Contemporary Daoism in Mainland China Today: Daoist Temples, Daoist Priests and the Daoist Association of China

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1. Introduction

In 2003, my article “Daoism in China Today, 1980-2002,” published in The China Quarterly, has detailed the revival of Daoism in China after a gradual liberalization of the state’s policies on religion since about 1982.1) This article presents the restoration

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of destroyed Daoist monasteries (*daoguan* 道觀), the return of liturgical activities in Daoist temples, and the establishment of the Daoist Associations of China (*Zhongguo daojiao xiehui* 中國道教協會), both nationally and provincially, and the China Daoist College (*Zhongguo daojiao xueyuan* 中國道教學院) for young Daoist priests. Apart from the restoration of Daoist temples, I also highlighted the activities of many married “Zhengyi 正一 (Orthodox Unity) Daoist masters,” or called *huojü daoshi* 火居道士 (hearth-dwelling Daoist masters), who lived and worked outside the monasteries to perform rituals for local communities for a living. 2) Another main evidence of the revival of Daoism is the ordination ceremony of Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Perfection) Daoists, called *shoujie* 授戒, at Baiyun guan 白雲觀 in Beijing, one of the large public monastic centers (or *shifang conglin* 十方叢林), held in 1989, the first such ceremony since the takeover of the communist government in China (see photo 1). For Zhengyi Daoist ordination, the so-called “transferral of registers” (*shoulu* 授錄), of Zhengyi Daoists at the Zhengyi Tianshifu 天師府 (the head offices of the Heavenly Master) was restored and took place at Longhu shan


龍虎山 in Jiangxi in 1995.

Over the past two decades, the speed of restoring and reconstructing Daoist temples has accelerated. The restoration of Daoist monasteries expanded from those temples located in metropolitan cities to small ones in rural counties. As a result of such restoration, it is officially reported that there are about 8,200 Daoist temples lawfully registered as normal places of religious activities in China to date.\(^3\) In comparison with this figure, the Daoist Association of China (hereafter the DAC) reported that only 400 Daoist temples were opened in 1992, 1,200 in 1995 and 1,600 in 1998.\(^4\) As for the growing number of registered Daoist priests associated with the Quanzhen order or the Zhengyi sect, Master Li Guangfu 李光富, the present chairman of the Daoist Association of China, revealed that the number of Daoist priests rises to 30,000 in 2017. However, Master Zhang Fenglin 張鳳林, the general secretary of the Association, reported that “there are 40,000 registered Daoist priests nowadays.”\(^5\) Furthermore, Master Lin Zhou 林舟, vice-president of the Association, added that “altogether more than 30,000 Taoist priests live in temples, and 60,000 Taoist priests reside at home.”\(^6\)

\(^3\) See China Taoism 中國道教, No. 2 (2017): 27.


\(^6\) See “Old Answers for New Ills,” South China Morning Post, November
Re-emerging from the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution marked by the repressive policies of the Marxist ideology, Daoism, together with Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism, are recognized by the state’s policy on religion in 1982 as the five organized religions in mainland China, which could engage in “normal” religious activities in the mainland.\footnote{See the 1991 “Document No. 19” about the Chinese Communist Party’s policy on religion. It states that normal religious activities are confined within “the bounds of law, regulation, and policy of the state.”} To a great extent, one can claim that the age-old Daoism has returned to modern China. Not only has Daoism developed very fast during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, it is also surprising that this ancient religion is being explored and revalued by Chinese leaders and intellectual groups in the hope of applying ancient Daoist values and wisdom to deal with issues of morality and environmental problems in contemporary Chinese society.

Without doubt, the rapid growth of market economy, the urbanization of villages, and the population change in China since the late 1990s have not only transformed the country’s socio-economic and demographic conditions, these changes also provide an opportunity as well as a serious challenge to traditional Chinese religions like Daoism, entailing the necessity for them to strive for a balance between tradition and change in modern times. For instance, as the first only-children of China’s one-child policy
reaching adulthood in China today, the *chujia* 出家 (leaving family/home) practice maintained by the Daoist monastic tradition becomes even more difficult.\(^8\) On the other hand, an opportunity for the institution of Daoism is the development and recognition of the Daoist laity like the Jushi lin 居士林 in Buddhism. As a prevailing practice to date, the organization of Daoist temples is based upon the authority of professional Daoist clerics structured by the lineages of masters and disciples. Therefore, Daoist efforts in adopting a new and more opened model of inviting lay believers to join the management of Daoist temples are rightly an important issue in view of the future development of Daoism in the changing situation of contemporary China. Thirdly, as being confined by the state’s policies on “normal” religions, it comes as no surprise to observe that the state’s regulatory control of religious activities and places of worship may possibly bring adverse effects on the growth of Daoism with respect to its religious evangelism, recruitment of young priests, fund-raising, social engagement, and other public activities, which are regarded to bring positive religious influences upon different social groups and education sectors both in cities and universities.

My aim in the present paper is to offer a preliminary study of

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\(^8\) For the contemporary development of monastic tradition of *chujia* in Quanzhen temples, see Adeline Herrous, “Daoist Monasticism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,” in David A. Palmer and Liu Xun eds., *Daoism in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 82-107.
Daoism in contemporary China during the period from 2000 to the present day. It focuses on three main aspects: the expansion of Daoist temples, the ordinations and trainings of Daoist priests, and the Daoist social engagement and charity work.

2. Daoist Temples

As quoted above, it is officially reported that there are about 8,200 Daoist temples lawfully registered as normal places of religious activities in China today. To account for the surprisingly increasing number of Daoist temples over the past two decades, one may attribute it to a state of “spiritual crisis” of Chinese people as they no longer believe in Marxism in post-Mao China. Obviously, some of them turn to Chinese traditional culture or religious faith, thus contributing to a guoxue (Chinese studies) heat. Besides, it is equally worth noting that the Chinese government has been looking more and more to Daoism to support its cultural campaigns in order to strike a balance between the indigenous Chinese religion and the flourishing Western Christianity in mainland China.9)

Thanks to the government’s strong and enthusiastic sponsorship, the “International Daoist Forum” 国際道教論壇 has been held four times. The first Forum, which opened in Xi’an 西安 and concluded in Hong Kong, was held on April 22-27, 2007 under the main theme of “Constructing a Harmonious World through the Dao.” It is understood that the Forum is intended to promote Daoism internationally. The government has been increasingly looking to Chinese indigenous religions like Daoism for help in its campaigns to promote the “soft power” of China.

Apart from the state’s support due to certain political considerations, I like to add an academic perspective that mainly originates from my recent field investigation of the Daoist temples in Guangdong 廣東 and Jiangsu 江蘇, which may be helpful in understanding the growth of Daoism at local levels. My 2009 article on “Contemporary Daoist Temples in Guangdong” took into account of the expansion of Quanzhen temples in Guangdong province. As noted in my fieldwork, many Daoist temples were newly founded in Guangdong as a result of their adoption of a certain religious or Daoist strategy, which I called “becoming Quanzhen” 全真化. Originally, they were popular temples (minjian miaoyu 民間廟宇) in towns and counties in Guangdong, which were dedicated for worshipping local deities. “Becoming Quanzhen”

refers to a religious tactic to legitimize popular temples as Daoist sites for religious activities open to the public.

Accordingly, the government’s “Regulations on the Management of Sites for Religious Activities” define religious sites for normal activities of Buddhist and Daoist temples, Islamic mosques, Catholic and Protestant churches. The government authority implements the regulations on the control of religions by prescribing that “the building of any new temple, mosque, or church must obtain the approval from the Provincial Religious Affairs Department” (新建寺观教堂须经省人民政府宗教事务部门批准). Furthermore, the “Regulations on the Lawful Religious Sites” prescribe that a site for religious activities has to be run by a delegation of clergymen and religious followers under the supervision of a Patriotic Religious Association. Noticeably, a person of the profession of a religious order is defined as a bishop, a father or a sister in the Catholic order; a pastor or a church-minister in the Protestant church; a Buddhist monk or nun; a Daoist priest or priestess; Iman of Islam in the Islamic order; or a person who has been approved to have a religious profession by a Patriotic Religious Association and the Religious Affairs Department 宗教局 of the People’s Republic.

In 2009, our field investigation revealed that some of the newly founded Daoist temples being approved as sites for religious activities were actually former popular temples in villages or in
towns. According to the government’s regulations, if authentic Daoist temples want to obtain approval to operate as sites for normal religious activities, they need to provide proof of their “Daoist” identity and guarantee that their management is run by “Daoist” priests. Since the Quanzhen school 全真派, which is based on the chujia practice, has been promoted to the level of Daoist orthodoxy by the official Daoist Association of China, many new popular temples claim their affiliation with the Quanzhen Longmen school 全真龍門派 in an attempt to obtain a government-approved religious identity for practicing religious activities and ceremonies in the temples.

I like to give an example of a Daoist temple named Tiandao guan 天道觀, which is situated in Xizhai cun 西寨村 in Yuhu qu 渔湖区, Jieyang shi 揭阳市. Wang Xinqing 王信清 (1913-2005) built this temple in April 1994, which was later declared as a legitimate site for Daoist activities in October 1995. Actually, Tiandao guan used to be a zhaitong 齋堂 (vegetarian hall) in the village. Before 1994, Wang Xinqing was well-known for her religious ability in spirit-communication, though she was not yet connected with Daoism whatsoever. In order to gain the legitimacy of a government-approved religious site open to her followers, many Daoist deities like Sanqing 三清 (Three Pure Ones), Yuhuang 玉皇 (Jade Emperor), Taiyi Jiuku Tianzun 太乙救苦天尊 (Heavenly Venerable Savior from Suffering) and Wang Lingguan 王靈官
(Divine Officer Wang) were installed and honored in the temple since it was built in 1994. Wang Xinqing, nonetheless, set up a statue of Yaochi jinmu (Golden Mother of the Jasper Pool, a main deity of Zhaijiao) venerated in the centre of a special hall at the back of the temple. The fahao (Daoist name) of Wang’s followers of Tiandao guan are, however, created according to the “lineage poem” (paishi 派詩) of the Quanzhen Longmen school.

Up to the year of 2010, sixty-two Guangdong Daoist temples have registered with the Guangdong Daoist Association. Among the twenty-eight temples I had visited in the province, twenty-one were newly founded Daoist temples of “Quanzhen” tradition approved by the Religious Affairs Department as sites for religious activities after 1988.

A second example that can explain the growth of Daoist temples as a result of the urbanization of rural areas is found in Kunshan city in Jiangsu province. In May 2017, I visited three Daoist temples in Kunshan, namely the Palace of Jade Emperor (Yuhuang gong 玉皇宮) and two Temples of the Emperor of Eastern Peak (Dongyue miao 東岳廟). These three temples were formerly popular temples built by villagers in Kunshan. Later after 1990s, they were rebuilt and transformed to be Daoist temples under the direct administration of Daoist priests assigned by Kunshan Daoist Association. As a common practice of most Daoist
temples in southeastern China, all Kunshan Daoist temples belong to the Zhengyi order, which means that Daoist priests residing in the temples are not monks practicing a *chujia* life, but are Daoist specialists who perform temple services for lay believers.

As known, the popular cult of the Emperor of Eastern Peak 東岳大帝 had gained widespread popularity in imperial China, particularly in southeastern regions, from the Song-Yuan period up to the end of the Qing dynasty.\(^{11}\) According to the *Qingjia lu* 清嘉錄, “On the 28\(^{th}\) of March, the birthday of the Emperor of Eastern Peak was celebrated, and many villages [of Kunshan] organized pilgrims to give ritual offerings to the deity. Village people in the towns of Shipai 石牌, Zhaoling 趙陵, Zhenyi 真義, Jiangli 姜里, Chetang 車塘, and Genglouqiao 更樓橋 flourished to visit Dongyue temples to pay worship to the deity.”\(^{12}\) Indeed, many Dongyue temples were already founded and scattering in the Kunshan region before 1950s. As a result of the economic reform in the past twenty years, more and more Kunshan villages were displaced and merged into “economic and technological development zones” (經濟技術開發區) in order to attract Taiwan businessmen’s investment to develop IT industry in the area. In light of the fast pace of economic reform,


land development and population change, the preservation of traditional temple cults becomes an immediate issue. The Palace of Jade Emperor and the two Temples of the Emperor of the Eastern Peak I recently visited in Kunshan city were examples of village temples being rebuilt on the basis of the model of Daoist temples in 1990s. Surprisingly, not only have the popular temples constructed as a “Daoist” site, they also keep veneration of more or less twenty statues of different local gods in a special deity hall, which were collected from many other village temples after their demolition due to the development of new economic and industrial zones (see photo 2). Some Daoist priests told us that old village residents make a pilgrim annually to these “Daoist” sites to worship their village deities on the festive occasion of their birthday celebration (shendan 神誕). In other words, the growth of Daoist temples in Jiangsu (such as Kunshan city) is actually an outcome of the merging of a significant number of popular temples originally built in local towns and counties into newly founded Daoist temples under the administration of the Kunshan Daoist Association.

The above examples not only show a close relationship between the religion of Daoism and popular temples in local communities, but also provide a reasonable account for the growth of Daoist temples in contemporary China, including the effects of the government’s regulations on religious places as well as the fast
economic and urban developments across many cities in modern China.

3. Daoist Priests

The growth of Daoist temples in China during the past two decades cannot be simply described as equivalent to the restoration and revival of Daoist monasteries destroyed in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) since the beginning of 1980s. Since 2000s, the fast pace of urbanization and economic growth not only triggers the growth of Daoism in cities, but also brings a demand for the transformation, or modernization, of traditional Daoist institution so that it can meet the changing needs of various groups of believers migrating to and working in cities. For instance, there are persistent issues of how to modernize the old religion, how to make more people understand its core values, and how Daoist temples can attract more middle-class people, university students and young people to join. In this section, we will analyze the professional group of Daoist priests, including their religious education and temple services.

As mentioned above, it is estimated that there are altogether about 30,000 Daoist priests residing in temples who either belong to Quanzhen or Zhengyi sects, and about 60,000 married Zhengyi masters, called *huoju daoshi* (Daoists living at home), or known
as the *sanju daoshi* 散居道士 in China nowadays. As required by the government’s regulation on religious personnel, a recognized Daoist priest must have a “Daoist identification card” (*daoshi zheng* 道士证) granted by a Daoist Association above the county level and approved by the Religious Affairs Department. Standard measures of issuing *daoshi zheng* to the priests of the Daoist schools have been made respectively in the past ten years. In the case of Quanzhen school, it is only after an adept has gone through the ritual of “taking the cap” (*guanjin* 冠巾), or commonly called the “small ordination” (*xiao shoujie* 小授戒), in which a monk or nun receives a Daoist cap, a Daoist robe and an ordination name from his or her master, that he or she can be accepted as an ordained Quanzhen priest.\(^\text{13}\) The *guanjin* ritual is usually performed after a minimum of three years of training in a “hereditary” monastery (*zisun miao* 子孫廟) of the master. Daoist training of an adept actually starts with a ritual of “taking a master” (*baishi* 拜師) through which he or she becomes a disciple of the master and can start the basic scriptural learning and the “daily morning and evening service” (*zaowan gongke* 早晚功课). This traditional regulation on ordaining a Quanzhen priest was re-introduced in 2007 and then spurred the local Quanzhen temples to organize

\(^\text{13}\) For the *guanjin* ritual practiced in late Qing period, see Vincent Goossaert, *The Taoists of Peking, 1800-1949: A Social History of Urban Clerics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), 102-103.
guanjin ceremonies all over China. In addition, nowadays Quanzhen public monastic temples also perform guanjin ceremonies at the provincial level so that a larger number of Daoist adherents can formally become Daoist priests according to the regulation enacted by the government authority.\(^{14}\) For example, the Zhongyue miao of Songshan has been organizing such ceremonies yearly for the last ten years. To give an instance of the guanjin ceremony at the provincial level, it is reported that the Beijing Daoist Association and the Palace of Lüzu (呂祖宮) jointly organized the guanjin ritual for seventy-four Quanzhen Daoist priests on May 20, 2016.\(^{15}\)

Next to the Quanzhen ordination of guanjin ceremonies is the “consecration” called shoujie (conferring the precepts) organized only by public monasteries of the Quanzhen school. Only a minority of Quanzhen monks and nuns are consecrated every time. After its interruption for more than fifty years, the renewal of the Quanzhen consecration ceremony in China was first realized at the Baiyun guan in 1989. The training period (jieqi) of this Quanzhen consecration was shortened from a hundred days in the old tradition to twenty days.\(^{16}\) There were seventy-five

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14) For example, the Changchun guan in Wuhan, one of the most famous Quanzhen monasteries in China, held the guanjin ceremony on May 18, 2012. Another monastery Baiyun guan in Lanzhou also organized guanjin ceremony on August 1, 2012.


16) During the early 19th century, the duration of Quanzhen ordination had
ordinands, thirty (40%) of whom were nuns, and all of them had already lived within a proper monastery for more than three years. At the end of the ceremony, the ordinands received the so-called “Great Precepts of the Threefold Altar” (Santan dajie 三壇大戒): the Initial Precepts of Perfection (Chuzhen jie 初真戒), the Intermediate Precepts (Zhongji jie 中極戒), and the Great Precepts of the Celestial Immortals (Tianxian dajie 天仙大戒). In November 1995, a second Quanzhen ordination was held at the Changdao guan 常道觀, also named the Tianshi dong 天師洞, on the Qingcheng shan 青城山 (see photo 3). Four hundred Quanzhen monks and nuns underwent the 1995 ordination (see photo 4). In 2012 and 2016, another two consecration ceremonies were respectively held at the Wulong gong 五龍宮 at Qianshan 千山 in Liaoning 遼寧 and the Changchun guan 長春觀 in Wuhan 武漢.

As a result of the organization of four Quanzhen consecrations up to 2016, there are about 1,000 ordinands having received the *Santan dajie* and finally becoming consecrated Daoists. According to Vincent Goossaert’s remarks, “Consecration was an essential monastic ritual that played a pivotal role in the continuation of the Quanzhen order as an institution of world-denying ascetics.”

As for the Zhengyi priests, one need to classify them into two different categories, namely married Daoist priests residing in temples (*gongguan daoshi* 宮觀道士) and those Daoist priests living at home (the so-called married *sanju daoshi*). As mentioned by Lin Zhou, it is estimated that about 60,000 married *sanju daoshi* preform Daoist liturgical services mainly for local communities; that means they practice rituals outside Daoist temples. Similar to the Quanzhen *guanjin* ritual, the Daoist Association of China requires that a Zhengyi priest who resides in a temple must first go through the ordination ritual usually called *chuandu* 傳度, in which he will receive a “Daoist Certificate” issued by a provincial Daoist Association, thus becoming a recognized Daoist priest of the Zhengyi sect. The word *chuandu* literally means that a disciple receives the “method of saving the world” (*dushi zhifa* 度世之法)


from his master. According to the “Regulation on the Administration of the Chuandu Practice of the Zhengyi Sect of Daoism” (道教正一派傳度活動管理辦法), all government-approved Daoist temples of the Zhengyi sect, or provincial Daoist Associations, can organize the chuandu ordination ritual. Similar to Kunshan Daoism, many Zhengyi Daoist temples flourish in southern and southeastern China today, including Nanchang 南昌, Changsha 長沙, Suzhou 蘇州, Maoshan 茅山, Fuzhou 福州, Shanghai 上海, etc. For example, up to 2008, among the total of twenty-one Daoist temples already open to the public in Shanghai, nineteen of them are Zhengyi Daoist temples.

Although Zhengyi Daoist priests can reside in temples and practice a normal religious life, a large proportion of “unregistered” Zhengyi priests are actually used to having a lay status. That means they live a married daoshi life at home, and will wear ritual vestments for performing rituals in local communities, especially in rural villages. As already discussed in my 2003 article, the question of the “official” status of married sanju daoshi and the effective management of them has always been a perplexing problem for the National and Provincial Daoist Associations. Since these sanju daoshi, or ritual specialists, always perform ritual services and offerings to popular gods in local temples, they may not be easily distinguished from temple shamans, whose religious identity and activities are criticized by the government authority
as superstitious and unlawful. Theoretically, it is illegal for the sanju daoshi to perform liturgical services and ceremonies outside Daoist temples, or officially endorsed religious sites, without prior approval from the regional Daoist Association. Implemented in 1992, the “Tentative Methods for Administrating the Zhengyi Priests Who Live at Home” emphasize the regulatory control over all sanju daoshi of the Zhengyi order, aiming at determining and identifying who are the “correct” and “recognized” ones.

While the first stage of the revival of Daoism in mainland China before 2000s was faced with the problem of the restoration and survival of Daoist temples, nowadays the Daoist Associations (at all levels) have shifted their attention to the proper training and education of young Daoist priests. To a large extent, the Chinese concept of “Daoist education” mainly refers to the nurturing of those Daoist clerics living in temples and how the China Daoist Colleges, both nationally and provincially, can attract young people to join the profession of Daoist priests. In May 1990, the National Daoist Association formally established the first China Daoist College in Beijing. Now, two levels of three-year degree programs, namely benke seng 本科生 (undergraduate) and yanjiu seng 研究生 (postgraduate) programs, are offered. Besides the China Daoist College in Beijing, at present, nine more Daoist Colleges have established at regional levels, including Chengdu 成都, Shanghai 上海, Wudangshan 武當山, Zhejiang 浙江, Longhushan 龍虎山,
Hebei 河北, Hunan 湖南, Fuzhou 福州, Guangdong 廣東, to recruit students mainly on provincial or local level. By all means, better improvement of Daoist training for the next generation of Daoist clerics is a serious concern and is high on the agenda of the Daoist Association of China today. Indeed, at present, the general education level of Daoist clerics in mainland China is comparatively lower than that of other professional personnel of other religions such as Catholicism, Protestantism, and Buddhism. General Secretary Master Zhang Fenglin says, “The majority of Daoist clerics nowadays have only attained an education level of up to junior high school; some aged Daoist priests are even illiterate.”

4. The Daoist Association of China, Social Engagement and Propagation of Daoist Faith

On July 18, 2017, the DAC celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of its founding in April 1957. In his anniversary celebration address, the present chairman Master Li Guangfu summarized the achievement of the DAC over the past sixty years in four aspects. Firstly, the restoration and revival of Daoist temples in the mainland was a remarkable accomplishment. Master Li emphasized that more than 8,200 Daoist temples have been registered and opened to the public to date. Secondly, the DAC successfully set up and continues to adjust its institutional systems by having enforced about twenty
policy documents, which aim to address a variety of issues concerning temple management, rules for the ordinations of Quanzhen and Zhengyi priests, and the criteria for defining the “correct” Daoist activities of sanju daoshi outside temples. Thirdly, the DAC has already established ten Daoist Colleges at provincial or city levels to help building proper and standardized training and education programs for Daoist priests. Fourthly, success has been achieved in the propagation of Daoist culture in the public and in academic institutions, largely exemplified by the publication of the quarterly journal *China Taoism* 中國道教 and the new edition of *Zhonghua daoza* 中華道藏 (Daoist Canon),\(^{22}\) as well as the organization of many Daoist conferences, sixteen Daoist Musical Concerts 道教音樂匯演, and four International Daoist Forum.

Despite such accomplishments of the DAC over the past sixty years, one may caution against a rising expectation over the DAC’s capacity and autonomy in assuming a central and leading role in the development and growth of Daoism within the regulatory framework and special political context of China today. While the early 1980s signaled an important phase of liberalization in comparison with the pervious Mao era, the state’s policy on religions is still confined within the limits of law and control. At

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\(^{22}\) In June 2015, the executive committee of the Taoist Association of China submitted its proposal to the government for compiling another set of *Daoist Canon*, to be called *Zhonghua xu daoza* 中華續道藏, which aims for a comprehensive collection of Daoist texts of the Ming-Qing periods. Cf *China Taoism*, No. 3 (2016): 23.
a recent national conference on religions, held in Beijing April 22-23, 2016, Xi Jinping 習近平, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, referred to the party’s long-standing policy on religions and reiterated that “the administration of religious affairs has to be adapted to the socialist society under the direction of the Communist Party” (積極引導宗教與社會主義社會相適應). According to Xi Jinping, the Communist Party has to “exert power of control over the administration of religious affairs” (牢牢掌握宗教工作主動權) and limit the influence of religion by keeping them separate from the government administration, the legal and educational systems.23) In sum, the discourse of the state’s control remains strong. In reality, the Religious Affairs Departments of China’s provinces and cities are empowered to issue local regulations on the supervision over religious affairs, including the registration and supervision of religious organizations, religious clerics, places of worship, and religious activities, education and property.24) In particular, heavy emphasis is placed on the rule that religious activities and personnel must stay within the localities where they are registered, and that religious education and the


distribution of religious materials are strictly controlled.

Within such regulatory framework on the control of religions, the author of this article is likely to take a realistic view in understanding the “leading” role the DAC assumes in the course of the development of Daoism in mainland China. On the one hand, one believes that an increasing number of registered Daoist temples and priests are to be expected, and normal liturgical services held in temples remain to be seen. But, on the other hand, it is not likely to anticipate a very substantial Daoist cultural influence upon the public society under the communist rule. Looking at Daoism from the angle of its social engagement, an increasing number of well-established Daoist temples, located in some first tier cities like Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou, have attempted to set up charity funds to meet social and education needs. Nevertheless, all of these temples’ benevolent activities are, of course, conditioned as a kind of financial aid to education or social institutions, without any hope of interfering or creating a significant impact of Daoist cultural force and value upon the state-controlled social welfare and education systems. Limited by this direction of development, Master Li Guangfu can only draw our attention toward the Daoist social engagement as shown in the reports of donations of money and cloths to the needy, the poor communities and the victims

of calamitous events such as floods and earthquakes.

Although it comes as no surprise to see that the regulation of religions in mainland China depends on the compliance to support the existing political legitimacy, changing socio-economic conditions over the past two decades will likely propel the regime into granting broader religious autonomy in the propagation of religious culture in the society. In the case of Daoism, one can exemplify the organization of Daoist summer camps for certain university students (those aged 18 to 35) in the Daoist temples mostly located at such famous Daoist sacred mountains as Wudangshan, Maoshan, Lishan (Xi’an), etc. In July 2017, there were twenty-two Daoist temples across eleven provinces to organize Daoist summer camps for learning and practicing Daoist culture. Usually, these Daoist summer camps last for seven days and provide free lodging and classes for participants to learn a variety of Daoist culture, including Daoist scripture, ritual, arts of nurturing life, *Taiji* 太極, *guqin* 古琴, *chadao* 茶道 (tea ceremony), and calligraphy. Without violating the state’s rule that “religions must conduct their activities within the religious sphere prescribed by law,” such Daoist summer camps for university students may be interpreted as a detour to propagate Daoist culture and faith to young generation in China today. Although it is

premature to claim the success of Daoist summer camps and conclude their positive effects upon the future development of Daoism in China, one can assume that these creative and alternative religious initiatives are constructive for the growth of Daoism, given the government’s increasing tolerance for and relaxation of its control over religious propagation activities.

5. Conclusion

It appears that no one would deny the fact that Daoism in China today is in the “best” condition if we look at the revival of Daoism from the angle of the largest number of Daoist temples open to the public ever in the history of China, especially after years of suppression under Mao’s rule. It is also believed that the old religion of Daoism can indeed provide us with valuable wisdom and values for dealing with the problems of modern society. Despite such a hope for the future revival of Daoism in the mainland, one cannot but concede that Daoism has its own problems to deal with. Compared to Buddhism and Christianity, Daoism has been much slower in attracting and retaining followers. Both of the present leaders of the DAC, Master Li Guangfu and Master Zhang Fenglin, issued a warning against the trend of the spread of consumerism to Daoist temples. Moreover, there is a serious concern about the lack of talented, educated and devoted Daoist priests in China who
can assume a leading role in sustaining the continued revival of Daoism in years to come. Finally, it is a timely issue for the clerical Daoism to recognize the Daoist laity and associate them with the central management structure of Daoist temples. Nowadays in the mainland, the Daoist laity has not yet been organized into a large number of autonomous lay communities that can offer Daoist temples and clerics the social and religious support as similar to the assistance that lay Buddhism or Christianity bring to the Buddhist sangha or Christian churches respectively. Indeed, Daoist efforts in this direction are still very modest against the background of the fast changing educational and social conditions of modern China today.

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Keywords: Contemporary Daoism, Daoist Temples, Daoist Priests, Daoist Association of China, Daoism and Communism
Photo 1: Platform for Ordination Ceremony at the Baiyun guan (Beijing)

Photo 2: Collection of Local Deities at the Dongyue miao of Kunshan
Photo 3: Tianshi dong, Qingcheng shan
Photo 4: A Quanzhen Nun Received Ordination in 1995
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Abstract

Contemporary Daoism in Mainland China Today: Daoist Temples, Daoist Priests and the Daoist Association of China

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Over the past two decades, the speed of restoring and reconstructing Daoist temples has accelerated. The restoration of Daoist monasteries expanded from those temples located in metropolitan cities to small ones in rural counties. The rapid growth of market economy, the urbanization of villages, and the population change in China since the late 1990s have not only transformed the country’s socio-economic and demographic conditions, these changes also provide an opportunity as well as a serious challenge to traditional Chinese religions like Daoism. This paper aims to offer a preliminary study of Daoism in contemporary China during the period from 2000 to the present day. It focuses on three main aspects: the expansion of Daoist temples, the ordinations and training of Daoist priests, and the Daoist social engagement and charity work.
Keywords: Contemporary Daoism, Daoist Temples, Daoist Priests, Daoist Association of China, Daoism and Communism