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The Censor's Stele: Religion, Salt-Production and Labour in the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake in Southern Shanxi Province

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Abstract: This case study analyses religious and technological changes that occurred during the last seventy years of the Ming dynasty (1574-1644) around the Hedong Salt Lake, situated south of Yuncheng City in southern Shanxi province. Based on a close reading of inscriptions found on stone steles at the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake and of different kinds of

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gazetteers, the article documents the processes and analyses the factors that shaped the expanding pantheon of local salt-production-related deities during this period. I argue that these religious changes need to be understood in the context of a wider sociotechnical system around the Salt Lake, especially the emergence of new salt production methods that were introduced at this time under the increasingly affirmative leadership of local salt merchants, as well as the changing conditions of local labour management. The larger methodological point the article makes is about the necessity to take stone steles themselves in their spatial and material dimensions as evidence of historical processes: this will allow us to see that by means of these steles and their inscriptions the temple became an architectural discursive space that facilitated new forms of social participation and of administrative intervention, while offering simultaneously a nexus between the sphere of human intervention and the relevant 'natural' factors of the salt production at the Salt Lake. Accordingly, the article proposes novel ways to understand the role of religious institutions such as temples in their relation to 'natural' and 'technological' processes.

When, in the early 1650s, Zhao Rujin 趙如瑾 (fl. 1649-1655) travelled as Regional Inspector of Shanxi province and Salt-Control Censor of the recently established Qing dynasty (1644-1911) to Yuncheng city in southern Shanxi province, he found the place devastated. Only "the shadows" lingered "to console each other." The bygone splendours and festivities associated with local salt production, its administration, and trade, were nothing but a distant memory. And this was, he observed, despite the fact that the Salt Lake still stretched out over an expanse of about 25 km from east to west just south of the city, containing, as it had since time immemorial, the "excellent resources of the spiritually efficacious salt," a promise of future success. The resources were there for the taking, he seemed to imply.

Having been appointed to the Salt Distribution Commission of Yuncheng, on the last night of his journey to his destination, Zhao Rujin dreamt that he was caught out by heavy rain and had to seek shelter in a temple building nearby. The temple, however, was so run down that it hardly provided any protection. Upon awakening, he thought the dream to be rather strange. The narrative continues that on the day immediately after his arrival at the Salt Distribution Commission in Yuncheng, he went out to the local Temple of the God of the Salt Lake to survey the Salt Lake from one of its tower-like pavilions, built on a large terrace that afforded an imposing view over large parts of the lake. He was worried about the frequent downpours that had afflicted the area in the recent past and adversely affected salt production. As he stood on the upper floor of the pavilion, heavy clouds suddenly built up over the southern mountain range of Mount Zhongtiao, and a violent wind arose that drove them straight over

the narrow lake towards him. Looking for shelter in the temple's main hall, he came face to face with the god. The expression of the statue struck him as sombre and gloomy. He noted with surprise the similarity of his experience to his dream, and set out on a desultory stroll through the temple precincts. In beautifully-wrought parallel phrases he evokes his impressions of the temple. The decay of each architectural detail is noted down, almost lovingly, and recreated—the eaves, stairs, roofs, colours, and passageways. This experience, which he narrated in a very personal, intimate tone—Zhao Rujin seems to have been alone—resulted in the formulation of his first proposal as Regional Inspector. Feeling a tremor of sadness and fear in his heart, he rushed to the Salt Distribution Commission in the nearby city, and communicated it to its staff with the following words: “The fact that the [Salt] Lake does not produce crystals shows that the resentment and fear-inspiring awe of the god are truly powerful. Would it not be better to repair [the temple], even if we might have to spend funds on this?”²

Here we might pause to acknowledge surprise that the first proposal of an official—sent out to one of the most important salt production centres in northern China as a representative of a central government in urgent need of resources to fund its continuing campaigns in the as-yet uncompleted pacification of China—was dedicated to the reconstruction of a temple. Zhao Rujin's visit came shortly after Yuncheng had been devastated in the autumn of 1649. Official troops from the young dynasty had been forced to storm the town to terminate a rebellion led by two malcontent army leaders.³ To revive and reorganise a languishing local monopoly economy that was based on the production and distribution of salt, a reader informed by modern managerial concepts might expect the implementation of rather more practical, income-generation measures.

This article aims to transform this surprise, a sense of the ‘strange’ that arises in our encounter with a mid-seventeenth-century Chinese official's attitude to contemporary problems of salt production, into a set of concrete questions, just as Zhao Rujin transformed his personal experience of the ‘strange’ into the concrete measures of raising funds, ordering workmen, and restoring a dilapidated building. However, this transformation is not intended to reduce the sense of the strange. It is too rich a feeling, too

² *Chongxiu chishen miao beiji* 重修池神廟碑記 (1653). A complete transcription of the stele inscription currently in the temple can be found in *Nanfeng huagong jituan gufen youxian gongsi* 南风化工集团股份有限公司 (2000), pp. 161-164 (henceforth cited as *Hedong yanchi beihui* 河东盐池碑汇). The text of this edition has been compared to photographs taken of the stele during a research visit to Yuncheng city in August and September 2000. This has resulted in several edits to the published text.

³ Dunstan (1980), p. 394, n119.

inspiring for any investigative endeavour, and constitutive of the cumulative effort of reconstructing the shared building of knowledge. Zhao Rujin's resolution to reconstruct the temple did not dissolve the 'strangeness' of his experience. On the contrary, the reconstruction transformed this 'strangeness' into a space that could be experienced bodily through the senses by reforming a decaying building into a resplendent, renewed temple complex. Finally, Zhao Rujin embodied this sense of the "strange" physically by placing his narrative of wonder right at the centre of the temple, inscribed on a stone stele for future visitors to read. Thus, Zhao's experience of the temple could become the reader's experience *in situ*, and his reconstruction a transformation in two ways: in an architectural sense and in a symbolical one. By inscribing a new layer of meaning upon the existing ones, future, present and past were constructed in the building as a continuity to be experienced on different levels with a sense of both the extraordinary and numinous.

Zhao Rujin is the point of departure for our exploration of a religious institution – the temple – as an element within a sociotechnical system. The Temple of the God of the Salt Lake (*yanchi shen miao* 鹽池神廟) in Yuncheng, southern Shanxi, during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties (1570-1650), offers a rich case study of a religious institution in a period that saw great changes in many different but related areas, of which those in salt production techniques and control of the production process are of primary interest. In what follows, I am less interested in offering a mere history of the temple than in exploring the temple as a space that provides an interface between different participants in the sociotechnical system, such as the visiting Censor Zhao.⁴ In this space, participants interacted in very specific ways that enabled them to establish particular links between the diverse elements or factors – social, political, environmental or religious – of the wider sociotechnical system of the salt business in which the temple was embedded. However, rather than being a neutral interface, the temple itself needs to be accounted for as a durable material object that embodies values, experiences symbolic and ideological meanings that were liable to manipulation in the process of negotiating different interests.

⁴ For a brief history of the temple from its foundation in the mid-Tang period (778), documented on the oldest surviving stele inscription from 797, until the early Republican period, see Seo Tatsuhiko (1992), pp. 175-209. See also Mizuno Seiichi and Hibino Takeo (1993), p. 141f, for a translation of a detailed description of the temple in the 1940s, published in 1956, with interesting photos of the temple. A similar report is offered by Nakatami Hideo (1940), pp. 43-48.

Figure 1. The Temple of the God of the Salt Lake (1881)



SOURCE: *Xiezhou quanzhi* 解州全志 (1881), chap. unpaginated (*tu* 圖), pp. 8a-9b.

NOTE: Illustration of the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake from a nineteenth-century local gazetteer (1881). Possibly for reasons of space one set of buildings is not shown: namely the Second Gate (*ermen* 二門), situated between the theatre stage (*zouyan lou* 奏衍樓) and the Pavilion of Maritime Brilliance (*haiguang lou* 海光樓). Also the terraces between the latter pavilion and the Pavilion of Incanting the Breeze (*gexun lou* 歌薰樓) have been shortened to accommodate the temple building on the pages.

I am inspired here by Francesca Bray's work on domestic architecture in Late Imperial China, in which she argues "that in the context of Chinese society of the late imperial period domestic architecture was a technology of significance comparable to that of machine-tool design in the nineteenth-century United States," analyzing the different symbolic orders which are superimposed in a physical building. Architecture, she thus contends, is a

technique that participated in the process of normalisation of the late imperial world, not in a static way, but negotiating different social interests of family and community, which are in themselves understood as changing over historical time.⁵ Developing my thesis from these findings, I argue that the temple as an edifice needs to be fully understood in terms of its role as a participant in the sociotechnical system that, as a signifying space, is able to intervene in this system on different levels, transforming discontinuities, ruptures and, often, dramatic changes into a systemic stability.

The sources I have used for this investigation are inscriptions on stone steles, also called stone tablets. As we have seen, Zhao Rujin's own account of arriving at his destination was transmitted on one of the steles which can still be found within the temple precincts. I documented this stele on a field trip to Yuncheng city in August and September of 2000, together with others that I analyze below.⁶ Like many other historians of local, social, religious and other histories who have increasingly used stele inscriptions to complement information about religious institutions or social organizations in China that other written (i.e., printed) sources do not allow them to access,⁷ I have turned to these inscriptions to tell a story which would have otherwise remained in the shadows, if not totally hidden. This is the story of the interrelation between a religious institution with its embedded ritual practices and the development of salt production techniques, as seen through the perspective of the spatial arrangement and its recorded interpretations. This story will allow us to question—in a wider sense—the relationship between religion and technology in China.

⁵ Bray (1998), p. 11. For sociotechnical systems, see Pfaffenberger (1992).

⁶ My own transcriptions of the inscriptions have been checked against the transcriptions offered in *Hedong yanchi beihui* (2000) as well as against those excerpts that were recorded in local Salt Gazetteers. These Salt Gazetteers began to be edited in Yuncheng from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards, the *Chongxiu Hedong yunsi zhi* 重修河東運司志 (Revised Gazetteer of the Salt Distribution Commission of Hedong), compiled by Feng Dadao 馮達道, 1660, revised and extended by Zhang Yingzheng 張應徵, in 10 *juan* 卷 and printed in 1672 being the oldest surviving one (henceforth *Hedong yunsi zhi*). Dated from slightly later are the *Hedong yanzheng huizuan* 河東鹽政彙纂 (Compilation on the Salt Administration of Hedong), compiled by Su Changchen 蘇昌臣 in 6 *juan*, 1690; the *Chixiu Hedong yanfa zhi* 敕修河東鹽法志 (Gazetteer of the Salt Laws of Hedong, Revised by Imperial Order), compiled by Shi Lin 石麟, Zhu Yifeng 朱一鳳, et al. in 12 *juan*, 1727; and, finally, the *Hedong yanfa beilan* 河東鹽法備覽 (A Complete Account of the Salt Laws of Hedong), compiled by Jiang Zhaokui 蔣兆奎 in 12 *juan*, from 1789.

⁷ See Hansen (1987), pp. 17-25, and Katz (1999).

Figure 2. Stone Tablets in the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake



SOURCE: Photograph taken by the author in the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake, Yuncheng City, on 7 September 2000.

NOTE: Collection of stone tablets in the temple. The Second Gate formerly protected these steles. The bases of the columns can still be seen to the right. Steles were also placed in other locations in the temple.

The Temple of the God of the Salt Lake was, and still is, an extremely rich repository of inscribed steles. Up until the first half of the twentieth century, we can trace about 110 steles that had at some stage been placed in the Temple of the Salt Lake, the oldest of which dates back to 797 AD in the mid-Tang period (618-906), composed and erected twenty years after the temple's foundation.⁸ More than mere texts that provide information about

⁸ See Seo Tatsuhiko (1992), pp. 175-209, especially p. 179 for a, by no means complete, list of stele inscriptions in the temple. For a recent and comprehensive catalogue of surviving and lost stele inscriptions in the Yuncheng area, see Wu Jun (1998). For the steles in the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake, see pp. 7-14, for

the temple's history, however, as material objects stone tablets form an integral part of the physical make-up of the temple, and are, as such, capable of telling complex stories. I read the inscriptions in dialogue with the spaces for which they were originally written. After all, inscriptions are texts on heavy slabs of stone, some of which are up to three metres high. These objects resisted easy displacement. Thus, unlike texts written on portable media, the reading of these inscriptions took place in the specific setting of the temple, some even in particular spaces within it.⁹

The relations established by texts placed within and among buildings with these architectural features are reminiscent of the peculiar layered inter-textual relationships between interlinear commentaries and the main text in the Chinese textual tradition. Thus, steles comment, interpret and even emend their environment. They tell the visitor to the temple what to see – or would have seen where artefacts are no longer there – and how to see it, or remember what was once there. Other steles indicate clearly what has been done, and should be done, in a specific place.¹⁰ Inscriptions make connections with other textual corpuses, frequently citing classical or other sources. Furthermore, inscriptions on stone tablets in themselves establish an evolving interrelated corpus of textual passages in which they quote and re-quote certain set passages or, significantly, leave out others. It is also rewarding to read these texts diachronically in their changing spatial relationships to one another and to the surrounding buildings. We know that steles were relocated during regular restorations, which in some cases could result in a profound remodelling of temples. These relocations changed the stele's relationships with one another or with specific architectural features of the temple compound. Even if these changes are difficult to document due to the lack of sources, it is important to consider that stele

other inscriptions formerly in the temple which are now in the Yuncheng City Museum, see pp. 112-122. Of the 110 steles, 39 were still in the temple at the time of my visit in 2000.

⁹ Mizuno Seiichi and Hibino Takeo (1993), pp. 154-156, provide a catalogue of steles with the locations where they were found in the different parts of the temple in the 1940s when the authors visited it. This catalogue is reproduced in *Hedong yanchi beihui* (2000), pp. 312-319. Nakatami Hideo (1940), pp. 43-48, mapped the steles as he found them during his visit in 1939. There are inconsistencies between the two lists, particularly inscriptions of poetic texts which were frequently related to specific buildings, such as “*Fu* on the Pavilion of Maritime Brilliance” (*Haiguang lou fu* 海光樓賦), inscribed on steles, see Wu Jun (1998), p. 8.

¹⁰ This is especially the case with inscriptions of a poetic nature, which were increasingly installed in the temple during the sixteenth century. They are associated with pavilion-style buildings, of which the temple had two. This type of stele inscription will be analyzed in a future publication.

relocations were not necessarily motivated by purely practical considerations. As temples are hierarchically structured as ritual spaces, it would certainly matter which stele inscription was placed in front of the hall that housed the shrine of the main deity. When, in 1535, the newly inscribed stele composed by Ma Li 馬理 (1474-1555) was placed in front of the three main halls as a pair for the imposing Yuan-dynasty stone tablet by Wang Wei 王偉 (n.d.), these texts were not only given prominence over the other steles in the temple, but their texts also became a matching pair, which any reading must take into account.¹¹

However, the setting should not be only understood architecturally. Given that this temple's god is one that has a direct relation to a specific geographic feature—the Salt Lake, which the building complex looks out onto rather spectacularly—the setting, which the stele texts would comment on, could equally be a natural one. We will see below how stele inscriptions are frequently the media through which features of the surrounding landscape were directly related to architectural elements, setting up a dynamic between a temple and its environment. So, once we return the inscriptions back to their settings, we realise that they are not merely descriptions, but agents that 'do things' to these settings. In certain ways, the settings become part of the text and the text becomes part of the setting.

Thus, when we read the texts of stele inscriptions transcribed on paper, as historians frequently do, we should never forget that they mean more than just what they say when situated in a particular space. We have to imagine that the intended reader, during the act of reading inscriptions *in situ*, actualises a complex dialogue between text and text as well as text and space, as if entering a room of charged and special significance in which the text makes space readable and itself becomes part of a ritual setting. The stele establishes links between the reader and their immediate environment, on the one hand, and between different elements such as the temple and

¹¹ Seo Tatsuhiko (1992), pp. 195-196, suggests this matching of the steles in 1535. Both steles have very similar dimensions and are alike in design: Wang Wei's 1321 stele towers 5.61 metres above the ground (0.84m comprising the base, 3.25m the body with the inscription, and 1.52m the carved top with the title) and has a width of 1.58 metres. Ma Li's stele is 5.68 metres high (0.80m the base, 3.16m the body, and 1.72m the top) and 1.54 metres wide; see *Hedong yanchi beihui* (2000), pp. 50 and 89 respectively. For more information about Ma Li's inscription, see below. In other cases, of course, placing might just be the result of contingencies that are difficult to reconstruct, such as dilapidation of the buildings or haphazard changes.

the environment or between different elements of the environment itself, on the other.¹²

Figure 3. View of the Salt Lake from the Temple



SOURCE: Photograph taken by the author in the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake, Yuncheng City, on 7 September 2000.

NOTE: View from the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake facing south towards the central section of the Salt Lake and Mount Zhongtiao.

The complexity and diversity of actors and participants who are linked in the sociotechnical system of Hedong salt production through the temple and its inscriptions are such that it was necessary to impose not only

¹² When stele inscriptions began to be transcribed and printed in Salt Gazetteers from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards, they were almost always shortened. This textual practice of shortening cannot only be attributed to concerns about length and space: the purpose of the inscription clearly changed when they were removed from their context. It is interesting to note that they were frequently reduced to the bare facts of historical relevance, to primarily document the history of the temple. We need a clearer understanding of the editorial principles and strategies of these transcription practices.

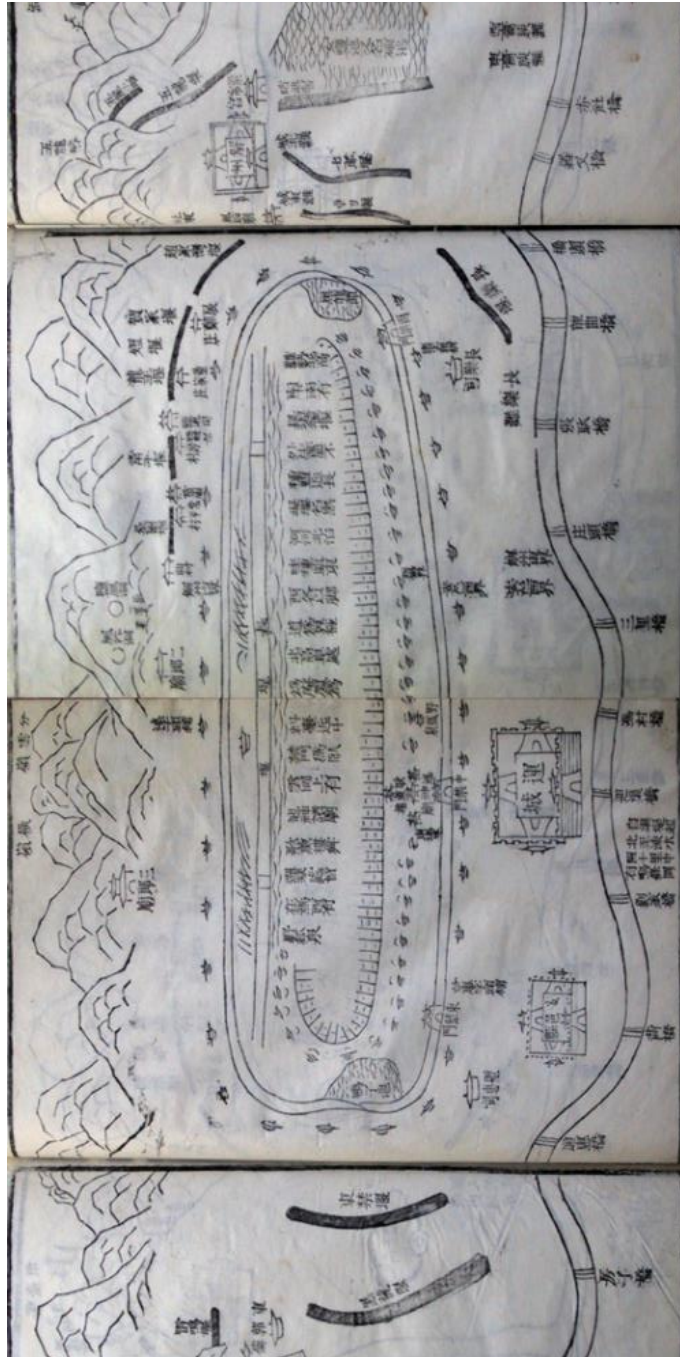
temporal limits, but also thematic ones for the purpose of this article. Of the innumerable possibilities of reading which are opened up by such a large corpus of stele inscriptions, I have chosen to explore the relationships between certain aspects of salt production during the late-Ming, early-Qing period and symbolic, religious, and cultural aspects of the temple as a building and its steles. I focus on stele inscriptions directly related to the reconstruction and refurbishment that took place in the temple—leaving out numerous inscriptions such as prayer texts, praise of specific salt administrators, poems, etc.—to argue that the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake—as the central religious institution of the Salt Distribution Commission—became the focal site of government control over the salt production process during a period when it was being challenged by changes in production techniques and in its management.

The Salt Lake and the Production Crisis in the 1570s

Located within the eastern bend of the Yellow River in the south of modern Shanxi province, the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake is situated on a cliff that overlooks the northern shore of the Salt Lake of Hedong. This elongated lake stretches from east to west for a length of about twenty-five kilometres, while from north to south it remains less than four kilometres wide. The southern shore of the lake is dominated by the Zhongtiao mountain range.

The region around the Salt Lake has three urban administrative centres that, at various stages in the long history of salt production in the area, engaged in long-drawn-out contests over control of the salt resources. The most ancient of these centres was the county seat of Anyi situated towards the northeast side of the lake. Xiezhou County, west of the Salt Lake, had enjoyed a period of prosperity during the Song (960-1279) and Jin dynasties (1115-1234), up to the thirteenth century, when it was the hub of the area's salt administration. The boundary between these two counties ran right through the middle of the Salt Lake, which resulted in the fact that the sources frequently talked about two lakes, the Eastern Salt Lake belonging to Anyi county and the Western Salt Lake being under administrative control from Xiezhou. The third urban centre, which in Ming times came to be called Yuncheng (literally 'City of the Salt Distribution Commission'), was a relative newcomer on the map. It went back to the re-foundation of the Salt Distribution Commission in the thirteenth century during the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) on the northern shore of the lake. The Commission was located directly north of the more ancient temple site of the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake. Around this new administrative centre of the salt monopoly soon grew a town that, by the sixteenth century, had outgrown

Figure 4. Plan of the Salt Lake Area (1789)



SOURCE: *Hedong yanfa beilan* 河東鹽法備覽 (1789), chap. 1, without numeration.

NOTE ON FIGURE 4: The illustration shows the three walled urban centres of Xiezhou, Yuncheng and Anyi (from right to left). The Temple of the God of the Salt Lake is situated south of the city of Yuncheng (above). The temple building lies within the wall that surrounded the Salt Lake, which had been built to protect the salt resources from illegal access by producers of contraband salt. South of the lake can be seen the mountain range of Mount Zhongtiao. Two circles indicate the caves from which, supposedly, the wind emerged that played such an important role in the salt crystallisation process. On the far right lies the former Nüzhen Lake where, in the 1570s, experiments with the new salt production technique, *jiaoshai* 澆曬 ('to irrigate and expose to the sun'), began. Thick black lines indicate dykes to protect the Salt Lake from flooding by 'guest water.'

its two rivals in the salt business in both population and importance. Unusually, by the fifteenth century, a city wall protected Yuncheng—even though it was neither a county nor a prefectural seat—testament to its wealth and importance.¹³

Tradition places great importance on the Salt Lake as one of the most ancient salt production centres in China.¹⁴ After the re-introduction of the salt monopoly following the An Lushan rebellion and, given the proximity of the Salt Lake to the capitals of the Tang and Northern Song dynasties, salt and revenue from the salt production in the Hedong Salt Lake were extremely important. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, after the Mongol conquest, however, production quotas fell significantly, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of overall nationwide salt production: no more than five to seven percent came from Hedong.¹⁵ This drop in

¹³ For a thorough account of the geographic and administrative setting see Dunstan (1980), pp. 8-14; on the rivalry between the three centres, especially between Yuncheng and Xiezhou, see pp. 161-176. There was already a city wall in the middle of the fifteenth century, see Dunstan (1980), p. 162, which, from 1525 onwards, was fortified with bricks, *ibid.*, p. 199ff. See also Chai Jiguang, Li Xitang and Li Zulin (1993), pp. 10-17.

¹⁴ See Wei Si (1983), pp. 129-131 and Chai Jiguang (1991b), pp. 200-204 on the ancient archaeological sites around the Salt Lake. At some point in the Ming dynasty, certain sites became associated with the ancient kings and cultural heroes. Shun, in particular, was gaining a special relevance for the Salt Lake and salt production.

¹⁵ See Chai Jiguang (1993), pp. 54-66 for Tang and pp. 67-87 for Song developments; production numbers are given on p. 78 for Song and p. 89 for Yuan dynasties.

production, as I will discuss in more detail in the following section, can largely be attributed to changes in salt production techniques: the abandonment of salt production in artificial evaporation basins to revert to spontaneous and naturally crystallised salt. In the fourteenth century, at the beginning of the Ming dynasty, the quota for salt to be produced at the Salt Lake within the official barter system (*kaizhong* 開中) was initially fixed at 304,000 *jin* 引. This increased steadily until the middle of the sixteenth century to more than double (620,000 *jin*).¹⁶

The period of about eighty years beginning in the 1570s was one of a profound transformation in many related areas of the sociotechnical system around the Salt Lake. I will be limiting my analysis to two areas: those changes that affected salt production methods, and those related to the social coordination of labour. First, a serious crisis in salt production followed a disastrous flooding of the Salt Lake in the autumn of 1570. So-called ‘guest water’ (*keshui* 客水) had entered from outside the Salt Lake in spite of the sophisticated system of protection – consisting of dykes, moats, and overspill catchments – that had long been maintained by successive salt administrations.¹⁷ For several years, salt production in the Salt Lake was seriously affected and the Salt Distribution Commission was unable to provide the officially stipulated quota of salt. These problems coincided with the shrinking of the officially designated Consumption Area of salt from Hedong in the twenty years following the disaster.¹⁸ Consequently, the official production quota fell.¹⁹ Second, the manner of control state officials wielded over the production process was changing as they were losing administrative command over a decreasing production force of registered salt workers (*yanding* 鹽丁).

Salt Production Methods

What was going wrong? Salt production at the Salt Lake had been described as highly unreliable for some time. This unreliability was related

¹⁶ 304,000 *jin* corresponds to 60,800,000 *jin* 斤; 620,000 *jin* to 124,000,000 *jin*, see Chai Jiguang (1991b), p. 25. On the salt monopoly and official barter system during the Ming, see the summary by Huang (1974), pp. 189-224.

¹⁷ See Dunstan (1980), pp. 51-103, who details the problems of local hydraulic management and this complex protection system.

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 296-328, for a detailed reconstruction of the process and the debates surrounding this process.

¹⁹ Late Ming quotas were still higher than earlier quotas (see note 17), having risen from around 420,000 to 440,000 *jin*, i.e., between 84,000,000 and 86,500,000 *jin*. See Chai Jiguang (1991b), p. 25 and Dunstan (1980), p. 383.

to the specific conditions of production there. Years of salt gluts followed years in which the lake did not produce any salt. In 1487, Qiu Jun 丘濬 (1421-1495) had already commented on this aspect of salt production in his political encyclopaedia, differentiating contemporary production methods in Hedong from those in other production areas, namely those along the coast where salt was produced through the boiling of brine.

Sea salt is produced from human labour; the brine has to be boiled to evaporation. The salt of Xiezhou is produced by Heaven, once the parterres are prepared and water introduced into them, one must await the south wind before the salt will crystallise. In the case of salt produced by human labour, if the annual quota is not met, one can supplement production from elsewhere, in the case of salt produced by Heaven, if there should be a shortfall, from where will one procure the difference? For this reason, offering Xie salt for barter purchase is not the same as offering sea salt. Sea salt is not restricted to one single spot: if one place has insufficient [supplies of salt], then by taking from another one may make up the difference. Xie salt comes only from one lake, if by misfortune the year should be a rainy one, or the wind be otherwise than from the south, the granulation will not reach the annual quota.²⁰

Between the twelfth and late sixteenth centuries until around the 1570s, the production of 'lake salt' (*chiyan* 池鹽) in and around Hedong's Salt Lake relied primarily on natural climatic conditions (sun, wind and rain), largely beyond human control, which helped to bring about the spontaneous crystallisation of salt. Human influence was possible only to a limited degree; artificial or technological manipulation of the process had its place, but remained largely inadequate to guarantee a regular and stable production of high-quality salt. In a local gazetteer of 1525, Lü Zigu 呂子固 (fl. 1489-1508), a native of Xiezhou, is quoted describing the conditions of contemporary spontaneous production of salt and the origins of the salt resources there:

In our present dynasty, commanded by the harmonious ethers, the springs show forth auspiciousness, and it is not necessary to prepare parterres for irrigating and sowing. The lake is as a tank for waters; on the bottom there is a deposit of mud, and above that there are the roots of salt. Above the roots is the salt floor. When in the fourth and fifth months of the year the fierce sun shines

²⁰ Dunstan (1980), p. 176f, quoting Qiu Jun's *Daxue yanyi bu* 大學衍義補 (Supplement to the 'Expositions on the *Great Learning*'), from 1506.

upon the lake, crystals appear upon the surface like ice. When the salt wind from the southeast shakes them, they fall back down on the floor and by themselves form grains. Of old this was called free-growing salt; now it is known as bushel-grain salt. If by good fortune a light rain falls, the grains will be clearer still; therefore it is known as grain salt.²¹

The salt production method at this time can be described as the extraction of “natural” or spontaneously produced salt. Accordingly, production followed a seasonal cycle, very much like an agricultural growth cycle. Salt was hauled out, in a normal, productive year, from late spring to early autumn.²² However, salt production was even more volatile and unpredictable than agricultural production, forcing workers and the administration to a much higher dependency on natural conditions. He Chuguang 何出光 (1546-1597) commented on this particular issue in 1588: “When salt crystallises, its coagulation and dispersal are beyond prediction; as for the time for hauling, it was known of old to be irregular. One can only wait for it; it is not to be forced.”²³

Even if the inundation of the lake in 1570 seems to have been of a rather exceptional nature,²⁴ it does not, on its own, adequately explain the acute sense of crisis evident around Hedong during subsequent decades, nor can it account for the changes in production methods that were to take place. It is the human response—in this case the administrative response—that converted an ostensibly natural event into a factor for change. The flood of 1570 was not the first disaster at the Salt Lake, but was apparently the first to lead—over the course of several decades—to the introduction of the new salt production technique in successive solar evaporation basins. He Chuguang’s brief comments on the problems of Hedong’s salt administration suggest that increasing demands on funds from salt production at this time, through the augmentation of the quota and of special fees, were as much to blame for these changes as the unreliability of natural factors:

Now Xiezhou salt is Heaven-made and, should production fall short of the quota, there is no means of supple-

²¹ *Xiezhou zhi* 解州志 (1525), chap. 3, pp. 5b-6b, see Dunstan (1980), p. 120. See also Vogel (forthcoming), p. 28.

²² See Vogel (forthcoming), p. 35f; and Dunstan (1980), pp. 114-118.

²³ Dunstan (1980), p. 349, from He Chuguang’s *Yanzheng yi* 鹽政義 (Proposals on the Salt Administration).

²⁴ See Chai Jiguang (1993), pp. 220-224. In almost three hundred years, from 1570 to 1856, sources document thirteen serious inundations of the Salt Lake, which is, on average, one every twenty-two years. Records for earlier periods are far less complete.

menting it. Qiu Wenzhuang has argued in detail that if the fiscal authorities alone fail to perceive it, it must be because they feel disconcerted at the difficulty of their position. But once the prospects for the annual quota are awry, then the Salt Lake authorities will go beyond all measure and propriety in their attempts to extract salt. The salt's taste worsens day by day; nor will the trend be checked until utmost ruination has been reached.²⁵

What He Chuguang calls “going beyond all measure and propriety in their attempts to extract salt” appears to be a veiled attack on contemporary experiments at the Salt Lake with this new salt production method, introduced in an attempt to increase production and, thereby, fulfil the financial obligations imposed by the official production quota. This new method, which contemporary sources called *jiaoshai* 澆曬 – literally ‘irrigating [parterres] and [evaporation of brine through] exposure to the sun’ – consisted of the controlled evaporation of brine in artificial solar evaporation basins.²⁶

Surprisingly, this method had a long history at the Salt Lake. It had previously been used during the sixth to twelfth centuries, until being abandoned during the Yuan dynasty, when experience and knowledge transmission appears to have been discontinued. Experiments to reintroduce the ‘new’ technique began after the flood of the early 1570s at the neighbouring Nüyanze salt lake and were evidently extended to the main Salt Lake in the 1580s, where *jiaoshai* became a regular practice in the following decade.²⁷ However, during this period – the last three decades of the sixteenth century – the new method remained highly controversial, as it

²⁵ Quoted from Dunstan (1980), p. 349.

²⁶ See the Salt-Control Censor Wu Dake's 吳達可 memorial from 1588-1589 for the need to introduce the new production method to fulfil the quota, *Hedong yunsi zhi* (1672), chap. 7, p. 7b; and Dunstan (1980), p. 316.

²⁷ For the details of the process of introducing the *jiaoshai* production method at Hedong during the late sixteenth century, see Dunstan (1980), chap. 4, especially pp. 349, 361; and Vogel (forthcoming). It can be assumed that initial attempts to use this technique did necessarily include the evaporation in ‘successive’ evaporation basins, see Vogel (1999), p. 412f. The longer history of changes in salt production techniques at the Salt Lake has received a great deal of scholarly attention, especially in the following publications (in chronological order): Ikeda Makoto (1950), pp. 658-670; Kawakami Kōichi (1974), pp. 35-70; Seo Tatsuhiko (1982), pp. 35-72; Zhang Zhengming (1986), pp. 117-122; Guo Zhengzhong (1988), pp. 3-10; Ji Chengming (1989), pp. 42-46; Guo Zhengzhong (1990), pp. 36-55; Cheng Yande and Yang Quan (1990), pp. 20-25; Adshead (1990), pp. 80-104; Hocquet (1991), pp. 1021-1039; Chai Jiguang (1991a); Chai Jiguang (1993), pp. 60-63; and Vogel (1999), pp. 404-416. Of interest here are also Vogel (1995); Vogel (2010); and Vogel (2010a), pp. 477-478, 493 and 500.

frequently produced a bitter-tasting salt which was black. Many people considered its introduction a further addition to the Hedong salt administration's problems rather than any sort of solution. The significant drop in quality of the salt the *jiaoshai* technique produced, when compared to the naturally and spontaneously crystallised salt, was identified as an important factor in the shrinkage of Hedong's officially designated Salt Consumption Area.²⁸ Thus, at another point in his proposals, He Chuguang explicitly states that: "The Salt of Xiezhou is by nature palatable. It is because the *jiaoshai* method is employed that it is bitter; it is because it is bitter that it will not circulate; and when it does not circulate the merchants suffer difficulties."²⁹

However fiercely different authors criticised this new development, experiments with the method continued until, by the mid-1630s at the latest, salt extracted though the *jiaoshai* method came to yield a product of acceptable quality. There are no complaints about the salt's quality in the sources from this date, which indicates that a process of practical knowledge accumulation and transmission had successfully occurred in the intervening decades.³⁰ By 1650, when Zhao Rujin visited Yuncheng, a combined use of the two production methods seems to have eased some of the problems of local salt production, which was caught between unpredictable climatic conditions and the state's unchanging demands for stable and reliable levels of production through its quota. Thus, the *Chongxiu Hedong yunsi zhi* 重修河東運司志 (Revised Gazetteer of the Salt Distribution Commission of Hedong) writes in 1660:

Within about ten years there are not more than one or two years with large harvests [of spontaneously produced salt], while there are two to three years with no harvest [at all]. In the remaining years little [salt] is brought forth. In the case of large harvests, the handling by gathering [of spontaneously produced salt] comes up to quota and there may even be a surplus. If there is no large harvest, one has to devote one's efforts to *jiaoshai*.³¹

This seventeenth-century Salt Gazetteer provides one of the earliest, detailed descriptions of the *jiaoshai* method as it was practiced at the time. The

²⁸ See *Hedong yunsi zhi* (1672), chap. 7, pp. 7-10b for Wu Dake's debate on the shrinkage of the Salt Consumption Area during that period, translated in Dunstan (1980), pp. 316-318.

²⁹ Dunstan (1980), p. 322. See also Salt-Control Censor Jiang Chunfang, serving in 1591-1592, calling salt produced in artificial evaporation basins 'waste salt' because of its bitter taste and black colour. Dunstan (1980), p. 340.

³⁰ Dunstan (1980), p. 387.

³¹ *Hedong yunsi zhi* (1672), chap. 2, p. 28a.

parterres (*xi* 畦) were divided into four sections. At the beginning of the production process, brine was poured into the first section with the help of a well-sweep and was continuously stirred with an iron rake to stimulate evaporation. Next, it was transferred into the second section where the brine turned a deep red colour. In the third section, workers had to wait for the brine to become clear again, then, in the fourth section, the crystallisation process took place. Here, brine needed to be one to two *cun* (c. 3-6 cm) deep. During the crystallisation process, 'salt-flowers' would begin to float on the brine's surface. These had to be beaten with wooden rakes to make them sink to the bottom. After all this, a large-grained, sweet-tasting salt crystallised due to the evaporation of the brine which had been stirred by the wind and heated by the sun.³²

At the same time as these technological developments were taking place, from the 1570 onwards structures of labour recruitment and trade began to change. Ever since the foundation of the dynasty, the Salt Distribution Commission had organised salt production and extraction from the Salt Lake by relying on a conscripted workforce of statutory salt workers from specially registered households from the twelve neighbouring counties. However, by 1649, all the salt-parterres of the whole Salt Lake had been given to salt merchants, who were now directly involved in the production process by hiring a labour force that they managed and controlled.³³

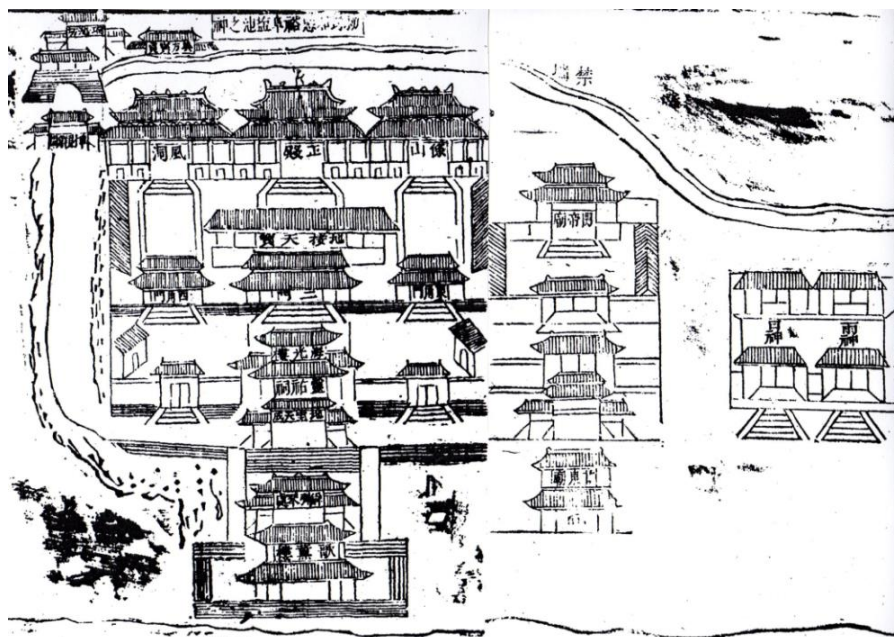
The County Gazetteer of Anyi from 1672 summarises these changes of the previous hundred years: "In the late years of the Ming Dynasty, the lake repeatedly suffered from floods and the merchants took on individual allotments of parterres to produce salt by 'watering and drying' (*jiaoshai*) in order to supply the quota. This [practice] has by now become the estab-

³² *Chixiu Hedong yanfa zhi* (1727), chap. 2B, pp. 2b-3a (vol. 1, p. 118f), see Vogel (forthcoming), p. 34 where he quotes a later source which indicates that "salt could be harvested every four to five days."

³³ See Dunstan (1980), pp. 234-254, for a reconstruction of the conditions of *yanding* up to 1570 and, for later developments, see pp. 380-387, especially p. 384f in which the stages of the process in which merchants took over control of production are summarized as far as can be documented from the source material. Dunstan (1980), p. 394n119, also recounts how, in 1649, after the number of registered salt workers had dropped to a mere 5844 due to social turmoil, the plots of the Salt Lake were finally given over to the merchants in their entirety. This local development needs to be seen in the context of the far-reaching changes in the state's general approach to labour recruitment and trade during the sixteenth century and the new Single Whip Method (*yitiao bian fa* 一條鞭法); see Schäfer (2011), p. 103f for a convenient timeline of the history of service labour in the Ming era; for the service labour system, see Friese (1959).

lished rule.”³⁴ Although this source associates these managerial changes directly with the introduction of the new *jiaoshai* production method, others suggest a more complex relationship between the two processes, i.e., the changes in the production method on the one hand, and changes in its management on the other. During this major transitional period, two different systems of control over the production process at times competed with and, at times, complemented, each other. First, the spontaneous production of salt, which the Salt Distribution Commission managed using workers from registered households to haul it out of the lake and, second, production through the *jiaoshai* method described above, which the salt merchants managed using hired workers on a seasonal basis.³⁵

Figure 5. Plan of Temple of the God of the Salt Lake (1727)



SOURCE: *Chixiu Hedong yanfa zhi* 敕修河東鹽法志 (1727), chap. 1, pp. 12b-13a.

NOTE: Oldest illustration of the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake.

³⁴ *Anyi xianzhi* 安邑縣志 (1671), chap. 2, p. 4b. Translation based on Dunstan (1980), p. 355.

³⁵ The complementary nature of the two production methods is also suggested by *Hedong yunsi zhi* (1672), chap. 2, p. 28a, cited on page 24 of the present article.

The Temple of the God of the Salt Lake after 1570

An analysis of seven stele inscriptions allows us to reconstruct the process of inclusion and exclusion of deities through which the pantheon of divinities that received official sacrifices at the temple changed and ultimately grew (see Table 1). Six of the inscriptions date from the eighty-year period of the late Ming and early Qing dynasties – i.e., from 1592,³⁶ 1602,³⁷ 1607,³⁸ 1619,³⁹ 1636⁴⁰ and 1653;⁴¹ and a seventh stele inscription, from 1535,⁴² has been included to provide a reference point to document the later changes. The six inscriptions from 1535, 1592, 1602, 1619, 1636, and 1653 commemorated and celebrated the completed work of repeated restorations of the temple. Unlike earlier inscriptions of that type,⁴³ they all name the temple deities and elaborate on the architectural features of the temple. The inscription from 1607 records sacrificial prayer texts that were recited in that year and thus provides a complete list of the gods of the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake at that time. The cumulative evidence provided by these sources suggests significant long-term changes in the perception and conceptualisation of the gods and of the temple space.

In the inscription of 1535, Ma Li describes the gods receiving sacrifices in the temple in the following way:

The Salt Distribution Commission of Hedong has had the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake for a long time. [The temple] has three halls and five gods that receive sacrifices: the two gods in the central hall are the God of the Eastern and the God of the Western Salt Lakes; the two gods in the hall to the left are the gods of Mount [Zhong]tiao and of the Wind-Cave and the one in the hall to the right, is the god, Prince of Wu'an, Loyal and

³⁶ *Fengchi chongxiu yanchi shenmiao beiji* 奉敕重修鹽池神廟碑記 (1592), p. 118.

³⁷ *Wang gong xinjian yanchi taiyang ci ji* 汪公新建鹽池太陽祠記 (1602) in *Chongxiu Hedong yunsi zhi* (1672), chap. 9, p. 7a (p. 694a).

³⁸ *Shiyu Kang gong chiji yanchi zhushen beiji* 侍御康公持祭鹽池諸神碑記 (1607), pp. 135-138.

³⁹ *Chongxiu yanchi shen miao beiji* 重修鹽池神廟碑記 (1619), p. 147f.

⁴⁰ *Chongxiu yanchi shen miao ji* 重修鹽池神廟記 (1636), p. 152f.

⁴¹ *Chongxiu chishen miao beiji* (1653), p. 162.

⁴² *Hedong yunsi chongxiu yanchi shen miao ji* 河東運司重修鹽池神廟記 (1535), p. 89.

⁴³ Usually noted in the title of the inscription by the first two characters of the title, *chongxiu* 重修, meaning 'restoration' or 'reconstruction.'

Righteous, these are all gods [registered] in the Sacrificial Records (*sidian* 祀典).⁴⁴

Table 1. Gods included in the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake

Year of the completion of the stele inscription and authors of their texts		1535 Ma Li	1592 Jiang Chunfang	1602 He Dongxu	1607 Wang Jianzhong	1619 Long Ying	1636 Yang Shengwu	1653 Zhao Rujin
Name of the God/s								
God/s of the Eastern and Western Lakes 東西池之神		X	X	X	X	X		X
God of Mt. Zhongtiao 中條之神		X	X	X	X	X		X
God of the Wind-Cave 風洞之神		X	X	X	X	X		X
關羽 Guan Yu	God of Prince of Wu'an, Loyal and Righteous 忠義武安王之神	X			X			
	Sage Guan, the Demon-quelling Great Thearch 伏魔大帝關聖					X		X
God of the Sun 太陽之神				X	X	X		X
God Master of the Rain 雨師之神						X		X
God of the Sweet [Water] Source 甘泉之神						X		X
God of the Soil 土地神		X	X					
This table provides a list of the different gods that received sacrifices at the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake during the period from 1535 to 1653 as documented in these inscriptions. The stele from 1636 represents an exception among this type of steles as it does not mention any specific gods. It depicts restoration work carried out at that time on a series of religious and public buildings of Yuncheng as a relief measure to provide work for an unemployed and starving local population; see below. Guan Yu as a god has been included here with two of his titles.								

⁴⁴ *Hedong yunsi chongxiu yanchi shen miao ji* (1535), p. 89. Biography of Ma Li in *Ming shi* 明史 (2003), chap. 282, pp. 7249-7250.

Further on, the author describes in great detail the reconstruction completed in 1535 and, thus, the architectural and spatial arrangements of the shrines within the temple.

In the centre they made a tall hall of three bays (*jian* 間) to offer to the gods as before; the small pavilion (*xiaoting* 小亭) in front of the eaves was replaced by a big room (*shawu* 廈屋) of five bays; they made steps [in front of it] and furnished [the terrace and steps] with stone balustrades of a length of 17 *zhang* (丈, ca. 53 metres). The halls to the right and left are both each slightly lower [than the main hall in the centre] but of the same [width of three] bays where they offer to the Gods as before.⁴⁵

However, several decades later after the restoration work on the temple in 1591-1592 had been completed, the gods were positioned anew. The Salt-Control Censor Jiang Chunfang 蔣春芳 (n.d.) who oversaw the restoration described them thus:

When our Emperor Gao, [with the temple name] Taizu, established peace in the central plain and became the ruler of all gods, he began to rectify their ranks, naming the [god(s)] in the central hall 'God(s) of the Eastern and Western Salt Lake,' the one to the left 'God of Mt. Zhongtiao,' and the one to the right 'God of the Wind-Cave'; they were [all] recorded in the Sacrificial Records.⁴⁶

In 1592, the God of the Wind-Cave and the God of Mount Zhongtiao were separated and assigned their places independently in the two side halls. In this context, it is significant that Jiang Chunfang 'erroneously' attributed the names of the gods and their placing to the founding emperor of the dynasty, Ming Taizu 明太祖 (r. 1368-1398). Given the profundity of the changes undertaken by the Censor, it would seem reasonable to assume that Jiang attributed the temple's reorganised pantheon to the dynasty's founder as a way of legitimising their far-reaching nature.

The original titles bestowed by the emperor on the deities of the temple were *yanchi zhi shen* 鹽池之神, and *zhongtiao fengdong zhi shen* 中條風洞之神, i.e., the 'God of the [Salt] Lake' and the 'God of the Wind-Cave of [Mount] Zhongtiao,'⁴⁷ and not those which Jiang gives in the 1592 inscription. It seems that the latter was still conceived of as a single deity in the four-

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 92.

⁴⁶ *Fengchi chongxiu yanshi shen miao beiji* (1592), p. 118.

⁴⁷ See *Hedong yanzheng huizuan* (1690), chap. 2, pp. 5a-5b; see also Seo Tatsuhiko (1992), p. 197.

teenth century, and slowly evolved into two separate gods who, by the time Ma Li wrote the inscription in 1535, were still sharing the same hall.⁴⁸ It was not until Jiang's time that the single god associated with a cave (see Figure 4)—which was believed to cause the summer wind that helped speed up the drying process of the brine—separated into two gods with distinct identities.

Also, it is unclear whether the name of the principal god in the central hall denoted a singular or plural entity in Jiang Chunfang's inscription. Whereas Ma Li spoke unequivocally about two gods, i.e., the God of the Eastern Salt Lake and the God of the Western Salt Lake, Jiang Chunfang is not so clear about this. One hundred years after Jiang's reorganisation of the temple, in 1690, the *Hedong yanzheng huizuan* mentions that, during Jiang's reform of the temple, the two separate gods of the eastern and western Salt Lakes were moved to be "offered joint sacrifices in the centre" (*heji yu zhong* 合祭於中).⁴⁹ This change of spatial arrangement and of ritual practice suggests that the double identity of the gods, which can be attested since the twelfth century in the Song dynasty continuing through the Yuan dynasty up until 1535—and which reflected the administrative division of the Salt Lake into two counties—started to merge during the late sixteenth century period of transition.⁵⁰ What is clear, however, is that in 1592, the God Prince of Wu'an (Guan Yu 關羽) no longer received sacrifices in any of the three main halls, in fact, seems to have been expelled from the temple altogether, as he is not mentioned in Jiang Chunfang's inscription.

All these cumulative changes leave the impression that deities with an identity as local tutelary gods, that is, the God of the Eastern Lake, the God of the Western Lake and the God of the Wind-Cave of Mount Zhongtiao, were transformed into what might be called 'production-related' deities. It seems that, because Guan Yu's identity was related to a local cluster of salt-related myths steeped in demonic lore (see below), it was more difficult to transform him into this kind of production-related god, so he was expelled from the temple. This impression is supported by a passage further on in the inscription, in which Jiang accounts for the architectural changes he initiated in the temple:

⁴⁸ In the Song and Yuan dynasty, one of the gods of the temple was called *yanfeng zhi shen* 鹽風之神 'God of the Salt Wind,' which received a title in 1105 and again in 1108, see the inscription from 1321, *Hedong yanchi beihui* (2000), p. 51f. See also Seo Tatsuhiko (1992), p. 194. No mention is made of Mount Zhongtiao as a deity prior to Ming Taizu's title. Ma Li's inscription is the first mention of a separate god of Mount Zhongtiao receiving sacrifices.

⁴⁹ *Hedong yanzheng huizuan* (1690), chap. 2, p. 5b.

⁵⁰ See the inscription from 1321 by Wang Wei on the Song enfeoffment of the two gods, in *Hedong yanchi beihui* (2000), p. 51f; see also Seo Tatsuhiko (1992), p. 194.

As mountains and the marshland [i.e., the Salt Lake] connect (*tong* 通) through *qi* 氣, and communicate with each other (*xiangyin* 相因) through a net of underground veins, salt, although given birth to (*chan* 產) in the Lake, has a source (*yuan* 原) that originates (*gen* 根) in the Mountains. As wind moves across the waters [of the lake] and their *qi* react with each other (*xiangying* 相應), salt, although provided for (*zi* 資) by water, has its creative impulse [for crystallisation] (*ji* 機) triggered (*qi* 起) by the wind. All three factors have to be present, and not one can be absent [in the production of salt]. In the same way, all three should be equally dignified [in the Temple]; one should not give precedent to another or show partiality. To build the Hall of the God(s) of the Salt Lake on a high and dry place, and to adorn it [most] beautifully so that it towers heroically in the middle [of the temple complex], and yet to place the halls of Mt. [Zhong]tiao and the Wind-Cave each in secondary positions, and stipulate them to be lower and more narrow, that is grossly inappropriate. I humbly hold the opinion that the spiritual efficacious ones, which are in Heaven, consequently feel deficiently treated by it and are not at peace [about this]. The fact that, over many successive years, water has flooded [the lake] repeatedly and salt has failed to crystallise, truly has a reason [therein].⁵¹

What reads at first as a 'standard account' of the natural processes behind the origins of the salt resource in the Salt Lake and of the spontaneous production process becomes, when read in the context of earlier inscriptions on stone tablets, a new departure in the discourse found in these sources. In pre-Ming and early Ming inscriptions, authors were mainly interested in the origins of the salt resource (or brine) in the Salt Lake, rather than the production of salt, which they linked back through quotations of classical sources—most frequently the *Hongfan* 洪範 chapter of the *Shujing* 書經—to a process of water seeping downwards.⁵² Although in 1535, Ma Li was the first to thematise Lake, Mountains and Wind as three interacting factors in the production of salt, he still did this through references to a classical text, in his case the *Yijing* 易經: "As for Mount [Zhong]tiao and the Wind-Cave: the first is where the source (*quan* 泉) of

⁵¹ *Fengchi chongxiu yanshi shen miao beiji* (1592), p. 118.

⁵² "Water flows down and when it flows down it becomes briny," e.g., the inscription by Li Ting 李庭 (1199-1282) carved in 1290, see *Hedong yanchi beihui* (2000), p. 30; Wang Wei in 1321; see *Hedong yanchi beihui* (2000), p. 52 and Lü Yuan 呂原 (1418-1462) in 1463; see *Hedong yanchi beihui* (2000), p. 69.

the lake spontaneously emerges (*suo zichu* 所自出), and the second, whence the *xun* 薰-wind arises (*suo congsheng* 所從生), and their [relationship] to the [Salt] Lake is *meng* 蒙, *xian* 咸, and *zhongfu* 中孚; they are different in form but are equal in merit [for salt production].⁵³ The names of the three hexagrams express emblematically the following three aspects: the source emerging from beneath the mountains, the interaction between lake and mountains, and the wind moving above the lake.⁵⁴

In comparison to these earlier sources, Jiang Chunfang's commentary offers two strikingly new departures. First, his account does not take recourse, explicitly or implicitly, to any classical or other legitimising textual source. It develops a 'rationalising' narrative that establishes salt production as a generative process, in which three external factors—mountain, water, and wind—are ascribed well-defined roles and shown to interact in specific ways. This new narrative goes hand in hand with the use of a 'technical' vocabulary in which nouns define these roles—the mountains are the source (*yuan*) of salt and the wind the creative impulse or trigger (*ji*) of the crystallisation—and verbs such as 'to connect' (*tong*), 'communicate with each other' (*xiangyin*), 'to give birth to' (*chan*), 'originate' (*gen*), 'react or interact with each other' (*xiangying*), 'to provide' (*zi*), and 'to trigger' (*qi*) specify the different types of generative interactions. Second, Jiang attributes the failure of salt production in recent years to adverse climatic conditions that were rooted in the temple's architecture. He asserts that the faulty hierarchical arrangement of the temple's three main halls does not adequately reflect the gods' or agents' roles in the salt production process. Jiang Chunfang thus conflates the ritually-defined spatial order of the temple with the order of the agents that shaped the surrounding landscape and produced salt.

Thus, as Jiang Chunfang recounts, the most profound remodelling of the temple's layout concerned the two lateral halls where the God of

⁵³ *Hedong yunsi chongxiu yanchi shen miao ji* (1535), p. 91.

⁵⁴ The Commentaries of Images of these hexagrams explain the images in the following way: see Lynn (1994), p. 159f, for *meng*, "Below the Mountain emerges the Spring: this constitutes the image of Juvenile Ignorance (*meng*)"; see p. 330 for *xian*, "The Lake is above the Mountain: this constitutes the image of Reciprocity (*xian*)," [*gen* 艮 is the lower trigram, and *dui* 兌 is the upper trigram. Kong Yingda commented, "The nature of the lake is such that it lets water flow down from it, so it can provide nourishing moisture to what is below. The substance of the Mountain is such that it accepts things from above, so it can receive this nourishing moisture." Lynn (1994), p. 333; and p. 524 for *zhongfu*, "Above the Lake, there is Wind: this constitutes the image of Inner Trust (*zhongfu*)." The phrase "different in form and equal in merit" evokes the *Xici xia* 繫辭下 section, "different in position but equal in merit," (*tonggong er yiwei* 同功而異位), see Lynn (1994), p. 91.

Mount Zhongtiao and the God of the Wind-Cave were placed. These halls were newly constructed to equal the central hall in size and importance, to reflect and honour the role these agents played in the salt production process. His detailed description of the building work that the stele offers thus comes to be framed as an essential part of, and contribution to, the process of salt production:

The main [i.e., central] hall was left as it had been, but it was repaired and adorned. As for the two halls to the left and right, we discarded the previous [buildings] and made [completely] new plans [for them]. We moved the soil to build the bases, brought bricks in handcarts and cut stones; we mowed down the luxuriant weeds, cleared away the dirt, broadened the land, made the buildings more spacious, and enlarged the corridors and walkways. Moreover, we added an 'incense pavilion' (*xiangting* 香亭), surrounded [the terraces] with stone balustrades, and encircled [the whole temple] with a fortified wall and made [the whole appearance of the temple more] dignified by adding gates on two sides. As for a Spirit Kitchen (*shen chu* 神廚) and a Temple for the God of the Soil (*tudi miao* 土地廟), these were newly constructed; we did not retain their original form. The scale and the prevailing atmosphere are majestic and lustrous, the *three halls are of equal dignity, and there are no differences in rank or status*. For the whole [complex] a plate signposted above the gate states: Appointed by Imperial Command, Shrine of Spiritually Efficacious Assistance (*qinsi lingyou ci* 欽賜靈佑祠).⁵⁵

As Seo Tatsuhiko maintains, this restoration work and remodelling of the temple from 1592 created the basic layout of the buildings for the future up to the present day.⁵⁶

On the basis of this new temple plan, following Jiang's work, a new development began. During the following thirty years or so, the temple continued to expand to accommodate new deities into a growing pantheon. These deities shared the characteristic of being production-related. In 1602, the Salt Distribution Commission built a shrine for the God of the Sun, and

⁵⁵ *Fengchi chongxiu yanshi shen miao beiji* (1592), p. 118f; emphasis added. The 'incense pavilion' is a structure built on the terrace in front of the main halls—normally open to all sides—in which the official sacrifices were held. A *xiangting* of three bays can be seen in Figure 1, p. 11.

⁵⁶ Seo Tatsuhiko (1992), p. 199.

again, in 1610, added one for the Rain God.⁵⁷ Moreover, in a later stele inscription we learn that, by 1619, a temple to the Sweet Water Source had been incorporated into the temple's pantheon.⁵⁸ We only have an inscription for the first of these gods, the God of the Sun. In its text, the author He Dongxu 何東序 (1531-1617) dramatises the discussions and deliberations that might have taken place in the Salt Distribution Commission prior to the introduction of this shrine.

First, Salt-Control Censor Wang Yishi's 汪以時 (fl. 1589-1601) three-year period in Yuncheng (1598-1601) is characterised by regular and successful salt production, and the climate is shown to have responded to the censor's ritual entreaties: it rained when rain was prayed for and cleared up when sunny weather was sought. With this, the text turns to the role of the sun in the salt production process. As it warms the brine and completes the process of transforming it into grainy salt crystals, the author insists that this transformation cannot solely be attributed to the agency of the wind. Within the text, Censor Wang Yishi realises that the sun's contribution to the production is of "a merit equal to the gods of the other cults, but that it does not appear in the documents, i.e., the Sacrificial Records of officially sanctioned cults."⁵⁹ He consequently looks everywhere for advice on how to construct a new shrine. After submitting the request through the relevant agencies of the central government, they finally built the shrine:

The shrine consists of a hall of five bays, two adjacent corridors and a main gate, each of three bays; it is covered with jade-blue tiles and surrounded by a cinnabar-red wall. [Its hall] is aligned with the [halls of the temples for the gods of the Salt] Lake, the [Wind-]Cave, and of Mt. [Zhong]tiao, all of them facing south.⁶⁰

The text, although stylistically very different from Jiang Chunfang's inscription ten years earlier, shares a series of important characteristics with the earlier text. Continuing Jiang Chunfang's focus on the agents' roles in the salt production process, He Dongxu frames the whole debate about the incorporation of the cult clearly within a detailed discourse on

⁵⁷ No stele commemorated the inauguration of this shrine constructed by the Salt-Control Censor Yang Shicheng 楊師程 (fl. 1609-1610). The date, however, is given in *Hedong yanzheng huizuan* (1690), chap. 2, pp. 5b-6a and *Hedong yanfa beilan* (1789), chap. 1, p. 11b. It was restored by the Censor Yang Shengwu 楊繩武 (?-1642?) in 1638.

⁵⁸ *Chongxiu yanchi shen miao beiji* (1619), p. 147 (missing characters filled in from p. 148).

⁵⁹ *Hedong yunsi zhi* (1672), chap. 9, p. 7a (p. 694a).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. 9, p. 8a (p. 694b).

the wind and sun as complementary factors in the process. Like Jiang, the later author legitimises the inclusion of the new shrine without recourse to textual authorities. Taking it one step further, he states explicitly that this cult does not appear in the documents, but is legitimised through experience, i.e., familiarity with the conditions at the lake and the Salt-Control Censor's observations.⁶¹ This emphasis on experience, together with the focus on the agents of salt production in the lake, creates what I called earlier a 'rationalising' account, based on the knowledge and experience gained from contemporary experiments with the new *jiaoshai* method. This is, of course, difficult to establish with certainty, but, it is revealing that He Dongxu uses the characters *wonuan yu chi* 沃煖於池 when talking about salt production in the lake: *wo* being a near synonym for *jiao*, 'to immerse, inundate or fertilise' and *nuan* meaning 'to warm' or 'to heat,' here directly relating to the sun's contribution to evaporating brine, i.e., *shai*. The construction of yet another shrine to the Rain God, less than ten years later, would fit with this trend of isolating and identifying the different agents' roles in salt production, adding them to the temple's pantheon as 'production-gods' and thus subjecting them to a new kind of ritual control.

One last characteristic that He Dongxu's prose shares with that of Jiang Chunfang is the detailed attention he dedicates to the architecture of the shrine, its size and, most importantly, its relative position in relation to the halls of the other gods. As we have seen, these considerations of ritual character were given great importance at the time, reflecting production-related issues. The God of the Sun was thus honoured with a personal hall that was not only as wide as those of the other gods, but was given, as befitting its importance, a ritually equally eminent place, i.e., facing south. What the author does not mention is that the shrine was placed to the east of the main axis of the temple.⁶²

In the 1650s, when Zhao Rujin commemorates the completion of the temple's restoration with an inscription, he continues the trend of including a complete list of the temple's pantheon which had begun with Ma Li in 1535. He shows himself even more clearly indebted to Jiang Chunfang when he legitimises the presence of each deity in relation to a specific aspect of salt production, using the same technical vocabulary as Jiang while summarising the interaction between lake, mountains and wind:

⁶¹ The document is actually more complex, as it brings into contact two different discourses of legitimation, the first of which we have mentioned above. Secondly, it addresses the question of how to legitimise the shrine's inclusion and construction in relation to the court. This theme will be explored in a forthcoming article.

⁶² In a later pictorial representation from 1690, the shrine to the God of the Sun is much smaller; it has, like the shrine to the Rain God, a width of no more than three bays, see *Chixiu Hedong yanfa zhi* (1727), chap. 1, pp. 12b-13a (Figure 5).

If it were not for the god of this Salt Lake, would emperors and kings of ancient and present times who treasure people's livelihood depend on the lake? Yet the establishment of the temple stems only from the Tang [dynasty] when the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Revenue, Han Huang 韓滉 (723-789), requested an imperial decree [to found a temple]. Now, although earth gives birth (*chan*) to salt, it originates (*yuan*) in the mountains, and although it is supplied (*zi*) by water, it arises (*qi*) from the wind, so the gods of Mount [Zhong]tiao and of the Wind-Cave were placed to the left and right [of the god of the Salt Lake] to receive associated sacrifices. [Furthermore,] one feared especially that there would be too much rain, [or that it would fall] at the wrong time and [again the brine] was in dire need of exposure to a fierce sun. Also, every year when the summer is at its hottest and the steaming heat [rises from the lake] the workers who haul out [the salt] and the local people cannot drink the water of the Salt Lake, since it is briny and half of the people suffer [seriously] from dehydration. However, since there is a sweet water source, numerous are the workers who are saved [by its water]. Therefore the Sun, the Master of Rain, as well as the Sweet Water Source are also placed in the temple as gods.⁶³

Zhao Rujin's account of the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake's pantheon includes one further god that has not been mentioned so far, i.e., the God of the Sweet Water Source (*danquan shen* 淡泉神). The earliest rationalised account of the inclusion of this god into the temple comes from Long Ying's inscription from 1619.⁶⁴ Although we know from later practice that

⁶³ *Chongxiu chishen miao beiji* (1653), p. 162.

⁶⁴ The question of the exact date when this last god was included cannot satisfactorily be resolved. Wang Wei's inscription from 1321 suggests that in 1105 (Northern Song dynasty) and then again in 1299 (Yuan dynasty), a God of a Sweet-Water Source received titles from the court. The source is called *danquan* 澹泉 in this inscription and it is by no means clear whether the references are to the same water source. Much later texts, such as *Hedong yanzheng huizuan* (1690), chap. 2, p. 6a and the *Hedong yanfa beilan* (1789), chap. 1, pp. 11b-12a, however, both identified the God of the Sweet-Water Source with this earlier god of a *dan* source (here written as 淡泉), and the latter texts add that the origins of this temple were not known. Both texts give as the earliest reference to the present-day shrine (Qing dynasty) the date of its restoration in 1638, which had been undertaken by the Salt-Control Censor Yang Shengwu. However, as we have seen, the cult is already mentioned in Long Ying's inscription from 1619 (see Table 1), *Chongxiu yanchi shen miao beiji* (1619), p. 148. In Ming sources anterior to Long Ying this god is not mentioned, see e.g.,

the *jiaoshai* salt production method included deliberately adding fresh water to the brine at a certain stage of the production process to avoid the crystallisation of a bitter, unpalatable type of salt,⁶⁵ Zhao Rujin accounts for the presence of the God of the Sweet Water Source within the pantheon of salt-production-related deities in a different way. This god's contribution to salt production consisted in the protection of the workforce from dehydration in the Salt Lake's difficult working conditions during the hot summer months. Thus, with the establishment of the god's shrine in the temple, a new layer of discourse is introduced – that of compassionate care for the salt workers.

The presence of this new type of discourse in the temple is further enhanced with the slightly earlier stele inscription by Yang Shengwu 楊繩武 (1636). In this text, the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake becomes in itself an agent of compassionate famine relief, whose reconstruction provided a market for both labour and materials at an economically depressed period when these had lost a great deal of value.⁶⁶

Consequently, those who owned building materials could sell, those who were skilled in the crafts obtained a salary; those who were strong would shoulder the heavy tasks and those who were weak would assist with the light tasks: there were several hundred people who from day to day relied on this for their livelihood and the construction work [was completed] in a steady order. We supported what was crumbling down of the Guest Tribute Arch (*bingong fang* 賓貢坊) so that it can be clearly seen by people from the lake; we supported what was falling down of the two – eastern and central – gates of the protective wall [that surrounds the lake], so that the lake was [again] sealed off; we repaired what was dilapidated of the Pavilion of Maritime Brilliance (*haiguang lou*), from which the lake appears like a mirror; we restored what was rotten of the Pavilion of Incanting the Breeze

Wang Jianzhong's 1607 prayer texts to the gods of the temple, which neither include prayers to the Rain God nor to the Sweet-Water Source God, *Hedong yanchi beihui* (2000), pp. 135-138. It appears that, from the beginning of the Ming era up to the 1610s, in spite of its previous history, this god was not included in the Sacrificial Records and thus was not eligible for the reception of an official cult.

⁶⁵ The addition of fresh water to the brine could occur naturally, "miraculously," when there was a light rainfall at the right time, but which now, under the conditions of the more controlled production process of the *jiaoshai* technique, was brought about through deliberate water control, see Chai Jiguang et al. (1993), p. 233.

⁶⁶ See Dunstan (1980), p. 230.

(*gexun lou*), that points towards the lake as if it were stretched out on a palm. The leaking Three Main Halls (*sanzheng dian* 三正殿) were reconstructed with bricks; the collapsed and peeling Hall of the Three Offerings (*sanxiang dian* 三享殿) was supported and renovated; furthermore, we encircled the halls with an iron chain. The [stage for theatrical] and musical [performance] and the [Spirit] Kitchen (*shen chu*) adjoin each other and [enclose the courtyard on the southern side encircling it like] the right and left hand joined; the display of the Tower of Stone Tablets (*beilou* 碑樓) [to the right and left of the courtyard] are like two wings.⁶⁷

Towards the end of the texts, Yang deflects possible criticism that might be directed at him for dedicating labour to a temple when people were starving. For him, the restoration project is justified as a way to keep people alive and to steer them away from banditry. Thus, he says that he composed his inscription to let future visitors to the temple know that the temple is not a place constructed for beauty or frivolous pleasures, but because “the God bestows blessing onto and gives profit to our people.”⁶⁸ In this way, Yang Shengwu inscribed this new meaning of “care for the people” onto the temple and its gods, a meaning that can be furthermore identified in the newly-installed god of the Sweet Water Source.

It is important in this context to note that, in his attempt to organise famine relief, the Salt-Control Censor involved local rich salt merchants in the funding of the restoration project, and that he recognised the contributors by inscribing their names at the end of his stele text.⁶⁹ As the Salt Distribution Commission was increasingly losing direct control over the salt workers around the Salt Lake, the temple began to acquire a new role as a benevolent social institution within the sociotechnical system. Its buildings and space would accommodate different strata of Yuncheng’s local society, and bring its members into a participative relationship under the guidance of the state’s salt administration.

Guan Yu in the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake

Finally, let us return now to the question of the presence of Guan Yu as a god in the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake. Guan Yu is, from a typological point of view, a type of god different from the other deities

⁶⁷ *Chongxiu yanchi shen miao ji* (1636), p. 153.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

worshipped there. He had been a historical figure, enfeoffed with honorific titles in the late Ming period (and, of course, earlier), while the other production gods were deities that had been entered into the Sacrificial Records of the Ming dynasty because of their generic function. In the late Ming, Guan Yu was also a god with trans-regional importance, while the other gods of the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake were specific to that area and one temple. If we only relied on the stele inscriptions and other official sources up to the sixteenth century without looking at other religious sources and later historical material, we might wonder why Guan Yu should be worshipped at all in a temple dedicated to the Salt Lake.

However, in religious printed sources the figure of Guan Yu had been powerfully connected to the area around the Salt Lake, since at least the early fourteenth century, through an account that linked his divine intervention as a demon-quelling protector with the continued and steady production of salt there. In this account, a Northern Song dynasty emperor called upon Guan Yu, through the intervention of the thirteenth-generation Celestial Master Zhang Jixian, to fight the demon-monster Chiyou 蚩尤, who had halted salt production in the lake. In a long, drawn-out and violent battle fought over the lake, Guan Yu finally defeated Chiyou. The demon's blood spilled into the lake and refreshed the brine, thus allowing the production of salt to resume.⁷⁰ This myth was centred on Xiezhou, which was, as we have seen above, the hub of the salt administration up until the late thirteenth century. Xiezhou was also the home county of the historical figure of Guan Yu; both Changping 常平, his home village on the south-western shore of the lake, and Xiezhou, the county seat, were important centres of Guan Yu cults during the Ming dynasty.

⁷⁰ In textual variants the episode is either attributed to the early eleventh or early twelfth century; for this myth, see Ter Haar (2000), pp. 184-204. The oldest sources that make reference to an earlier, possibly regional, myth in which the brine of the Salt Lake of Xie is linked to Chiyou's blood can be dated to the late tenth to early eleventh centuries, as for example in the *Mengxi bitan* 夢溪筆談 (Brush Talks from the Dream Brook), published in 1166 by Shen Gua 沈括 (1031-1095), see *Mengxi bitan jiaozheng* 夢溪筆談校證, pp. 127. In a poem by Wang Yucheng 王禹偁 (954-1001) on the Salt Lake, *Yanchi shiba yun bing xu* 鹽池十八韻并序 (Eighteen Rhymes on the Salt Lake, with Preface), dated 993, the author already mentions the belief that Chiyou's blood became brine, see *Wang Huangzhou xiaochu waiji* 王黃州小畜外集 (tenth century), vol. 808, chap. 7, p. 11b. During the same period, Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣 (1002-1060) mentions in the poem, *Song Pan sifeng zhi Xiezhou* 送潘司封知解州 (Seeing Off [Mr] Pan, Director of the Board of Honours, appointed as Prefect of Xiezhou), "the blood of Chiyou," see *Wanling xiansheng ji* 宛陵先生集 (eleventh century), vol. 873, chap. 17, p. 3b. In these three sources, however, no mention is made of Guan Yu.

Accordingly, the history of the Guan Yu cult in Yuncheng's Temple of the God of the Salt Lake during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is complicated by the emerging identity of Guan Yu as a trans-regional, empire-wide god on the one hand, and his regional association as a Xiezhou local deity with its manifestation as a demon-quelling salt god on the other. Intra-regional rivalry between this county town on the western end of the Salt Lake and the Anyi-county city of Yuncheng were likely to interfere in the changes that were witnessed in different centres of the Guan Yu cult around the lake. To account for these in detail would go beyond the scope of this paper, and would involve an analysis of the various repositories of stele inscriptions in the different cultic centres.⁷¹

The different attitudes that the stele inscriptions of this period take towards Guan Yu and the changes in the temple and its cult suggest that this was an era rife with tensions. Ma Li's 1535 inscription is the oldest of all documented inscriptions in the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake that mentions a cult to Guan Yu taking place in the temple. Ma Li accounted for Guan Yu's presence in the pantheon by stressing his exemplary nature of loyalty and uprightness, but did not make any direct mention of a possible relation between this god and aspects of salt production. Given the older and local tradition of Guan Yu as demon-quelling salt god, Ma Li must have consciously chosen to exclude and to overwrite it with an empire-wide, trans-regional representation of the god as protector of the empire and as the moral model of the local community. However, the inscription shows that the other representation lurked behind the text, and that the author felt compelled to engage with it uneasily. Thus, he had to acknowledge that "those who speak on behalf of the old clans honour him as a god, considering him like thunder and lightning" – which echoes the battle between Guan Yu and Chiyou – continuing: "A popular saying is that heroes that die will necessarily become luminous gods, to drive out and exorcise the *wangliang*-monster (魍魎) and to be feasted with sacrifices." The aspect of exorcism is briefly invoked here, and then immediately ameliorated by a return to the more acceptable aspects of ritual propriety, through supposed citations from a ritual text that legitimates and simultaneously obviates the exorcism aspect.⁷² These tensions in the text

⁷¹ Apart from the grand Guan Yu temple in Xiezhou and the 'ancestral' temple in Changping 常平, north of Yuncheng city another temple was located that housed an important local cult to Guan Yu. According to early-Qing sources this temple, the *Ningji miao* 寧濟廟, was also devoted to his demon-quelling salt-protecting avatar, see *Hedong yanzheng huizuan* (1690), chap. 2, p. 7b. The rich repositories of stele inscriptions in these temples await further study.

⁷² *Hedong yunsi chongxiu yanchi shen miao ji* (1535), p. 91f. I say "supposed citation," because I could not trace it to any single text.

must have been symptomatic of strains between local and trans-regional – i.e., imperial – interests in and around the Salt Lake. They reveal that the god Guan Yu in the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake was a figure through which local society and the imperial monopoly salt administration negotiated their contending claims.

In the 1592 inscription by Jiang Chunfang, it emerges that Guan Yu had been removed from the ritually dominant position of one of the main halls of the temple during the restoration that this inscription celebrates. Jiang Chunfang did not even include Guan Yu in his catalogue of the complete pantheon of the temple's gods, suggesting that he had not merely been demoted to a new shrine in an inferior position, but excluded altogether. If we review the later inscriptions from 1607, 1619 and 1653, however, it emerges that the god was returned to the temple just fifteen years later.⁷³ The 1607 inscription not only mentions Guan Yu but also, surprisingly, for the first time in the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake, refers to his battle with Chiyou over salt production.⁷⁴ The next steles from 1619 and 1653, elaborate this point in ever greater detail. In the latter inscription, Zhao Rujin writes:

As for the Demon-Quelling Great Thearch (*fumo dadi* 伏魔大帝, i.e., Guan Yu), he is a person from Changping Village south of Xie[zhou]. In the Dazhong period of the Song (i.e., *dazhong xiangfu* 大中祥符, 1008-1016), [the Demon-monster] Chiyou haunted the [Salt] Lake and the townspeople beseeched the Thearch in prayer. Suddenly, wind and thunder [arose] and darkness [descended], and the air filled with the sounds of [clashes of] metal armour and iron cavalry troops. After a while the sky cleared and the sun shone radiantly; the water of the lake was as it had always been and the salt 'grew' again. The people vied [with each other to express] their gratitude and in an attached shrine within the Temple of the [God of the Salt] Lake they bestowed sacrifices onto him.⁷⁵

How can we account for these changes? First, a pictorial representation of the Salt Lake carved on a stone tablet in 1597 (Figure 6) suggests that Guan Yu never completely disappeared between 1592 and 1607. This stone tablet, formerly in the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake, shows a building

⁷³ See *Hedong yanchi beihui* (2000), p. 138 for Wang Jianzhong (1607), p. 147f for Long Ying (1619) and p. 169 for Zhao Rujing (1653).

⁷⁴ *Shiyu Kang gong chiji yanchi zhushen beiji* (1607), p. 138.

⁷⁵ *Chongxiu chishen miao beiji* (1653), p. 162. The 'Demon-Quelling Great Thearch' was part of a new, grander title that the god received in 1614 (see below); see Inoue Ishii (1941), p. 261.

Figure 6. The Temple of the God of the Salt Lake (1597)



SOURCE: Detail of the *Hedong yanchi zhi tu* 河東鹽池之圖 from 1597. Photograph taken by Susan Naquin on 19 September 2005 in the Yuncheng City Museum (with kind permission).

NOTE: The centre of the illustration is dominated by the towering Pavilion of Maritime Brilliance with the three gables of the three main halls of the temple slightly beneath. To the left (east) beneath a group of four people, separated by a rectangular cache that bears the three characters 關王廟 (*Guanwang miao*), is located the Temple of King Guan.

slightly to the east of the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake named the 'Temple of King Guan' (*Guanwang miao* 關王廟).⁷⁶ Calling it a temple (*miao* 廟) rather than a mere shrine (*ci* 祠) confirms that, when Guan Yu was removed from the main temple, an independent cult was established separately from the cults of the pantheon of gods. In the inscription on the 1607 stele, Guan Yu is included in the prayers of thanks offered to all the gods of the Temple of God of the Salt Lake, which indicates that he was once again considered part of its pantheon, rather than as a god with a separate cult. This return to the pantheon was also expressed architecturally. When the shrine to the God of the Sun was created between 1598 and 1602, a new building was erected slightly east of the Temple of King Guan, leaving the latter wedged between the new shrine and the main temple, and thereby incorporated into the expanded temple complex.

With this information in mind we are able to refine our understanding of Jiang Chunfang's position. His attitude can be characterised as a radical attempt to redefine the gods of the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake as 'rationalised' production forces, and his attempt to control these forces through the temple building was a way to assert the central administration's control over the production process. This attempt accompanied a critical attitude towards the new *jiaoshai* production method, as he showed a clear preference for the older method of spontaneously produced salt. This attitude is evident from the opening of his "Essential Regulations from the Comptroller of Salt" (*Ancuo yaogui* 按鹺要規):

Hedong's salt is the best in the entire world. There was originally none of the "waste salt"; the name only appeared after a flood at the Salt Lake had stopped crystallisation and the *jiaoshai* technique was adopted as an expedient. They used this salt to make up allocations, and the merchants further adulterated [the stock they received]. When this [salt] was forced upon the people, who accepted it? Since I have held office, salt has twice crystallised. Hauled out, it came to not below several hundred thousand *yin*, and it is all top-grade good salt.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Hedong yanchi zhi tu* 河東鹽池之圖 (Illustration of the Salt Lake of Hedong) from 1697 with a text by Wu Kai 吳楷 (fl. 1596-1598). For a translation of the text and a presentation of this pictorial inscription, see Guo Zhengzhong (1995). For the relevant detail of this image that shows the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake, see the drawing in Seo Tatsuhiko (1992), p. 198. See Figure 6.

⁷⁷ Translation of title and quotation from Dunstan (1980), pp. 340-341 with slight changes. For the remainder of the text of the "Essential Regulations," see pp. 341-346, *Hedong yunsi zhi* (1672), chap. 7, p. 16a.

In the remainder of his “Essential Regulations,” Jiang outlines the implementation of various far-reaching measures to impose a tighter control over merchants who reaped illicit benefits by taking advantage of the complexities of the intractable salt distribution system. Given the increasing dependence on merchants’ involvement in salt production during the crisis-ridden 1580s, Jiang’s approach can only be characterised as high-handed. He was undoubtedly emboldened to take such measures by the extraordinary success of two bumper harvests of spontaneously crystallised salt from the lake. The exclusion of Guan Yu from the pantheon of the temple suggests, in this context, a firm rejection of local involvement in the production of salt by those who Ma Li had earlier called the “old clans” around the lake “that honour him as a god,” and of those who experimented—certainly with the approval of earlier Salt-Control Censors—with the new production method. The separation of the Guan Yu cult from the “production gods” was a symbolically-charged move to reaffirm the Salt Distribution Commission’s, and thereby the state’s, prerogative and control over salt production. It is also significant that, in 1594, two years after Jiang had expelled Guan Yu from the temple, this god received a new title that raised him to the unrivalled title of *di* Thearch. As ‘Great Thearch, Loyal and Just, Protector of the Land, Harmonising with Heaven’ *xietian huguo zhongyi dadi* 協天護國忠義大帝, Guan Yu was further purged of all possible association as a local demon-quelling avatar.⁷⁸

In the same vein, Guan Yu’s subsequent reappearance in the temple, with the explicit recognition of his local identity in the various Salt-Control Censors’ inscriptions, must be seen in the context of the increasing success of the new *jiaoshai* method in producing quality salt, and the ever-growing involvement of local merchant families in the production process that followed. In the 1610s, twenty years after Jiang Chunfang’s term as Salt-Control Censor in Yuncheng, relations between the Commission and the local community had changed significantly. A more cooperative approach was manifest when the Salt-Control Censor, Wang Yuanyi 王遠宜 (n.d.), eased some of Jiang’s more onerous restrictions on the merchants during his term between 1617 and 1619. A grateful local community responded with the erection of a commemorative shrine and an inscription in his honour, the first of its kind in Yuncheng.⁷⁹ To what extent the new title the emperor bestowed on Guan Yu, seven years after his first appearance as demon-quelling salt god in the temple, can be attributed to local influence from the Salt Lake area is open for investigation. However, in 1614, he was recognised empire-wide as the ‘Demon-Quelling Great Thearch of the

⁷⁸ Inoue Ishii (1941), p. 256f.

⁷⁹ See Dunstan (1980), pp. 376-378; the inscription was composed in 1622, *Hedong yunsi zhi* (1672), chap. 9, pp. 24b-26a.

Three Realms, the Heavenly Honour, Spiritually Mighty and of Far-Reaching, All-Shaking Power, the Divine Sovereign Sage Guan' *sanjie fumo dadi shenwei yuanzhen tianzun guansheng diju* 三界伏魔大帝神威遠震天尊關聖帝君.⁸⁰ In turn, this grand title finally imperially legitimised the local avatar and those that worshipped him in this guise around the Salt Lake.

Conclusion

During the last seventy years of the Ming dynasty (1575-1645), the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake in Yuncheng experienced an unprecedented flourish of activity as its pantheon of gods underwent great transformations and a significant expansion. The Temple of the God of the Salt Lake was only one element within the complex sociotechnical system of the Hedong salt business around the Salt Lake. Many other elements intersected in this system that was comprised of a very particular geography, a shrinking force of statutory salt workers, entrenched salt merchants, the local urban and rural populations around the Salt Lake with their customs and traditions, the different layers of local territorial and salt administrations with their staff, and a whole gamut of religious and educational institutions. Yet, the temple was the most important institution for the imperial Salt Distribution Commission in its relationship and interaction with the local environment. As it grew in size, repeated restorations and construction of new buildings and shrines, the institution of prayer services and other things were, with novel frequency, recorded in inscriptions that were placed in the temple on stone tablets. In large part through these steles and their inscriptions, the temple became an architectural discursive space that facilitated new forms of social participation, and offered a nexus between the sphere of human activity and the relevant 'natural' factors of salt production. These decades coincided with technological change in which the *jiaoshai* production method supplemented or partly replaced the method of spontaneously produced salt and at a time when the Salt Distribution Commission gradually withdrew from direct management of the production process to lose its institutional control over the conscripted workforce, and, finally, when its relations to, and forms of interaction with, the merchants changed.

Under the strictures of these changes, the salt administration used the Temple of the God of the Salt Lake as a space to assert a new legitimate, i.e., ritual, control over salt production. Ritual and salt production technology entered into a relationship of competition as ritual was cast – in the case of Jiang Chunfang's 1592 inscription – as a means to influence and intervene

⁸⁰ Inoue Ishii (1941), p. 261.

in natural processes more successfully than human technological control over the production ever could. As technological knowledge of the new production processes was gained and refined, and as merchants employing the *jiaoshai* method produced palatable salt at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Guan Yu, as a more interventionist god, was openly acknowledged as a salt production god in the temple. The inclusion of this god in the temple's pantheon, one who enjoyed a deeply-rooted popular local appeal around the Salt Lake, signified not only an official acknowledgement of the greater role that local merchants played in producing the wealth the state coveted, but allowed for new forms of ritual control of the representation of this deity. Thus, each restoration of the temple and ensuing changes in the pantheon renewed the temple's role as a space of negotiation between the shifting relationships of local and governmental interests.

In this context, it is important to bear in mind that the spontaneous production of salt was never abandoned at the Salt Lake. Whilst the highly-volatile production of spontaneously crystallised salt could not satisfy the demands of a state in search of steady revenue from the salt monopoly, or sustain the local economy, or secure the livelihood of Hedong salt merchants—all of which could be provided by producing salt by the *jiaoshai* method—it remained an ideologically important factor. A bumper harvest of salt, which under ideal climatic conditions could only be spontaneously produced on average perhaps twice a decade, provided a vital renewal of the miraculous, 'strange' quality of salt production, reaffirming regularly not only the efficaciousness of the gods, the temple, and its rituals, but also the bureaucratic control of, and participation in, salt production by the Salt Distribution Commission.

Furthermore, an awakened concern for ritual matters and the spatial disposition of the temple, such as the size and placement of buildings and their shrines, as well as the growing corpus of inscriptions on steles, converted the temple into an evolving knowledge space, in which layer upon fresh layer of texts and experiences accumulated over time. For a recently-arrived visitor, such as a newly-appointed Salt-Control Censor, sent out from court to manage the concerns of Hedong's salt administration, the temple represented a repository of experiences and knowledge which the stele inscriptions made decipherable, and which, simultaneously, awaited reinterpretation according to the exigencies of a changing time. In this sense, the temple and its spaces as repositories could create a living sense of historical continuity, localising change in the material, thereby making it liable to continued ritual manipulation and bureaucratic control.

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