. The compound noun *Zongjiao* 宗教 which at present is the usual term denoting ‘religion’ literally means “teaching from the ancestors”. It was introduced as a Japanese loanword during the days of reform in 1898.⁷ Nevertheless, in the Chinese historical and contemporary contexts about a dozen different religions can be counted, if we include believe systems such as historical traces of Manicheism and Nestorianism, Judaism and Christian forms of Catholics and Protestants as well as

1 De Groot 1918, 2.

2 Needham 1956, 281.

3 Munro 1985.

4 See Bauer 2001, 23, with reference to Feng Youlan, who was among the most prominent Chinese historians of philosophy in 20th century.

5 Ownby 2001, 139–158.

6 Exemplary voices of this critical view are Teiser 1996, 3–37; Lagerway 2002, and Overmyer 2003, 307–316.

7 Paper 1994; Liu 1995.

Islam. The borderline between folk religions and the so-called official religions such as Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism is difficult to draw. Similarly, the ‘three religions’ resist to any attempt to a clear cut separation between them.

The only verified evidence in the Chinese case which applies to all three is the absence of a personified Creator God and thus the absence of a monotheistic religion.⁸ As a minimal account in this regard we should mention the most important and prominent myth of origin which says that the visible world of the prenatal chaos (*hundun* 混沌) was developed in line with the world-principle (*dao* 道).⁹ The categories *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 and the *wuxing* 五行 (five movements/five agents) can be seen as signs of attempts to bring an order into the ‘whole’.¹⁰

As pointed out already recent research shows that the phenomena of transcendence and sacred are not absent from the traditions of genesis myths or narratives of the paradise. In opposition, they show evidence for an omnipresence of the “numinous” and the supposed sacred and the Divine.¹¹

3 Approaching the sacred

There is no singular and fixed definition of the sacred. Etymogically *sheng* 聖 (holy, sacred) is correlated to *sheng* 聲 (voice, sound), as such referring to the meaning “sensitive”; and simultaneously to *cong* 聰 which means “smart, clever”. Thus, *sheng* 聖 refers to a high-graded ability to understanding out from slightest signs or tokens. This term is therefore superordinated to the terms “knowledge” (*zhi* 知) and “wisdom” (*zhi* 智). A *shengren* 聖人 (a wise/sacred person) knows before others will know (*qian zhi* 先知): *zhi* 智 is a virtue, but *sheng* 聖 is more than a virtue, it is superordinated to every virtue, as such also to *zhi*.¹² A *shengren* 聖人 is a “sage”, who in the daoist tradition is also associated with immortality. The idea of immortality in this context relates to ancient ancestor worship. This fostered a tight connection between the living and the dead. The latter were thought of being full of authority on the earth. The idea of immortals attaining transcendence, obtaining wonderful powers, walking through walls, flying through the air and communicating with the death, is still very popular today as symbols of long life and of happiness.¹³

For the purpose of longevity and immortality people needed to nourish the Qi 氣 (“vapor”, “breath” and “finest influences”). Qi is the stuff which everybody and the whole

8 Birnbaum 1986, 119; Hahn 1994, 169–183, here 170.

9 Major 1978, 9–10; Girardot 1983.

10 Major 1978, 13–15.

11 See for instance Lagerway 2002; Reiter 2002, 49.

12 See Lüshi chunqiu, chapt. 20, 8, in Chunqiu 1984, 686.

13 For a brief overview on this issue see Kohn 1996, 52–63.

cosmos was made of. Life is seen as a consolidation of Qi, whereas death means the scattering of Qi.

In the context of body techniques for life prolongation and immortality the component energy or life force figures integrally in Qi. Therefore, first of all, one had to seek to hold Qi together, to not to disperse it *via* exhaustion, due to too much work, too much talking, too much worrying, too much eating and drinking and too much sexual activity. These warnings against overdoing and exhausting Qi are part of a whole range of practices which are aimed to help at nourishing Qi and at prolonging life (*Yang sheng* 養生).

Qi in its most subtle and pure form was to be found within the mountains. Sacred places in China are places which are *sheng* 聖 (holy, sacred) or *ling* 靈 (efficacious, powerful, magic, curative). *Ling* is “directly connected with the powers of the earth and the *dao*”.¹⁴ *Shengdi* 聖地 are places which are curative and sacred. This particular association of magic, curativeness and power with the mountains (*shan* 山) has been textualized since Han-times (200 BC).

The phrase *chaoshan jinxiang* 朝山进香 was and still is the common term for pilgrimage. It does however not imply a hint to a journey or to a circuit. *Chao shan* 朝山 literally means “paying one’s respect to a mountain”. *Jin xiang* 进香 means “to present incense”. This refers to the practices of bringing and burning incense and to get in contact with the transcendental sphere. Emperors used to perform sacrifices at the sacred mountains to perform the *fengshan* 封禪 offerings to the mountain, the rivers, for the heaven and the earth.¹⁵ In opposition to this the expression *shaoxiang* 烧香 refers to the ordinary or daily burning incense in front of the family altar or in the village-temple.¹⁶

3.1 Sacral geographic space and mountains (*shan* 山)

Mountain regions in historical accounts are often discussed as hideaway in times of distress. When bandits or troops of invaders approached their villages, people abandoned their houses and hid in nearby mountain forests. Moreover, mountain regions were important places for several professions such as dyers, physicians and ordinary herbalists.¹⁷

The analogy ‘sacred and mountain,’ moreover, is revealed in the expression *shanmen* 山門 (door/entrance to the mountain). These two characters are to be found in almost every single temple (including all those in the flat lands) denoting the ‘entrance to the

14 Hahn 1994, 171.

15 On these sacrifices see Lewis 1998 and Reiter 2002, 72–73.

16 Naquin and Yü 1992, 11–12.

17 Ch’ü 1981 [1972], 209; Tanigawa 1985, 104–110; Schmidt 1996, 19.



Fig. 1 The Five Sacred Mountains in China: Huashan, Hengshang (North), Taishan, Songshan, und Hengshan (South).

sacred? Similarly, the term *xian* 仙 or *xianren* 仙人 (literally “the sacred”; “the immortal”) directly refers to a man/a person who stands nearby a mountain (*shan* 山).

Shan can denote one single mountain but also a group of mountains or a mountain chain, grottos within a mountain or even an island. In ancient China heaven and the ancestor ghosts had been regarded as powers, for which sacrifices had to be delivered. Mountains and waterways were seen as a kind of symbolic reticule defining the empire. This evidences the constructional character of the sacred places as well as the interaction between sacral and profane. Mountain tops were regarded as entrance points into heaven and as dwellings of deities. Not all pilgrimage places were mountains, but mountains were the prototypes for pilgrimage and eremitism – mountains were throughout associated with powerfulness and efficacy, curativeness and holiness.

Chinese historical accounts since the first century BC paid great attention to the description of the sacral-geographic order within Chinese space. The religious-geographic order with the Five Sacred Mountains (*wu yue* 五嶽; Fig. 1) as cornerstones of this order and their interrelation with the political order has been described by Sima Qian 司馬遷

(145–90 BC) in his *Shiji* 史記, *Records of the Grand Historian*, 109 BC.¹⁸ He depicts the space of China as resulting from an act of culture which is linked to the legendary culture hero Yu 禹. According to this account the first legendary emperor undertook ‘sacrifice tours’ on the sacred mountains. He and all the following emperors gained the religious legitimation of the space China by ritually imitating this first act of culture.¹⁹ Via oracle he determined the month and day for the audience with the regents of the four directions and the various provinces. The second month of the year he approached the *Taishan* (literally: the peak of the highest freedom and utmost heal) in the east, in the present Province Shandong. He burned the brunt offering to the heaven, harmonized the calendar order for the seasons and the month, corrected the order of the weeks, standardized the length of the flutes and the measurements for length, space and weight. On the fifth month he travelled to the sacred peak in the South, Hengshan (literally: the vertical transverse mountain) in the present Hunan Province. Thereafter he left for the peak of the West, Huashan (literally: the blossom peak), in the present Shenxi Province. Lastly, he visited the Mountain in the North, Hengshan (literally: mountain of the steadiness), in the present Shaanxi Province.

The State ritual was modified continuously, also in terms of naming and numbering of the sacred mountains, from its beginnings in 200 BC until the end of the empire in early 20th century. Only in Han-Times (200 BC–200 AD), when the number ‘five’ was to become the significant order-number, the Songshan (literally: the high, lofty mountain), in the present Henan Province, was added as the fifth sacred mountain, as the mountain at the center. And only in the 8th century the five Sacred Mountains have been assigned to Daoism.²⁰ According to the Five Phases paradigm (*wuxing*) the Taishan for instance correlates with the east and the phase ‘wood’ which again is associated with spring and growth. This was foundational for this mountain to become the interface between heaven and earth, between life and death.²¹ It was believed that heaven (*yang* 陽) loved the dark (*yin* 陰), thus one had to admire the principle of the dark at the foot of a high mountain and to offer sacrifices. Similarly it was believed that the earth (*yin* 陰) loved the principle of the light (*yang* 陽). Therefore sacrifices had to be offered to the earth on a round hill on the flat land. The spatial implemented spiritual infrastructure at the Sacred Mountains provided the emperor with orientation and discursive power for his (imperial) ritual interaction with the heaven. This same spatial infrastructure is to be found in Beijing: the Forbidden City is marked exactly by five spaces, namely the Heavenly Temple in the south which is an exact visualization of the Heaven-Altar of the Taishan, the Moon temple in the East, the Sun temple in the West, the earth temple in

18 Qian 1973, vol. 28.

19 Kiang 1975, 183.

20 Yü 1992; Landt 1994, 8–9.

21 Cedzich 2001, 9–10.

the North. The Inner, the Forbidden City with the residency of the Emperor – in analogy to the Holy Mountain in the Center (the Songshan) – is the Center of the Empire which is ritually legitimized and supported.²² The five Sacred Mountains served as spatial markers of the sacral legitimization of political power, and simultaneously also as ritual centers for popular religious practices.

4 Pilgrims, travelers and literati

Pilgrimage was not a religious duty. It was not specifically forced by religious professionals neither in Buddhism nor in Daoism. Pilgrimage was also not fortified within the Confucian classics. However, the emperors' sacrifice tours throughout the history were almost compulsory for legitimizing political power. Similarly, people, when seeking to approach the numinous and deity followed the same sacral geography.

The focus in the following is the 17th century which was characterized by a variety of religious specialists, besides Confucian scholars, Buddhist and Daoist clerics of both genders, diviners and geomancers.²³

In Late imperial China, pilgrimages to the Sacred Mountains were undertaken due to varying reasons. Wanderers traveled in order to find a master in the daoist tradition. Students and Literati wandered as seekers of learning and visited the centers of learning. Others traveled for self-cultivation (*xiu shen* 修身, literally: correction of the self).²⁴

When beginning in the 16th century leisure travel activities dramatically increased and travelogues (*youji* 游记) started to appear in high numbers on the book market, narratives about individual experiences of pilgrimage are only rarely to be found among them.²⁵ One reason for this might be seen in the fact that pilgrims mostly were illiterate.

The travelogues mostly stemmed from literati who approached the holy peaks²⁶ with multiple identities: they were at the same time administrators, poets, historians and seekers of longevity and mystical experience. Mundane desires such as sightseeing and retracing the footsteps of famous poets, emperors, sages and philosophers²⁷ were only part of their interests.

Literati emphasized literacy, correct moral and aesthetic judgment. To be sure, literacy was a crucial element in the offerings, paper money as well as in the prayers. However, on the other hand site oral recitation and repetition of poems and singing were also part of the activities on the holy mountains.²⁸ Women pilgrims visiting the holy

22 Shatzman Steinhard 1999.

23 Goosaert 2004, 699–771, here 699–700.

24 Goosaert 2004, 732.

25 Wu 1992, 66.

26 The most famous peak was and still is the Tai Shan (Mount Tai). See Chavannes 1910.

27 Dott 2004, 1, 195–197.

28 Dott 2004, 20, 231.

peaks for praying for sons as heirs were not necessarily literate. Among others a sheer number of pilgrims approached the holy peaks in late imperial China for religious devotion, for seeking health, a higher official position, good crops or greater control over conquered territories (such as the emperors).²⁹ Literati or scholar officials lodged for the night in a comfortable hostel, and after bathing in the morning they literally went on the backs of others (on sedan chairs or also on a donkey) to the peak.³⁰ Their accounts were not primarily ‘eye witness accounts’ of their experiences of pilgrimage: Literati at that time were fascinated with historical appreciation and with the appreciation of beautiful scenery. They went out to viewing historic sites and to describe them also in poems. They eagerly wanted to walk in the footsteps of famous cultural heroes, poets, emperors and philosophers. Their thinking was dominated by the general principles of Neo-Confucianism, which were a synthesis of earlier Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist contents.³¹ In 16th and 17th century a number of edifices in honor of Confucius were built by scholar officials on the Taishan.

Hence, sacred mountains were no more remote places, but very much populated. Pilgrimage tours were facilitated by agencies, restaurants, guesthouses and the many sedan chair bearers who offered their services to everybody who could afford it.³² Sacred Mountains more and more were visited by wealthy people like Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597–1684?), who wrote their private and personal accounts on the experiences as travelers and as pilgrims.³³ Any dichotomization of the secular and the sacred however would be inadequate since the conceptual separation of belief and knowledge is not at stake here.

Zhang Dai, a wealthy literati and descent of a prominent family in Shanyin³⁴ (present Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province) was not forced to pursue an official carrier. He could afford to travel and to enjoy beautiful sceneries wherever he loved to. He went to the West Lake in Hangzhou (which is about 52 km away from his home town) several times, but also to Yangzhou (which is about 290 km distant to Shaoxing) and to the Sacred Mountain Taishan (which is about 250 km away from Shaoxing). It is well known that traveling even in 17th century, still required time. People traveled over land and water, from Nanjing to Beijing for instance. This distance of about 1200 km required at least thirty days.³⁵ When Zhang Dai traveled to the Sacred Mountain, the Taishan, he was on the road for a dozen days. He wrote:

29 Dott 2004, 231.

30 Wu 1992, 68–70, mentions Wang Shizhen (1526–1590).

31 Dott 2004, 204.

32 Wu 1992, 73–74.

33 On this quite personal account on experienced pilgrimage see Wu 1992, 66–67; Liscomb 1993; Eggert

1994; Landt 1994; Strassberg 1994; Ward 1995 and Riemenschneider 1997.

34 The cultural centers Shanyin 山陰 Kuaiji 會稽 both belonged to the prefecture Shaoxing 紹興. Since the 16th Shaoxing was among the richest districts (*xian* 縣) in Southern China. See Cole 1986, 6.

35 Pang 1996, 82.

泰安州客店

客店至泰安州，不復敢以客店目之。余進香泰山，未至店里許，見驢馬槽房二三十間；再近，有戲子寓二十餘處；再近，則密戶曲房，皆妓女妖冶其中。余謂是一州之事，不知其為一店之事也。投店者，先至一廳事，上簿掛號，人納店例銀三錢八分，又人納稅山銀一錢八分。店房三等。下客夜素早亦素，午在山上用素酒果核勞之，謂之「接頂」。夜至店，設席賀，謂燒香後，求官得官，求子得子，求利得利，故曰賀也。賀亦三等：上者專席，糖餅、五果、十饅、果核、演戲；次者二人一席，亦糖餅，亦饅核，亦演戲；下者三四人一席，亦糖餅、饅核，不演戲，用彈唱[9]。計其店中，演戲者二十餘處，彈唱者不勝計。庖廚炊爨亦二十餘所，奔走服役者一二百人。下山後，葷酒狎妓惟所欲，此皆一日事也。若上山落山，客日日至，而新舊客房不相襲，葷素庖廚不相混，迎送廝役不相兼，是則不可測識之矣。泰安一州與此店比者五六所，又更奇。

When people came to an inn in Tai'an prefecture, they dared not to take it an ordinary inn. On my pilgrimage to Mount Tai (余進香泰山) I stopped at an inn. Before I reached the inn, I saw twenty to thirty stables for horses and donkeys. Nearer the inn, there were more than twenty theatre quarters. Still closer, I saw secret chambers where pretty and coquettish prostitutes were housed. I had never known that the Prefecture's phenomenon had its origins in the inn.

For guests, they have to first register in a hall, each one has to pay the inn a standard charge of 3 qian and 8 fen, and pay the mountain tax of 1 qian 8 fen.³⁶

Rooms had 3 types. For common guests both evening and morning were vegetarian meals. They were entertained with plain wine, fruits and nuts at noon in the mountain, called "reaching the summit" (*jie ding* 接頂). When they returned to the inn at night, there were congratulatory (he 賀) (final) banquets, believing that after they offered incenses (燒香) their wishes for promotion, a son and profit would be granted. The congratulatory meals also had 3 types. The most expensive type provided a separate table for each pilgrim and had five fruits, ten dishes, sweets, cakes, and a choice of dramatic and musical entertainments: the middle grad sat 2 to a table, with sweets, cakes, dishes and nuts, and dramatic performance. Those paying the cheapest rate were crowded in 3 or more to a table, also provided with sweets, cakes and dishes, but were regaled with only music, not theatricals.

36 In Ming times, a normal worker earned about 20 liang 两 a year. 1 两 = 2000 钱, 1 钱 = 10 分。At that time, one 斤 (half kg today) of pork is about 20 钱, and one 斤 of noodle is about 10 钱。Thus 三錢八

分 is not a big amount, but I guess it was only the basic fee for the inn, and other charges depended on what you ordered (personal communication by Lee Cheuk Yin, Singapore University).

The inn had more than 20 places having dramatic performances, and countless musical performances. It also had more than 20 stoves in the kitchen and helpers amount to one to 2 hundred men. When (the visitors) came down from Taishan, they ate meat, drank wine, and sought pleasure with prostitutes, doing whatever they wanted. All this happened within a day. It was strange that despite the heavy traffic up and down the Mountain, there were still enough rooms and manpower for it. All the new arrivals never found their rooms unready; vegetarian and non-vegetarian meals never got mixed up, nor did the employees ever fail to anticipate every need of the guests. It was even stranger that there were five to six inns which could match this in Tai'an Prefecture.³⁷

This extract from Zhang Dai's late 17th century travelogue offers vivid insights into the ways pilgrimage had become an integral event involving touristic structures that allowed thousands of people to be employed. To be sure, the Taishan was the most prominent among the Sacred Mountains. Whether or not other mountains also 'offered' such well-organized pilgrim-tour-packages, there were masses of people "on the roads."³⁸

5 Rescuing the world from disease and death

Students, scholar officials or wealthy merchants could afford to make use of such well-organized pilgrimage to the Five Sacred Mountains that helped people (*xiang ke* 香客) to perform their prayers for sons, wealth and an office. These were the most common goals why they were supposed to approach the Sacred Mountains. Yet, there were also those who sought to transform their selves towards immortality, and to rescue the world from disease and pain.

They needed to know some more details which shall be explored with the help of Chen Shiduo 陳士鐸 (1627–1707).³⁹ He lived during the same period and at the same place, namely the early 17th century Shanyin, as the above quoted Zhang Dai. Chen was an equally ambitious writer as Zhang. Yet, he did not contribute to written literary pieces but merely to knowledge texts in the realm of medicine and *yangsheng* 養生

37 Tao'an mengyi 陶庵夢憶 – "Dream Memories from the Tao Hut", written ca. 1659–1660 by Zhang Dai 張代 (1597–1684?).

38 On the increasing significance of pilgrimage and wandering as seekers for a master in late imperial China, see Goosaert 2004, 732–733.

39 His life dates can only be reconstructed on the basis of a single passage within the Shanyin 山陰 Gazetteer from 1804, saying that he died at the age of 80 (see Shanyin xianzhi 山陰縣志, 1804, quoted according to Liu Changhua 柳長華 et al. (eds.): Chen Shiduo yixue quan shu 陳士鐸醫學全書. Beijing: Zhongguo zhongyiyao chubanshe, 1999, (hereafter quoted as CQS): 1137).

(self-cultivation aimed at health preservation).⁴⁰ As a *shengyuan* (licentiate) he was educated enough for participating at higher level-examinations, what he did, but failed like so many of his contemporaries. An increasing number of highly educated people who never made it up the examination ladder and therefore never attained any official position; a surplus of educated people who were in need of alternative ways for their career and income⁴¹ catered to the increasing demand for encyclopedias of useful everyday knowledge (*riyong leishu* 日用類書), which to a significant part also included medical knowledge. Medical activity as an alternative professional career had been known at least since the 11th century, and in the mid-17th century, it became specifically the choice of Ming loyalists.⁴² This contributed to elevating the social status of medical specialists and of their expert knowledge and also materialized in a significant increase in the writing and publishing of medical books.⁴³

Irrespective whether or not Chen Shiduo was regarded as a gifted physician and as the founder of a new (medical) canon, we focus here on the fact that he heavily refers to the virtuous hermits (*yin junzi* 隱君子) and other extraordinary people (*yiren* 異人) who lived in hidden places near the tops of the sacred mountains and whom Chen reports to having met on his journeys. He incessantly consulted aborigines (*turen* 土人)⁴⁴ in order to learn from them for his own medical practice.⁴⁵ On his own extensive travels⁴⁶ he also helped to treat ill people when having been asked, i.e. he practiced medicine as a traveller (*xingyi* 行醫).

He moreover reports that among his writings several secret formulas have been included which derived from his grandfather Anqi's 安期 who was versed in the art of *fangshu* 方術 (occult arts). Chen informs the reader moreover that Anqi travelled to Sichuan (Shu 蜀) mounted the Emei 峨嵋山,⁴⁷ where a daoist master (*yushi* 羽士) transmitted him miraculous recipes.⁴⁸

40 Today his writings, especially the *Shishi milu* 石室秘錄, 1691 (Secret Record of the Stone Chamber), and the *Bianzheng lu* 辨証錄, 1687 (Record of Differentiation of pattern), are easily available in almost every larger bookstore in China. Chen Shiduo's writings are of particular interest due to his 'extraordinary' efficient medical recipes against *childlessness* for instance. See Messner 2016.

41 For detailed numbers see Elman 2000, 140.

42 On Ming-Loyalisms see Struve 2007, 159; Struve 2009, 343–394; Yates 2009, 5–20.

43 Widmer 1996, 77–80.

44 See Chen 1999a 辨証錄, in CQS: 697.

45 It is by no means certain that Chen himself practiced medicine. At least, Prof. Dong Hanliang 董漢良, the editor of *Yueyi huijiang* 越醫彙講 (1994) ex-

pressed his doubts in a personal conversation during my research stay in Shaoxing, Winter 2005.

46 He most probably was in Beijing in 1687, where he met the holy masters. In 1693 he went to Beijing again for a second time. See the second prologue to his *Dongtian aozhi*, 1698: "In autumn Kangxi Ding Mao 康熙丁卯 [e.g. 1687] he [Chen] met the Heavenly Master Qi Bo in Yanshi 燕市 [e.g. Beijing] [...] In autumn [Kangxi] Gui Hai 癸亥 [e.g. 1693] I again traveled to Beijing. [...]" (CQS: 1015).

47 Which today is been regarded as one of the Four Buddhist Sacred Mountains. At Chen Shiduo's time, this mountain was visited even more often by Daoist adepts. See Messner 2016. On the Emeishan in history see Hahn 2000, 683–708.

48 See *fanli* 凡例 in Chen 1999b, in CQS: 1016.

This statement is crucial for his identity-formation as an extraordinary physician: the name of his grandfather (Anqi) can also be read *as posteriori* naming by Chen Shiduo, because Anqi 安期 refers to “Heavenly Master”⁴⁹. His grandfather – he says – was in possession of secret formulas which he again got from Daoist priests, whom he had met during his journeys to the sacred mountains.

These accounts prove the high significance of the sacred mountains and hidden masters for Chen Shiduo’s identity building as a great physician. In addition, in several forewords and reading-instructions to Chen’s textbooks we find the following biographical narrative: once, in 1689 – Chen was already 60 years old – during his stay in a guest-house in Beijing [it is not clear, whether he was there for the metropolitan examinations or not], he sat in his room, very sadly, sighing loudly. All of a sudden, there were two impressive *Junzi* 君子 (noble men, men of virtue) appearing in front of him; after acquiring about his grief, they quickly realized that Chen’s only desire was to rescue the world from disease and early death. His deep and honest desire aroused their pity. They told him the best recipes and the best methods to become a good physician. After that they told him to write down all the valuable information. Chen, only after they had disappeared, realized that he had actually met the heavenly masters and immortals Qi Bo and Zhang Zhongjing.

This account on the transmission of medical knowledge to the adept Chen Shiduo intrinsically relates the virtue of “purity of intention” with immortality: medicine hereby becomes a domain of moral exercise and fulfilment. This however was not an invention of the 17th century. As mentioned above, medical activity since the 11th century was known as an alternative ‘scholarly’ career. This however did not involve automatically a high status. In opposition, the relation of status and skills in the case of the medical profession was continually negotiated. Yet in 17th century things changed favourably. The borderline between so called scholar-physicians (*ruyi* 儒医) and heredity-physicians (*shiyi* 世医) blurred. Chen Shiduo presents himself as being chosen by two prominent immortals that were highly popular at that time. They transmitted him the miraculous recipes and curing methods for rescuing patients from death.

He shows several modes of the interrelation between the Sacred and rescue, which he had directly learned from heavenly masters. With this, medicine became the knowledge-domain for the powerful *materia medica*. Mountains are places where the power of a deity is manifest,⁵⁰ and where the power of *material medicine* was developed. Yet, all this power was only to be accessed by virtuous, truthful people.

The particular conceptualization of the mountain as sacred space is described in detail already by Ge Hong 葛洪 (ca. 283–ca. 343), who was instrumental in the transmis-

49 Since Wu (reg. -140 until -87) this name referred to daoist master and the search for longevity. *Ciyuan*, 0137.3.

50 Naquin and Yü 1992, 11.

sion of various textual corpora in Taoist thought, alchemy, medicine and hagiography.⁵¹ Depicting the ways one had to act and to behave when entering a mountain, he offers insights how philosophical dialogue and an encyclopedia of rites merged into an authoritative advise:⁵²

Everyone who is able to produce medicinal drugs and all those who wanted to escape from political chaos and who (therefore) chose secluded locations, without exception went into mountains. Yet, if somebody enters the mountains without knowing the method of the [ritual] and enters the [sphere of] mountains (*bu zhi ru fazhe* 不知入法者), he will usually encounter danger for body and life [...]. Every mountain – either big or small – is filled with holy (sacred) powers (*shenling* 神靈). Big mountains have great power – small mountains have lesser powers. Anybody who enters a mountain without knowing the art [of behaving in a correct way] will inevitably be damaged. Some will suffer from serious diseases and will be injured, they will be shaken by panic fear.⁵³

The methods (rites: *fa*) for calling sacred powers – or – for spellbounding negative powers consist in instructions for moving correctly, for arming oneself with talismans and for thinking correctly. The Sacred here clearly appears as a conceptualized counter world – inheriting unpredictable powers. Thus, the methods (rites) are the key for communicating with the sacred, simultaneously they are the precondition for approaching and achieving longevity, and immortality.

6 Pilgrimage as practice for transformation and self-cultivation

The conceptual history of the Mountains as a Sacred Space involves the idea of the human body as a sacred space, e.g. as a mountain. It was textualized and depicted in detailed drawings, so that the adept could visualize the processes and concomitantly ‘doing’ the transformative processes. As such the idea of transforming oneself towards longevity or even towards immortality was tightly connected to a kind of ‘inner pilgrimage’. For approaching the state of immortality, people had to perform techniques in and through the body-self (*shen* 身) – to harmonize the mental and physical life-force with eternal life-force of the heaven (cosmos). The *fangshi* 方士 (magicians, masters of techniques, shamans) were seen as the keepers of the secret of immortality.⁵⁴

51 Pregadio 2008, 443; Company 2002.

52 Schmidt 1996, 17–20.

53 Hong 1985, 299.

54 On early depictions of these seekers of immortality, see DeWoskin 1983.

Historically, the example of the legendary Yellow Emperor became the paradigm for attaining immortality. He presided China's legendary Golden Age (2852–2255 BC), when he taught people how to use fire, to plow their fields and to harvest the thread of the silk worm. It is furthermore said, that his interest in medicine and in nourishing his own vitality finally resulted in experimentations with metals and herbs in order to find the formula for immortality (which is a steady process towards pure yang, the golden elixir (*jinye*). After taking the drug, he mounted a dragon and flew away to the world of the immortals.

The path to immortality was divided into two streams with different emphasis and methods. The outer (*wai dan*) and the inner elixir (*nei dan*). The followers of the outer school sought to produce the pill of immortality from metals and herbs through alchemical processes. Their goal was to bridge and unify the apparent duality of human *qi* and cosmic *qi*. The inner school especially, later – by Song Dynasty (960–1279) – became important as a major alchemical pattern.⁵⁵ They sought to produce the Golden Elixir (*jinye*) via inner transformations.

A text from the Northern Song, around 1078,⁵⁶ the *Chen Xiansheng neidan jue* 陳先生內丹訣 (Master Chen's Internal Alchemical Lesson) explains:

When the elixir reaches the seventh cycle [when You achieve a certain level in Your exercises], you must remove yourself from the commotion of the market places and enter deep into the mountains. Calmly sit amidst the rocky crags, holding your breath and concentrating your spirit. Cut off the breath that comes and goes through the mouth and nose. Make the true *yin* and *yang* converge inside your belly. Seize the creative power of Heaven and Earth and make it adhere to your four extremities. After a thousand days, your five organs will change completely and the embryonic Qi will transform into immortal bowels.

Then You will feel a hole open up in the gate of the summit, which will emit a red and black vapor. This is the embryonic Qi dispersing. After a thousand days, the hole in the Summit Gate will seal shut. The embryonic Qi is expelled completely, the merit of seven cycles, is complete. From this point onward, the

55 The body vision unique to internal alchemy first appears in the Song dynasty (960–1260). Following the Yuan (1260–1368), it continues to transform in response to socio-political and religious pressures, including new forms of Buddhist tantra transmitted from Mongolia and Tibet. The development of new political dynamics across the western and north-western frontiers and the transmutation of gender concepts changes during the Ming dynasty (1368–

1644) and led to a new interest in gendered practice. Overall, different schools and masters imagined the body in different ways.

56 Other texts from Southern Song and Yuan (12th–14th century) reflect the classical period of the *nei-dan* tradition. But in 17th century there seems to be a Renaissance of these traditions. See Eskildsen 2009, 89.

five viscera will bear fruit, and you will not take in food of the kind cooked in smoke and fire.⁵⁷

This passage says: the only and right place to be where finally immortality is accomplished is the mountain. Immortality is a state or process in which the body-self more and more approaches the state of subtleness and nearly pulverization: pure *yang*.

The ongoing process of transformation towards immortalization is essentially a process in which the inner anatomy transforms. The adept does no longer need to eat, since the five viscera grow their own food (fruit).

The adepts first have to cultivate a trance through inner concentration and breathholding – in which the Spirit grows and expands beyond the border of the body. This goes to the point where it contains the entire universe. With a vision of a bright ball of light coming down (the descending of the elixir), it leaves adepts with numbness in their limbs, which may linger on for quite a while even after coming out of trance (4ab).

Subsequently adepts nurture in themselves a holy fetus (*shengtai* 聖胎), which will be able to exit the body and travel greater distances as it matures (7b–16b) When it reaches its full maturity, it can travel limitless distances.⁵⁸

The conceptualization of the body as an energetic network is a prerequisite for the medical view of the body as being the residence of multiple, complex ongoing Qi- processes and blood flows. In early Daoism multiple deities are seen to be located within the body. The view of the body as a mountain – and as such as the place for inner pilgrimage – is evidenced in the course of the middle ages (3th–9th century), a time in which the Buddhist concept of mountains as sacred pilgrimage sites gradually has been textualized.⁵⁹ The oldest extant picture of visualizations of the body as Mountain stems from the 13th century: *Duren jing neiyi* 度人經內意 (Internal Meaning of the Scripture of Salvation)⁶⁰ is a Song commentary on the *Duren jing* 度人經 which is a key text of the School of the Numinous Treasure, that was vastly expanded under Emperor Huizong (1101–1125).

Fig. 2 shows the body as mountain. The route is shown in the oval shaped river, in which Qi 氣 is flowing through the body during internal practice. At the foot of the mountain is the Sea of Suffering (*kubai* 苦海), which is a Buddhist term for the state of all beings forced to drift un-enlightened in the mundane world. The image borrows it to designate the Ocean of Qi (*qihai* 氣海) in the alchemical body. The flow of *qi* originates here, at the mountains foot.

It then flows up through the Governing Vessel (*dumai* 督脉) along the back of the body (left in the image) and enters the energetic cycle at the Gate of Life (*mingmen* 命門).

57 See Zhengtong daoang, 1096. This section heavily relies on Eskildsen 2009, 90–91.

58 Eskildsen 2009, 90–91.

59 Hahn 2000, 683–708.

60 Zhengtong daoang, 91, dat. 1227; Neswald 2009, 32–33.

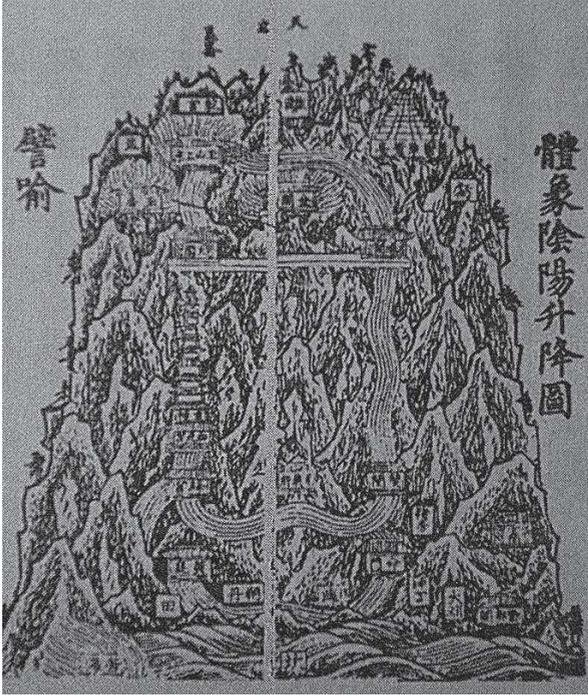


Fig. 2 The body as mountain.

There it feeds the flow of essence (*jing* 精). From there it goes through the Double Pass (*shuangguan* 雙關) to the peak of Mount Kunlun in the head, where the Qi transforms.

After transformation it descends along the Conception Vessel (*renmai* 任脉) along the front of the body (right side in the image), moving from the Heavenly Pass (*tianguan* 天關)⁶¹ past the throat – usually described as the Twelve-storied Tower (*shier cenglou* 十二層樓) – into the immortal womb at the center of the abdomen, above which the Jade Chamber (*yufang* 玉房) is located. In the womb, the cyclical sign *wuyi* 戊己 represents the internal mating of cosmic water and fire, Qi and *shen* (spirit).⁶² The clockwise, left-to-right passage of Qi in the body, moreover, accords with the directional movement of the Buddhist pilgrim at a stupa, mountain, or during an internal pilgrimage.

Similar patterns also apply in the tantric vision of the body as cosmic mandala and sacred mountain. The pilgrim's route is marked by a stream that proceeds from the bottom left up along the outer slopes of the mountain and down on the right. In each

61 Which – according to the *Dadan zhizhi* 大丹直指 (Direct Pointers to the Great Elixir), DZ 244 – is located behind the brain.

62 Despeux and Kohn 2003, 185–186.

case visualizations not only work at mountain locations but are equally relevant within the pilgrim's body. Places of power widely spot the mandalized body/mountain/cosmos.

The pilgrim thus circumambulates these places until he or she gains access to the internal altar of the deity, pictured at the very center. Unlike Daoist adepts, Tantrikas usually transform into the deity through intentional visualization; whereas internal pilgrimage in Daoism does not imply that the adept through intentional visualization and identification transforms into the deity. However, in Daoism the internal pilgrimage means to simultaneously affect pilgrimage ritual and access to sacred knowledge and sacred sites and to foster alchemical transformation of the physical and spiritual self.

7 Conclusion

Sacred sites in Chinese past and present alike are associated with mountains. They have been investigated in their multiple identities: as part of imperial ritual (emperors throughout journeyed to sacred mountains in order to perform rituals to legitimate their political power), as part of mysticism, nature and history worship (literati, poets and officials approached these places to connect themselves with ancient and extraordinary sites and scenes), as part of life and fertility performances (women, as part of pilgrimage associations or with their family members, came to pray for baby sons), as part of death and purgatory sites (male villagers came to pray for departed ancestors), as part of Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist sites of worship and ritual, as sites for performing self-cultivation and rectification of the minds, as sites which were used by literati to project something of themselves into the future.

In late Imperial contexts when rising numbers of literati required them to seek for alternative professional career, many chose medicine. Transforming medicine from a low regarded practice to a respected profession required to integrating the power of the sacred space as part of the personal (physicians) identity as well as part of the prescriptions. This in turn required moral integrity and the honest and great commitment in what it meant to rescue the world from disease and suffering.

This is the moment when body-knowledge and body practices came into play that included techniques of visualization of the Qi within the own body or also within those of patients. In the end the adept transforms himself into a perfected self, free from pain and disease.

To sum up, the body-self in these 'inner pilgrimage' exercises is not to be seen just as a medium for approaching the sacred, but is seen essentially as the intrinsic space where the Sacred 'is located' – where it can be developed and lived with.

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1 Map drawn by Angelika Messner on the basis of <https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/583425311.html>.

2 Zhengtong daoang, 91. Number matches to Schipper and Verellen 2004.

ANGELIKA C. MESSNER

Angelika C. Messner heads the China Center at Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel and acts as a visiting professor at the Zhejiang University, as well as guest professor at Shanghai University for Traditional China Medicine, China. She pursues basic research on emotion knowledge and practices in China.

Prof. Dr. Angelika C. Messner
Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel
Philosophische Fakultät
Seminar für Orientalistik
Leibnizstraße 10
24118 Kiel, Germany
E-Mail: messner@sino.uni-kiel.de