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Michael Szonyi

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Article abstract

Many scholars of late imperial China have argued that the imperial state's sanctioning of certain cults was an important factor in the standardization of Chinese culture. This paper is a case study of the Five Emperors, a local cult which was not only not sanctioned, but actively suppressed by state officials. In response, worshippers of the cult concealed their deities behind the Five Manifestations, a cult which was state sanctioned. But the cult retained distinctive rituals, iconography, and representations in local popular culture. The conflation of the Five Emperors with other trans-local cultures demonstrates that the standardization of Chinese culture was often only illusory, concealing enduring local distinctiveness.

# National Gods and Local Contexts: Distinguishing the Five Emperors and the Five Manifestations in Late Imperial China

MICHAEL SZONYI

## Résumé

*Many scholars of late imperial China have argued that the imperial state's sanctioning of certain cults was an important factor in the standardization of Chinese culture. This paper is a case study of the Five Emperors, a local cult which was not only not sanctioned, but actively suppressed by state officials. In response, worshippers of the cult concealed their deities behind the Five Manifestations, a cult which was state sanctioned. But the cult retained distinctive rituals, iconography, and representations in local popular culture. The conflation of the Five Emperors with other trans-local cultures demonstrates that the standardization of Chinese culture was often only illusory, concealing enduring local distinctiveness.*

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*Plusieurs études des dernières heures de la Chine impériale ont vu un facteur important de la standardisation de la culture chinoise dans la sanction de certains cultes locaux par l'État central. Cet essai se penche sur le cas de l'hommage aux Cinq Empereurs, une pratique régionale que les représentants de l'État ont plutôt tenté de supprimer. En réponse à cette interdiction, les adorateurs ont caché l'objet de leur vénération derrière la célébration des Cinq Manifestations, un rite autorisé, celui-là, par les autorités. Dès lors, cependant, la culture populaire locale a attaché à ce culte reconnu des images, des représentations et des rituels particuliers. L'examen de cette fusion du culte des Cinq Empereurs avec d'autres éléments culturels à la portée plus vaste montre que la normalisation de la culture chinoise n'a bien souvent été qu'un phénomène illusoire, masquant la persistance de traits distinctifs à l'échelle locale.*

In the early seventeenth century, Xie Zhaozhi complained that:

The most deplorable custom in [Fujian] is that when pestilence arises, [the people] call on evil spirits. They burn incense and make offerings in the hall. They appear terrified. Morning and night they make obeisances and pledge sacrifices in a disorderly way...

They call on sorcerers to perform their rites. They paste paper together to make a boat and send it out to the water's edge. These boats are always put out at night. The people who live there shut up their doors to avoid it.<sup>1</sup>

In the Fuzhou region of Fujian province in coastal southeast China, this practice was associated with a group of deities known as the Five Emperors (*Wudi*).<sup>2</sup> Local people in the Fuzhou area are now rebuilding temples to this fascinating group of deities. Who are the Five Emperors? What can we learn of their origins and identities? What can they tell us about the social history of late imperial China?

Historians and anthropologists alike have become increasingly interested in the complex stratification which underlies Chinese myths and symbols. Research has explored how different groups in society construct their own representations of myths and deities, corresponding to the needs of the particular group at a particular time; how these different representations interact and interpenetrate; and how the state may attempt to superscript particular interpretations and images over others, in the interests of control and cultural integration.<sup>3</sup> James Watson has made a powerful case that the promotion of certain cults by state authorities played a significant role in the standardization of Chinese culture. Although, and perhaps because, different groups in society developed their own understandings and representations of the state-sanctioned deities they worshipped, the power of state-sanctioned cults could overwhelm and even lead to the disappearance of diverse existing local cults.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I present some of the data I have collected on the cult of the Five Emperors, in order to further explore these questions on the relationship between local and trans-local cultures.

The Five Emperors have traditionally been seen as a local manifestation of the trans-local state-sanctioned cult of the Five Manifestations. A close investigation of all the available sources suggests, rather, a distinct local cult that has flourished because of the perceived efficacy of the deities in the face of recurring danger. The confusion

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1. Xie Zhaozhi, *Wuzazu* [Five Assorted Offerings] (1608; reprint Taipei, 1971), 6:31b-32a.
  2. My thanks to the participants in the panel on Chinese Religion and Cultural Integration, in particular my fellow panelists, Ken Dean and David Ownby, and the commentator, Jennifer Jay. Research for this paper was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Rhodes Trust, Oxford. The following abbreviations are used in the notes. CT: Kristofer Schipper, *Concordance du Taotsang* (Paris, 1975); SKQS: *Wenyuange Siku Quanshu* [Complete Works of the Four Treasuries from the Wenyuange Library] (Taipei, 1986). Where not otherwise specified, manuscripts were obtained from ritual specialists in the Fuzhou area.
  3. James Watson, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou ('Empress of Heaven') Along the South China Coast, 960-1960," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, eds. David Johnson *et al* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985); Prasenjit Duara, "Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, the Chinese God of War," *Journal of Asian Studies* 47 (1988); Paul Katz, "Wen Ch'ung - The God of Many Faces," *Hanxue yanjiu* 8 (1990); Terry Klee-man, *A God's Own Tale: the Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong* (Albany, 1994).
  4. Watson, 293-4.

with the Five Manifestations has arisen because of the conflation in some sources of this local cult with the trans-local cult. Watson has pointed out that "the flow of ideas was both up and down the hierarchy of power."<sup>5</sup> It is very important to note further that within these flows, ideas could be manipulated, appropriated, and deliberately subverted. The differentiation of representations of deities among different groups in society is closely linked to such processes.

### **A Paradox: the Five Emperors, the Five Manifestations, the *Wutong***

The gazetteers of the Fuzhou region present their reader with an intriguing paradox. These gazetteers list temples in the area to a group of deities known as the Five Manifestations (*Wuxian*), but provide almost no details on the deities themselves, and virtually none on the practices associated with them. On the other hand, the gazetteers, as well as a myriad of other sources, also describe a group of deities called the Five Emperors, about whom various stories and histories circulate, and there is considerable evidence about the rituals of their cult. But there is no mention of temples to these deities in the temple lists in the gazetteers. Moreover, when one visits modern reconstructions of temples in the Fuzhou area which the gazetteers list as temples to the Five Manifestations, one is told by worshippers that these temples used to be and remain temples to the Five Emperors, not to the Five Manifestations.

Cedzich and von Glahn offer a simple resolution of this paradox, assuming, though without making their assumptions explicit, that the term Five Manifestations in sources from the Fuzhou area refers to the trans-local state-sanctioned deities of the same name, that the Five Emperors is simply the local name for these deities, and thus that the two terms refer therefore to the same deities.<sup>6</sup> But this apparently straightforward resolution of the paradox is in fact highly problematic.

The Five Manifestations were originally called the *Wutong*, and were a form of malicious mountain spirit. The twelfth century *Yijianzhi* contains several stories involving deities or demons called *Wutong*, and these present an ambiguous image of the deity. In some stories, *Wutong* refers to a single deity, often portrayed as one-legged or even simply as a large foot or leg.<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere in the same work, *Wutong* refers to a group of five anthropomorphic deities.<sup>8</sup> In still other stories, such as one about an *Wutong* deity

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5. Ibid., 294.

6. Ursula-Angelika Cedzich, "The Cult of the Wu-t'ung/Wu-hsien in History and Fiction: The Religious Roots of the *Journey to the South*," in *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion*, ed. David Johnson (Berkeley, 1994); "Wu-t'ung: Zur bewegten Geschichte eines Kultes," in *Religion und Philosophie in Ostasien: Festschrift für Hans Steininger zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed., Gert Naundorf et al (Würzburg, 1985); Richard von Glahn, "The Enchantment of Wealth: The God *Wutong* in the Social History of Jiangnan," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51 (1991). The following brief summary of the Five Manifestations relies heavily on these works.

7. Hong Mai, *Yijian zhi* [Record of the listener] (Beijing, 1981), 4:19:695; 7:2:891.

8. Ibid., 15:7:1613.

known as the King of Peace and Happiness, *Wutong* seems to refer to a generic category of deity.<sup>9</sup> In the eleventh century, the ambiguous but often malevolent *Wutong* described in the *Yijianzhi* was gradually transformed into the more benevolent Five Manifestations and specified as a group of five particular anthropomorphic deities, associated with a particular temple in Wuyuan in modern Jiangxi province.<sup>10</sup> This Wuyuan temple was first granted an imperial sanction in 1109, and further titles were awarded to the deities in 1115, 1132, 1145, and 1167. In 1174, the deities were promoted to the status of dukes, and given new, two-syllable honorary epithets, each one beginning with the character Manifest (*xian*). Thereafter, through a process von Glahn labels 'rechristening,' the deities became known as the Five Manifestations.<sup>11</sup> A Ming source suggests that continued imperial patronage in the first half of the thirteenth century led to a proliferation of temples to these deities.<sup>12</sup> Then in the fourteenth century, the first Ming emperor included the cult of the Five Manifestations in the official canon, and ordered a temple to the deities built near Nanjing.<sup>13</sup> An inscription composed on the occasion of the temple's completion names Wuyuan as the place of origin of the cult.<sup>14</sup> Later in the Ming, worship of these deities seems to have faded in most parts of China.

The term *Wutong* first appears in sources from the Fuzhou area in a twelfth-century gazetteer. According to this account, there was a temple dedicated to the deities, located outside the city wall, which had been built in the Jingde reign period (1004-07). But worship of the deities, the gazetteer claimed, went back to the post-Tang interregnum, when Wang Shenzhi, the Prince of Min, had authorized the people of cities, towns and villages to erect temples. The temple had been rebuilt and enlarged in 1040, and was visited by the powerful families of the city.<sup>15</sup> There is no mention of a link between the Fuzhou temple and the cult in Wuyuan. The silence on this issue of Zhu Xi, a repeated visitor to Fuzhou, is noteworthy. Zhu Xi visited the *Wutong* temple in Wuyuan, his ancestral home, at the behest of his relatives, and he found the temple "mysterious and strange."<sup>16</sup> But he does not mention that these same deities were also to be found in Fuzhou. Thus in the Song sources we find nothing to link the *Wutong* temple in Fuzhou with the cult centred in Jiangxi aside from the ambiguous term *Wutong*.

The earliest link between the *Wutong* temple in Fuzhou and the cult centre in Wuyuan does not appear until the early Ming. According to a fifteenth-century gazetteer of Fujian, there is in Fuzhou, "the Temple of the Five Manifestations... According to

9. Ibid., 11:10:1295.

10. Valerie Hansen, *Changing Gods in Medieval China, 1127-1276* (Princeton, 1990), 140-2.

11. *Xin'an zhi* [Gazetteer of Xin'an] (1175; reprint SKQS *zhenben*) 5:13a; von Glahn, 665; Cedzich, "Geschichte," 45.

12. Zhang Ning, *Fangzhou ji* [Collected works of Zhang Ning] (SKQS) 18:7b.

13. *Mingshi* [History of the Ming] (Beijing: 1984), 50:1304.

14. Song Na, *Xiyin ji* [Collected works of Song Na] (SKQS), 5:30b.

15. *Sanshan zhi* [Gazetteer of Three Mountains (Fuzhou)] (1182 [1638]; reprint Taipei, 1980), 8:7702-3.

16. Zhu Xi, *Zhuji Yulei* [Collected Sayings of Zhu Xi] (1270; reprint Taipei, 1963), 3:53.

the Suzhou gazetteer, the Five Manifestations are the tutelary deities of Wuyuan.”<sup>17</sup> This identification of the cult in Fuzhou with the state-sanctioned deities whose home temple was in Wuyuan became an enduring theme in gazetteers and other sources, persisting in such sources until the late Qing. In the section on local temples, the compiler of a nineteenth-century edition of the gazetteer of Changle county, to the south of Fuzhou, linked local temples with the *Wutong*/Five Manifestations tradition by tracing both to the first Ming emperor:

The Founding Emperor of the Ming made his capital at Jinling [i.e. Nanjing]. Then, in the capital, he built fourteen temples. One of these was called the temple of the Five Manifestations and Heavenly Agents (*Wuxian lingguan*). The worship of the Five Manifestations throughout the empire at present, in fact, comes from this.<sup>18</sup>

There are, however, hints in later sources that the deities worshipped in Fuzhou are not simply a local version of the Five Manifestations. Guo Bocang (1815-90) describes the confusion in his gazetteer of Black Rock Hill in Fuzhou city. “Many of the village temples in the area worship the Five Emperors... People mistakenly point to the *Wutong* and Five Manifestations as being the Five Emperors.”<sup>19</sup> The paradox in the use of the two terms Five Manifestations and Five Emperors in the gazetteers lies in the patterns of usage of the two terms. Are the two terms in fact interchangeable? If not, why not?

As I have already suggested, the evidence from the gazetteers suggests that the different terms are used depending on the context. Temples themselves are always described with reference to the Five Manifestations; when representations and rituals associated with the deities are described, the term used is Five Emperors. Thus, for example, a gazetteer tells of a certain temple at the West Lake in Fuzhou being destroyed in a campaign of suppression of the Five Emperors cult. But in the lists of temples in the same gazetteer, the temple is listed as a shrine for the worship of the *Wutong*.<sup>20</sup>

These few discrepancies are not in themselves a persuasive argument for distinguishing the two sets of deities, Five Emperors and Five Manifestations. But there are a number of other problems with the straightforward identification of the two sets of deities. The hierarchy of temples in Fuzhou city and its hinterland is centred, not on the ancestral temple of the Five Manifestations in Jiangxi, but rather on Fuzhou itself. The iconography and ritual practices associated with the cult, insofar as these can be recovered, bear no similarity whatsoever with those of the Five Manifestations, but appear to be a distinct tradition, though with links to other traditions of the southeast coast. Most important of all, whatever the sources used to get closer to popular understandings and representations of the cult, be they popular literature, missionary accounts,

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17. *Bamin tongzhi* [Gazetteer of the Eight (Prefectures of) Min (Fujian)] (1490; reprint Fuzhou, 1989), 58:365.

18. *Changle xianzhi* [Gazetteer of Changle county] (1869), 8:30b.

19. *Wushishan zhi* [Gazetteer of Wushishan (Black Rock Hill)] (1842), 4:63a.

20. *Xihuzhi* [Gazetteer of West Lake (Fuzhou)] (1915) 10:11b; 8:19a.

ritual practices or iconography, the picture that emerges is very different from simply a local version of the Five Manifestations, which has spread to Fuzhou as part of a hierarchical network of cults centred around Wuyuan and promoted by the state. Each of these issues will now be discussed in turn.

### The Hierarchy of Cult Centres

It is now widely accepted that cults often spread through the process of division of incense from ancestral temples, creating a nested hierarchy of temples with the original ancestral temple at the apex. "Branch temples were explicitly identified with the home temples of deities in other places. Followers did sometimes go on pilgrimages to the base temples; the branch temples were always named for the home temples."<sup>21</sup>

Wuyuan clearly served as such an ancestral temple for the cult of the Five Manifestations, and temples to the deities in Suzhou, for example, and elsewhere, were explicitly identified and affiliated with it.<sup>22</sup> However, aside from the vague remarks in the gazetteers, I have discovered no cases in which temples to the Five Emperors were affiliated with the cult home in Jiangxi, nor of pilgrimages back to the Wuyuan ancestral temple. On the contrary, the ancestral temple of the cult of the Five Emperors was located precisely in Fuzhou. It was there to which the various temples owed their origins, and it was there that the apex of the nested hierarchy of cults was centred. The gazetteers of Funing, to the north of Fuzhou, make explicit the distinction between the two hierarchies. According to the compilers, the Five Emperors are worshipped mostly by sojourners from Fuzhou. The Five Manifestations are also worshipped in the area, but at a different temple, and these gods are linked to the larger cult: "there is no place south of the [Yangtze] that does not worship them."<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the first temple to the deities in Taiwan was built by migrants from Fuzhou.<sup>24</sup> The spread of the cult to Xianyou in Putian, to the south of Fuzhou, is described in a seventeenth-century inscription south of the county seat. "The Five Emperors were at first the Emperors of Fuzhou city, and originally we of Xianyou did not dare to invite and worship them [here]." In 1650, the deities appeared in a vision to a local Daoist and instructed him to build them a temple, which was completed in 1653.<sup>25</sup> Thus the evidence suggests that the cult may

21. Hansen, 183.

22. *Wu xianzhi* [Gazetteer of Wu county] (1642), 21:19b-21a. See von Glahn, 666.

23. *Funing fuzhi* [Gazetteer of Funing prefecture] (1762), 34:2b.

24. Lian Heng, *Taiwan Tongshi* [General History of Taiwan] (1920-1, reprint Beijing, 1983) 403-4. Modern materials from the temple also claim it was founded during the Kangxi period by merchants from Xiadu in Fuzhou, and identify the temple mentioned in the Song gazetteer as the founding ancestral temple. Xilaian Guanli Weiyuanhui, *Chifeng Wufu dadi jingli* [History of the imperially appointed great emperors of the five good fortunes] (Taipei, 1965). I am grateful to Prof. Donald Sutton for providing a copy of this material.

25. Inscription entitled *Chengnan dingjian Xingshengmiao Chongji Wuhuang dadi bei* [Inscription recording the construction of the temple of flourishing sagehood for the worship of the Five Great Emperors south of the city wall (of Putian)] by Tang Xianyue, dated 1653, in Putian. This stone is included in Kenneth Dean and Zheng Zhenman *Fujian zongjiaoshi beiming huibian: Xinghuafu fence* [Epigraphical materials on the history of religion in Fujian: the Xinghua region] (Fuzhou, forthcoming), 430-1.

have begun to expand when Fuzhou natives, perhaps merchants and migrants, took the deities with them when they left the city. Gradually the cult became the object of worship by people with no links to the city.

### Ritual Practices

Von Glahn and Cedzich have gathered the available evidence for the rituals and iconography of the Five Manifestations cult of Jiangxi. In the Song, the home temple in Wuyuan was the site of huge assemblies known as “Great Maigre Feasts in Celebration of the Supreme Goodness and All-Pervasive Mercy (Aparatihata) of the Buddha” (*zhishan wuai dazhai*) which attracted many pilgrims from far away on the eighth day of the fourth month. Great processions were also held on this date elsewhere in Jiangnan. In the Ming, von Glahn finds evidence of worship of the deities as gods of wealth on domestic altars; of worship of a number of deities associated with the cult, including Duke or Marshall Ma (Ma gong; Ma yuanshuai), whose iconography reflects the influence of the Tantric Buddhist tradition, and most strikingly of tea seances (*chayan*) in which female mediums conjured up the spirits and put clients’ wishes to them.<sup>26</sup>

The ritual practices of the cult of the Five Emperors describe a tradition that shows no significant similarities with the Jiangxi cult. They reflect a number of different influences, some local and immediate, others drawing on elements long present in the ritual and religious repertoire of Chinese culture. By Ming times, the deities were associated by the people of Fuzhou with the dangers of pestilence and epidemic disease. The most thorough description of the ritual practices of their cult in late imperial times is found in the anonymous diary *Record of Tidings from the Banyan City*:

In the second month [of 1642] pestilence arose. According to the customary rules of the locality, prayers and sacrifice [were made] to the local gods, among which are some named the Five Emperors. So the residents of each ritual area collected money to hold a ritual *jiao* of the great *Nuo* exorcism... The local gods of each area paid their respects according to a schedule. When they went out, there were insignia and sedan chairs, seals with ribbon and “documents” [the equivalent of present-day visiting cards]. [The deities] offered greetings to one another, and there were the curious practices of the adjutant handing out announcements [of the deities’ visits] and rushing the chair on arrival at the gate. Moreover, there are vendors and vagabonds who either dress up with the faces of ghosts, or play the roles of the yamen runners. They go along the streets in a procession, competing to show off the splendour to one another.

Then they make a paper boat, in the utmost detail; none of the implements and odds-and-ends are forgotten. When starting work or launching the boat, they always select a lucky time, just as if they were making a [real] boat. Launching the boat is called Putting Out to Sea (*Chuhai*) to indicate the Five Emperors driving the pestilence away out to sea. On this day, they slaughter a goat and a pig, and, facing the boat, offer them in sacrifice. The crowd gathers in groups of ten or a hundred people, striking gongs and beating drums. There are several dozen gongs, and just as many drums. Those who are in charge either wave flags or carry the boat, making a tremendous racket which frightens the heart and startles the spirit. Before this, they may also hold an exorcistic

26. von Glahn, 668-80; Cedzich, “History and Fiction,” 185.



procession. Images of the Five Emperors and their subordinates made of paper and paste ride on horses in a circle all around the town. Those who follow carrying incense number in the several thousand, none of them dare even to breathe in the hot sun. This is known as *qingxiang*. When the time has come for the boat to be set off, then [everyone] rushes and is afraid of being left behind. The sweat boils upon them like rain, and [even if] they fall down and have an accident, they are still willing to accept this. When one village has just finished, another village starts up, even to the point that three or four villages, or even six or seven villages were doing this on the same day. From the second to the eighth month, the market towns and villages every day turned into a country of ghosts.<sup>27</sup>

There is evidence for the parading and burning of boats as a response to disease from the Song at the latest. In 1273, an official in Jiangxi forbade the ritual parading of such boats. The practice was evidently common, the official having ordered the destruction of 1300 such boats, and was associated with pestilence.<sup>28</sup> More detailed information from within the Daoist liturgical tradition is found in a Daoist text entitled "Divine Empyrean Ritual for Expelling Pestilence by Sending off a Boat," which is included in a compilation within the present Canon, the *Daofa huiyuan*.<sup>29</sup> The ritual calls for the construction of an Ornamental Boat (*hua chuan*) to deal with illness. A sacrifice is offered, certain deities are requested to enter the boat, and then the boat is burned.<sup>30</sup> Schipper has discussed liturgies of boat expulsion rites associated with the *Wangye* in contemporary Taiwan. Paul Katz has demonstrated that such rites were extremely common throughout South China in the late imperial period, and there is evidence of similar practices in other parts of Asia.<sup>31</sup>

Exorcistic processions and ritual boats were both ritual forms associated with the Five Emperors cult in Fuzhou by the mid-Ming. In the Qing these rituals were held on

27. Haiwai Sanren (pseud.), *Rongcheng Jiwen* [Record of tidings from the banyan city (Fuzhou)], in *Qingshi ziliao* [Qing historical documents] (Beijing, 1980), 2-3.

28. Huang Zhen, *Huangshi Richao* [Daily notes of Mr. Huang] (SKQS), 79:21b-22b. See Piet van der Loon, "Les origines rituelles du theatre chinois," *Journal Asiatique* 265 (1977), 148.

29. Van der Loon has analyzed the provenance of the various works within this large compilation, comprising 268 *juan*, and finds that most of the items which can be dated firmly were written in the thirteenth century. The latest date in the collection is 1356; the collection, argues van der Loon, was probably compiled and printed soon afterwards. It seems probable that the compiler was Zhao Yizhen, an important figure in the Clarified Temerity ritual tradition. The works in the collection describe a number of different cults and ritual traditions and techniques from south China. Piet van der Loon, "A Taoist Collection of the Fourteenth Century," in *Studia Sino-Mongolica; Festschrift für Herbert Franke*, ed. Wolfgang Bauer (Wiesbaden, 1979). Note that this article contains an error in the dating of the death of Zhao Yizhen. The correct date of 1382 is found in Piet van der Loon, *Taoist Books in the Library of the Song* (London, 1984), 63n50.

30. *Daofa huiyuan* [A Corpus of Daoist ritual] (CT 1220), 220:1a-7b.

31. Kristofer Schipper, "Seigneurs Royaux, Dieux des Epidemies," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 59 (1985); Paul Katz, "Plague God Cults in Late Imperial Chekiang: A Case Study of the Cult of Marshall Wen," in *Simiao yu minjian wenhua yantaohui lunwenji* [Essays from the conference on temples and popular culture] (Taipei, 1995).

the fifth day of the fifth month, in marked contrast to the annual festivals of the Five Manifestations in Wuyuan, held on the eighth day of the fourth month. The earliest evidence that I have found for festivals to the gods on the fifth day of the fifth month in Fuzhou is the 1754 edition of the prefectural gazetteer:

The gods are commonly known as the Great Emperors. Their images are always set up in [groups of] five. Their appearance is fierce and frightening. Their palaces are majestic. Those who pass in front of them hold their breath and do not dare to look. It is also said that the fifth day of the fifth month is the birthday of the gods. Before and after, for over a month, there is not a single day in any of these temples when theatrical performances pledged [to the deities] are not given in thanks. Even those who are not sick also hurry to the temples to implore [the gods] for aid... In the event that contagion spreads, then the people of the area vie to contribute money. They invite a sorcerer to make prayers. This is called praying [for relief of] disaster.<sup>32</sup>

By the mid-Qing at the latest, the Five Emperors had become charged more generally with the well-being and protection of the areas in which their temples are found. In a development similar to that traced by Liu Zhiwan for pestilence deities in Taiwan, the ritual processions and boats ceased to be sporadic responses to epidemic outbreaks, and became inscribed in the calendar of annual communal rituals.<sup>33</sup>

The nineteenth-century American missionary Justus Doolittle provides useful details on the surnames of the deities. Whereas the Wuyuan deities are often described as five brothers surnamed Xiao, Doolittle gives each of the Five Emperors a different surname: Zhang; Liu; Zhao; Zhong, and Shi.<sup>34</sup> In the early twentieth century, the same five surnames were in common use.<sup>35</sup> In field investigations in over fifty temples in four different counties, I have found that villagers identify the deities with the same five surnames in virtually every temple.<sup>36</sup> In many of these temples, a sixth image is placed on the main altar together with the Five Emperors. Villagers explain that this is the Five Emperors' teacher, Kuangfu. The significance of these surnames will be discussed further below. For the moment, it should be pointed out that this complex of ritual and iconography bears no similarities with comparable aspects of the Five Manifestations cult of Jiangxi as described by von Glahn.

32. *Fuzhou fuzhi* [Gazetteer of Fuzhou prefecture] (1754), 24:4b-5a.

33. Liu Zhiwan, "Taiwan zhi wenshen xinyang" [Belief in gods of plague in Taiwan], in *Taiwan minjian xinyang lunji* (1963; reprint Taipei, 1983).

34. Justus Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese; With Some Account of Their Religious, Governmental, Educational and Business Customs and Opinions, with special but not exclusive reference to Fuhchau* (New York, 1865), 1:277. von Glahn notes that in Middle Chinese the name Xiao was homonymous with the *xiao of shanxiao*. von Glahn, 657.

35. Chen Zhenrui, "Wudi kao faren" [Preliminary Investigation into the Five Emperors], in *Minsu zhouban* (weekly supplement to *Minguo Ribao*, Fuzhou edition), 12 (1 June 1930); 13 (8 June 1930); 15 (22 June 1930).

36. Michael Szonyi, "Village Rituals in Fuzhou in the Late Imperial and Republican Periods," D.Phil dissertation, Oxford, 1996, chapter 5.

### The Five Emperors in Local Popular Culture

The Five Emperors are an important part of the local literary, ritual and oral tradition of the Fuzhou area. In this section, I present a number of texts that reflect different aspects of the identities of the deities in the local cultural tradition. These texts include a ritual text for recitation by an association of lay worshippers of the deities, two scripts for marionette theatre, a collection of scripts of stories told in the vernacular by local story-tellers, and an account of the deities by a Republican member of the gentry. These sources suggest a distinct local cult, with its own distinct history, rather than a local version of the Five Manifestations which spread to Fuzhou as part of a hierarchical network of cults centred around Wuyuan and promoted by the state.

Several accounts stress the demonic origins of the gods. In 1995, I obtained from a master puppeteer in Fuqing a script for marionette theatre relating to the origins of the deities. This work is the *[Story of] The Five Numinous Gentlemen of the Palace of Heavenly Immortals*. In this work Guanyin, in a botched attempt to remedy the bad behaviour of humankind, expels a great breath which is transformed into four demons, the four sages, who ravage the earth seizing souls. Guanyin later transforms herself into the fifth sage, defeats the other four in a challenge, and forces them to be more discriminating. Together, as the Five Emperors, they seize the souls of evil people but allow the good to live.<sup>37</sup>

Another explanation for the origins of the deities appears in a late Qing literary work, *Supplementary Record of the Min [Fujian] Capital*. This work in 450 chapters was compiled by an author now known only by the pseudonym Villager Who Asks for Nothing (Liren he qiu). This work appears to have been originally a collection of scripts for use by local storytellers, and thus the stories were probably in circulation for some time prior to the compilation of the text in the nineteenth century. The contents of the work comprise legends and stories from Fuzhou and the surrounding region. One tells the story of five spirits, an aquatic monkey, an aquatic crow, an oyster, a perch and an aquatic frog, who dwelt in a bottomless pool of the Min River opposite Fuzhou city. They took the shapes of men, "confusing people into letting their vital fluids drain away, and then dividing and eating the flesh of the dead bodies." The frog tried to restrain his fellows, convincing the other four spirits that they should not eat human flesh, whereupon they were transformed into *Wutong* deities. Local people thought they were the emperors of the five directions descending to earth, and built a Temple to the Five Emperors by the banks of the Min river.<sup>38</sup>

Not all descriptions of the deities draw attention to their demonic origins. Worshippers at a temple to the deities in Putian currently recite a scripture entitled *The*

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37. *Tianxianfu wulinggong* [The five numinous gentlemen of the palace of heavenly immortals]. ms.

38. Liren Heqiu (pseud.), *Mindu bieji* [Supplementary record of the Min capital (Fuzhou)] (Fuzhou, 1987), 250:638.

*Precious Scripture of the Basic Exorcistic Practice of the Heavenly Immortals, the Five Great Emperors*, which is attributed to the Immortal Lu Dongbin and which appears to date from the late Ming or early Qing.<sup>39</sup> In this text, the Five Emperors are given a heavenly talisman by the Celestial Worthy of Primordial Beginning, who sends them on a mission to transform the behaviour of the people to follow the sages of the three teachings. They visit the Buddha, the Daoist Jade Emperor and Confucius and receive from each a text, and then set off to transmit these to the world.<sup>40</sup>

A Republican work on Fuzhou culture by Guo Boyang, an important figure in local gentry society at the turn of this century, provides another account of the origins of the deities. According to this story, the Five Emperors were originally five licentiate, in the city to write the provincial examination. One night, they overhear a gathering of ghosts plotting to poison a well. The ghosts gleefully remark that they will be able to kill more than half the inhabitants of the city. The five students attempt to prevent anyone from drawing water from the well, but nobody will believe their story. So they decide to sacrifice themselves, and together they drink all the water in the well. After their death, the people of the city are deeply moved, and carve images of them to worship.<sup>41</sup>

Analysis of these different myths hints at the different layers of meaning that have been inscribed on the Five Emperors at different times by different groups. Some of the myths emphasize the demonic origins of the Five Emperors, while in others, this aspect is obscured, and stress is laid rather on the power of the deities to relieve those suffering from plague. Not surprisingly, this vision of the deities is emphasized in the script for recitation by lay worshippers, turning to the deities in times of need. Finally, the most recent version of the myth suggests a gentry effort to Confucianize the deities, to incorporate them into a literati ideal. Similar attempts have been described in the history of other cults, most notably that of Guandi.<sup>42</sup>

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39. The temple keeper was kind enough to allow me to photograph the partial text in the temple on 8 March 1994. According to the preface, the text originally comprised five *juan* in three fascicles; I have obtained only the first and the third of these, but the second is reportedly extant, and the content is certainly known by associations of lay worshippers from Putian who recite it at the annual rituals to the deities.

I am grateful to Mr. Li Ting, the head of Special Collections at the Fujian Provincial Library, for his assessment of the age of the text based on the printing style. The attribution to Lu Dongbin derives from the author's preface which is signed Chunyang, Lu's style. The preface is dated the *jihai* year, which the temple keeper identifies as 879. Another edition of the text which I collected in Hui'an in 1995 begins with a preface from the Guangxu reign period (1875-1907).

40. *Tianxian wuhuang dadi xiaojie benxing baojing* [Precious scripture of the basic exorcistic practice of the heavenly immortals, the five great emperors]. ms.

41. Guo Boyang, *Zhujian xuhua* [Sayings on bamboo slips, continued] ms. in the Fujian Provincial Library. This story calls to mind Dore's account of a group of local deities in Rugao, Jiangsu. Henri Dore, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, trans. D.J. Finn (1933; reprint Taipei, 1967), 2:10:137-41.

42. See Duara, "Superscribing Symbols."

## The Daoist Liturgical Tradition

The very different popular understandings of the deities force us to confront more seriously the issue of their identification with the cult of the Five Manifestations. Are the myths associated with the deities in Fuzhou simply local accretions that have replaced aspects of their representation that have disappeared? Or do they trace out a rather different trajectory of development from that of the Five Manifestations of Wuyuan? These questions would be impossible to answer, were it not for the existence of several texts in the Daoist liturgical tradition, which show clear links with the five deities worshipped as the Five Emperors in Fuzhou.

Li Fengmao's recent survey of early Daoist texts concerning disease has demonstrated that, in antiquity, it was believed that there were five kinds of pestilence, each linked with the demonic spirit of one of five generals who had died in battle.<sup>43</sup> The earliest discussion in extant Daoist works about deities and demons associated with plagues and epidemics is the *Nuqing guilu*, compiled by the fourth century at the latest.<sup>44</sup> The text suggests that disease outbreaks were the result of the interconnection between human conduct and the natural order; that when people behaved in violation of the natural order, demons of disease were despatched to punish them, and that acquiring the true name and appearance of these demons gave one power over them, including the power to expel them and thereby stop an outbreak of disease. The *Nuqing guilu* accordingly provides long lists of names of demons which can be used to expel them. Included in these lists is a group of five known as the Five Demon Masters (*Wuguizhu*). The names of these deities are Liu Yuanda, Zhang Yuanbo, Zhao Gongming, Zhong Shili and Shi Wenye. Each of them is in charge of ten thousand demons, and responsible for the transmission of a different kind of disease.<sup>45</sup> All five of these names reappear in a second text, the *Taishang dongyuan shen zhoujing*, which emerged in its present form by the end of the Tang at the latest.<sup>46</sup> By the Song or Yuan, from whence dates a third short text in the present Daoist Canon, the *Taishang dongyuan cishen zhou miaojing*, the different categories of disease had become associated with Five Emperor-Commissioners (*Wudi shizhe*), who carry out the will of Heaven in spreading pestilence in the world. The Five Emperor-Commissioners are thus the agents of disease, armed with a heavenly talisman, spreading illness according to the dictates of the registers of individual behaviour. The cure for illness is to modify one's behaviour, but in the meantime, one should perform the appropriate rituals invoking the aid of these deities. Li argues that the Five Emperor-

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43. Li Fengmao, "Daozang suoshou zaoqi daoshu de wenyi guan" [The understanding of pestilence in early Daoist books contained in the Daoist canon], *Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiu jikan* 3(1993); "Xingwen yu songwen: daojiao yu minzhong wenyi guan de jiaoliu he fenqi" [Causing and driving away plague: interaction of and distinctions between Daoist and popular understandings of pestilence], in *Minjian xinyang yu zhongguo wen hua guoji yantaohui lunwenji* [Collected Essays from the international conference on popular belief and Chinese culture] (Nangang, 1994).

44. Li Fengmao, "Daozang," 423.

45. *Nuqing guilu* [The Pure Woman's regulations [for the control] of demons] (CT 790) 6:2a-b.

46. Li Fengmao, "Daozang," 433.

Commissioners are none other than the Five Demon Masters of the earlier texts, demons who have been converted into emissaries of Heaven.<sup>47</sup>

The story of these deities is filled out in other canonical texts, of which the most well-known is the *Soushen ji*. It tells of the appearance in the sky of five martial figures in 591. The Sui emperor, enquiring about them, is told by one of his ministers that they are five demons of pestilence. In an attempt to avert the danger, the emperor gives them each the title of General, and orders the building of a shrine in which they could receive sacrifice. The account ends with a visit to the shrine by the Kuangfu Perfected Man, who accepts the five pestilence deities as his subordinates. A similar story is found in a Yuan work on the pantheon, which adds the important detail that in the Sui and Tang, the gods were worshipped on the fifth day of the fifth month.<sup>48</sup>

Details concerning the names of the various deities found in these texts are compared with similar details from nineteenth- and twentieth-century sources, as well as the contemporary iconography in Table 1. The results are striking. In the total matrix of thirty-five names, there is a single discrepancy in one surname. For each of the five surnames, both surname and given names are consistent across at least two and as many as all four of the four sources for which given names are available. There are thus overwhelming similarities among the names of deities found in texts in the Daoist Canon and ascribed to as early as the fourth century, with others dating to the Song or Yuan, and the deities worshipped in Fuzhou in the late imperial period and at present. The history of the Five Emperors of Fuzhou, it is clear, cannot be understood without reference to the Daoist textual tradition.

We may now be in a position to offer some preliminary hypotheses about the origins of the Five Emperors. Our exploration has shown that to explain the textual and ritual historical development of the deities worshipped from the late imperial period to the present in Fuzhou requires that we come to terms with at least three traditions. There is the *Wutong* and Five Manifestations tradition or traditions. There is a textual tradition, also of great antiquity, comprising works in the Daoist Canon, as well as Daoist texts in local circulation, that describe a group of deities called the Five Commissioners of Plague or the Five Emperor-Commissioners of Plague. There is also a varied corpus of stories and legends, written, oral, and theatrical, which tie a group of deities called the Five Emperors to the local history and geography of the Fuzhou area. In the

47. Ibid., 449. Two other short texts in the Canon, *Zhengyi wensi bi dushen dengyi* [Zhengyi lantern ritual of the expulsion of disease gods by the supervisor of plagues] (CT209) and *Taishang sanwu bang jiu jiao wudi duanwen yi* [Ritual of the most high three and five jiao of entreaty for the stopping of plague by the five emperors] (CT 809) also refer to a group of deities called the Five Emperors.

48. *Xinbian lianxiang soushenji* [Newly compiled version with facing pictures of *In search of the sacred*], in *Huitu sanjiao yuanliu soushenji* [Illustrated collection of (editions of) *Origins and Transmission of the Three Teachings and In Search of the Sacred*] (Shanghai, 1990), 570; see also Paul Katz, "Demons or Deities – The Wangye of Taiwan," *Asian Folklore Studies* 46(1987), 208.

Song, there is no evidence that the *Wutong* cult in Wuyuan and the *Wutong* temple in Fuzhou were linked by anything more than name, and the name at that time could refer both to specific deities and to a generic category of deities. When the *Wutong* of Wuyuan were transformed into benevolent deities and then renamed the Five Manifestations, both names increasingly referred to a specific cult rather than the earlier generic category. What appears to have happened is that in the Ming, when the deities from Wuyuan were granted state sanction, an explicit connection was manufactured between these deities and the deities worshipped in Fuzhou. As von Glahn suggests, Ming endorsement of the Jiangnan cult, "in effect condoned worship of them throughout the empire."<sup>49</sup> It also condoned worship of deities that could be represented in their guise. This mis-identification by official authors persisted in official sources to the late Qing. But other Qing sources reveal that the link between the Five Emperors and the Five Manifestations is not so straightforward, for they describe a discrete local cult of the Five Emperors. These deities had their own identities, names and iconography, and these show clear influences from the Daoist tradition of the Five Commissioners of Pestilence.

We are, therefore, left with the conclusion that the local cult was the product of a complex and ongoing interaction among a number of different traditions, some unique to the locality, others common across wider geographic markers. What is clear, furthermore, is that the Five Emperors is not simply the local name for the state-sanctioned cult of the Five Manifestations. Rather, this distinctive local cult, with links to an ancient tradition that had never been sanctioned by the state, has been presented in certain sources as part of a different ancient tradition which had. The gods have not been standardized, but an illusion of standardization has been manufactured, concealing a vibrant and changing local tradition.

### The Spread of the Cult

Beginning around the middle of the Ming, under the guise of the Five Manifestations, the cult of the Five Emperors dramatically intensified, in terms of the number of temples dedicated to the deities; and spread, in terms of the geographic distribution of those temples. The 1520 gazetteer of Fuzhou prefecture lists three temples in the vicinity of the city, two of them then extant.<sup>50</sup> The third, which had fallen into disuse, is the original temple mentioned in the Song gazetteer.<sup>51</sup> In the area of West Lake, a shrine to the Ming era prefect of Fuzhou, Tang Xun, was converted to a temple to the deities some time before the turn of the seventeenth century.<sup>52</sup> The 1754 edition of the prefectural

49. von Glahn, 678n88.

50. *Fuzhou fuzhi* [Gazetteer of Fuzhou prefecture] (1520), 31:10b; *Min du ji* [Record of the Min capital (Fuzhou)] (1612; reprint 1831), 3:11b.

51. At some later time the temple on this site was revived. It is still extant; I visited it in August 1993.

52. *Xihu zhi* (1915), 10:11b. The text actually reads that the shrine was converted to the worship of the *Wutong*. However, it seems certain that this was again a case of the author of the text confusing the two. The temple was the site of procession festivals in time of plague; it was also destroyed by order of an official who was later remembered for his campaign against the Five Emperors. On Tang Xun, see his biography in *Fujian tongzhi* [General Gazetteer of Fujian] (1938), 35:15:1a-b.

gazetteer records the destruction of this temple by official order in 1700; by the time of the compilation of the gazetteer, more than ten temples in the city had sprung up in its place.<sup>53</sup> The *Record of the White Chicken*, a script for recitation in local dialect probably dating from the late Qing, identifies nineteen temples devoted to the Five Emperors within the city walls.<sup>54</sup> In the early twentieth century, Chen Zhenrui located a total of thirty-two temples to the deities in the city.<sup>55</sup>

The cult of deities known specifically as Five Emperors spread continuously beyond Fuzhou as far as Funing to the north; Putian to the south, and Taiwan to the east.<sup>56</sup> An eighteenth-century prefectural gazetteer of Funing lists one temple to the Five Emper-

53. *Fuzhou fuzhi* (1754), 24:5a-b.

54. *Baiji* [Record of the white chicken]. ms. This script is in the possession of a local performer, Mr. Chen Shengping, to whom I am grateful for briefly allowing me to see it. Another version of this story, sharing many details with the script, has been collected under the same title in *Zhongguo minjian gushi jicheng*, *Fujian juan*, *Fuzhou shi fenjuan* [Collected popular stories of China, Fuzhou, Fujian volume] (Fuzhou, 1990), 2:317-328.

55. Chen Zhenrui.

56. The evidence on the spread of the cult to western Fujian is ambiguous. There is no gazetteer evidence of temples to the deities in the Nanping or Gutian area upriver from Fuzhou. (*Yanping fuzhi* [Gazetteer of Yanping prefecture] (1765) 12:23a-32b; Gutian *xianzhi* [Gazetteer of Gutian county] (1751), 5:1a-27a). Based on a seventeenth century reference, Cedzich incorrectly locates a temple to the deities in Gutian (Cedzich, "History and Fiction," 164n109). The temple is actually in Lianjiang, to the northeast of Fuzhou (*Minduji* (1612), 31:9a). Zuo Zongtang reported in the mid-nineteenth century that 'since being stationed in Yanping [to the west of Fuzhou] I have investigated and learned that in the provincial capital there are temples to deities called the Five Emperors.' This implies that the deities were not worshipped in Yanping itself (Zuo Zongtang, 22). Nor is there evidence, moving further west, for temples to the Five Emperors, the Five Manifestations or *Wutong* in the Ouning county (*Ouning xianzhi* [Gazetteer of Ouning county] (1693), 7:1a-7a, but see below regarding Jianou) or Shaowu prefectural gazetteers (*Shaowu fuzhi* [Gazetteer of Shaowu prefecture] (1900), 11:33a-47a). There is some evidence in some of the gazetteers for the worship of deities known as the Five Emperors, Five Manifestations, or *Wutong* in western Fujian. The 1929 gazetteer of Jianou, into which Jian'an and Ouning counties were combined in the early Republican period, while listing no temples to the deities, does report that it had been the custom to parade on 4/28 the five emperors of the five directions, but that this practice had recently been abandoned (*Jianou xianzhi* [Gazetteer of Jianou county] (1929), 19:7a-b. The 1919 gazetteer of Jianning, which is itself in Shaowu prefecture, mentions a temple to the Five Manifestations, linking it to the familiar story of the Hongwu emperor establishing a temple to the deities in Nanjing (*Jianning xianzhi* [Gazetteer of Jianning county] (1919) 6:4a-b. Further to the south, the 1752 edition of the Tingzhou prefectural gazetteer lists temples either to the Five Manifestations or the *Wutong* in several of the prefecture's counties (*Tingzhou fuzhi* [Gazetteer of Tingzhou prefecture] (1752), 13: 2b-12a). The 1869 gazetteer of one of these counties, Ninghua, mentions two such temples to the Five Manifestations, also linking them to Hongwu (*Ninghua xianzhi* [Gazetteer of Ninghua county] (1869) 7:9b-10a). In Longyan, the situation is further complicated by the Five Numinous Ones (*Wuling*) described in Ye Mingsheng, "Fujian Daojiao Lushan pai xingtai ji yuanliu chutan" [Preliminary discussion of the form, origins and spread of the Lushan sect of Daoism in Fujian], in *Fuzhou Daojiao wenhua yanjiu* [Research on Daoist culture of Fuzhou], ed. Zhang Zhuangxing (Fuzhou, 1994).



ors in Xiapu County.<sup>57</sup> An early twentieth-century county gazetteer lists a second temple, in nearby Sansha, and records that it was constructed in 1737 and restored in 1895.<sup>58</sup> In the early Qing, there was also at least one temple in Fu'an county, the existence of which is known from a report that it was destroyed by fire after an earthquake in 1722.<sup>59</sup> The spread of the cult from Fuzhou to Xiyou in the seventeenth century has been discussed above. The ritual text from the Putian area, dating probably from the late Ming, tells of a series of epidemics afflicting the area, whereupon the gods signified their arrival in the area through a spirit-writing medium.<sup>60</sup> In contemporary Taiwan there are apparently about a dozen temples to the Five Emperors, the earliest of which date from the early Qing. The deities are known there as the *Wufu dadi*, the Great Emperors of the Five Fortunes.<sup>61</sup>

James Watson has argued that it was the state promotion of particular deities that encouraged the further spread and intensification of their cults.<sup>62</sup> I would agree that state sanction encouraged local elites to claim that they worshipped particular deities, but this does not necessarily mean that these elites and the peasants around them actually gave up the worship of their local gods and substituted deities from the state-approved pantheon. What seems to have happened with the Five Emperors is that faithfulness to existing local gods was legitimized by obscuring those deities under cover of state-sanctioned ones. As I have shown above, calling the temples to the deities Five Manifestations temples had little effect on the rituals or popular representations of the cult. If state sanction does not explain the spread of the cult, then what does? The answer to this question is not yet clear, but it is likely that two important factors were the activities of merchants from the cult centre and the frequency of epidemic disease outbreaks. According to Xie Zhaozhi, when epidemic struck in the late Ming, "of ten people who fall sick, nine will die."<sup>63</sup> Though little attention has been paid by

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Most interestingly, the cult of the Five Emperors from Fuzhou also spread north to Wenzhou, taken there by an official who was a Fujian native, Lin Yingxiang. Lin built a temple to the deities while serving in Wenzhou in 1598. The deities were known there as the Five Commissioners of Epidemics, the only example I have found where the connection between the Fuzhou deities and the early Daoist tradition is made explicit. Sun Dongyuan *Yongjia Wenjianlu* [Record of things heard and seen in Yongjia county] (1888), *xia*: 18b-19a. I owe this reference to Paul Katz.

I have found no information about the spread of the Five Emperors to Chinese communities overseas, though there are reports of the burning of paper boats by associations of Fuzhou migrants in Singapore, as part of the *pudu* ritual. Onoe Kanehida, "Tōnan Ajiya Kajin shakai no dentō geinō" [Traditional public entertainments in the Chinese society of south-east Asia], *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō* 82(1976).

57. *Funing fuzhi* (1762), 34:2b.

58. *Xiapu xianzhi* [Gazetteer of Xiapu county] (1929), 24:2b.

59. *Funing fuzhi* (1762), 43:32a.

60. *Tianxian Wuhuang Dadi Xiaojie Benxing Baojing*, 1:1b.

61. Qiu Dezai, *Taiwan Miaoshen zhuan* [Record of the Temples and Deities of Taiwan] (Jiayi: 1981), 421-2.

62. Watson, 293 ff.

63. Xie Zhaozhi, 6:32a.

historians to the question of Chinese disease history,<sup>64</sup> it has been generally recognized that the frequency of epidemic outbreaks increased dramatically from about the sixteenth century.<sup>65</sup> In Fujian as a whole this increase appears to have begun somewhat earlier. According to a list of the major recorded disease disasters in China compiled from dynastic histories and other sources, the number of serious epidemics in Fujian per century rose from two in the fourteenth to four in the fifteenth and then peaked at six in the sixteenth century.<sup>66</sup> The sources suggest that the key factors in the expansion of the cult were the movement of Fuzhou natives into the surrounding hinterland and beyond, and the efficacy of appeals to the deities to relieve outbreaks of disease and later to successfully avert the outbreak of disease, in other words, to the miracles performed by the deities in response to the needs of their believers. Thus the expansion of the cult is much more subject than Watson would allow to the influence of popular understandings of the deities involved. Worship of the Five Emperors spread, not because the state endorsed them, but because increasing numbers of people in more and more places found the deities efficacious in the face of recurring epidemic outbreaks, and found it convenient to worship them behind the concealment of the Five Manifestations, or at least to portray them as such in certain sources.

### A Further Complication

Though official campaigns against heterodox or licentious sects in the Fuzhou area are recorded from the Song,<sup>67</sup> the first specific mention of the cult of the Five Emperors arousing the opposition of local officials comes from the early Qing. A campaign against the deities was launched in 1700 by Prefect Chi Weicheng, a Han Bannerman who took office in Fuzhou in 1697. An epidemic broke out in the city in 1698-99, shortly after his arrival. The frantic processions from a temple to the Five Emperors at West Lake aroused his ire, and he ordered the images of the deities destroyed. The local gentry then petitioned him to convert the temple into an academy and shrine to Zhu Xi. Chi's favourable response led to the establishment of the West Lake Academy. Chi's efforts to eradicate the cult did not stop there. In all, he was credited with the destruction of over one hundred licentious temples. His activities were recorded approvingly in a poem entitled 'The

64. The chief exceptions are Helen Dunstan, "The Late Ming Epidemics: A preliminary survey," *Chi'ng-shih Wen-t'i* 3:3(1975): 1-59, and Carol Benedict, "Bubonic Plague in Nineteenth Century China," *Modern China* 14.2(1988): 107-55.

65. William McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (1977; London, 1979), 211.

66. The list is in Chen Gaoyong *et al*, *Zhongguo Lidai Tianzai Renhuo Biao* [Table of Natural Disasters and Human Catastrophes in Chinese History] (1939; Shanghai, 1986), 2:1216-1690. Some errors in the chronology of this list are corrected in "Appendix, Epidemics in China," in McNeill, 269-76. The same trend is evident in both versions.

67. In the early eleventh century, Li Kan destroyed 315 licentious temples in Gutian. His record makes clear that what made the temples licentious were the mediums and shamanistic practices associated with them, and the trickery perpetrated on the people. *Sanshan zhi* (1182) 9:7718. On Ming suppression, see, for example, *Luozhou zhi* [Gazetteer of Luozhou] (1863), 1:28b, which describes the destruction of a village temple on the orders of the magistrate in the sixteenth century.

Prefect of Fuzhou Destroys the Licentious Temples,' by Zha Shenxing (*jinshi* 1703), but the prefectural gazetteer dryly assessed his accomplishments from a longer perspective: "Chi died, and not long after the appearance of the temples remained imposing."<sup>68</sup>

At the conclusion of the drama *Record of the White Chicken*, a high official who had suffered injury at the hands of a subordinate of the deities threatened to destroy all temples of the Five Emperors in Fuzhou. Though he did not carry out this threat, the keepers of the various temples were worried nonetheless, and agreed that all of their temples should be renamed temples to Guandi, and his image installed. In the Republican period, Chen Zhenrui also found that shrines to the Five Emperors were concealed in Guandi temples.<sup>69</sup> This is also the case in contemporary practice. One of the largest temples to the Five Emperors in the Fuzhou suburbs is in the Auspicious Footprint Monastery. The Five Emperor deities are located in one of the two main halls of the temple, the other being a shrine to the Martial Sage, in other words, Guandi, clearly identifiable by his red face and large black beard. A reconstructed temple of the Five Emperors in Yixu is also called the Guandi temple, though the only images in the temple are those of the Five Emperors.<sup>70</sup>

These stories suggest that the local cult of the Five Emperors, which had previously been represented as the local version of the state-sanctioned cult of the Five Manifestations, was exposed as nothing more than a cult to heterodox deities in disguise. Local officials responded by attacking the cult. In turn, local devotees looked for a new cover for the gods, eventually settling on the powerful and state-sanctioned god Guandi. It is in this second disguise, now ineffectual given that the People's Republic sanctions no deities, that temples to the Five Emperors are now being reconstructed in the Fuzhou countryside.

## Conclusions

When all of the historical sources are taken together, they present a picture of a local cult that flourished through the expansion in the range of activity of its believers, and because of perceptions of efficacy in the form of miraculous cures or prophylaxis. The cult flourished also because of a series of manufactured associations, mis-identifications or conflations between this local cult and a state-sanctioned trans-local cult. The ritual practice and iconography of the cult of the Five Emperors suggest that their development can be thought of as a series of appropriations and modifications of elements from the more general Chinese tradition, together with practices and representations

68. *Fuzhou fuzhi* (1754), 47:23a; *Xihu zhi* (1915), 10:11b; Zha Shenxing, *Jingyetang shiji* [Collected poems of Zha Shenxing] (Shanghai, 1986) 2:696.

69. Chen Zhenrui.

70. I visited these two temples on 6 April 1993 and 19 October 1992. These stories call to mind Tang Bin's suppression of the cult of *Wutong* in late seventeenth-century Jiangnan. After destroying images of the gods, Tang replaced them with statues of Guandi. Tang Bin, *Tangzi yishu* [Collected writings of Tang Bin], in *Sanxian zhengshu* [Correct Works of Three Sages] (1879; reprint Taipei, 1976), 4 xia: 26b.

unique to the locality. All of these came together into the ritual form described by the anonymous diarist of *Record of Tidings in the Banyan City*, when the cult emerged in the mid- or late Ming in something recognizably like its present form. What is most interesting for the present purpose is that the co-mingling of the cult of the Five Emperors, first with the Five Manifestations and later with Guandi, appears to have had little effect on the ritual practices or iconography of the cult. There is no evidence that the processions of ritual boats, or the grotesque iconography of the deities were abandoned, nor pilgrimages to the Five Manifestations cult centre in Wuyuan adopted. The complex and fluid ritual and iconographic tradition that had been building for centuries around the Five Emperors was not affected by the elaborate subterfuge that developed around the identity of the deities in official and literati sources. Thus the history of the Five Emperors is not the now well-known story of the dynamic interaction of elite and popular understandings which together produce a new synthesis, but rather of the partial and apparent superscription of a national cult on a local one.

In late imperial times, deities in groups of five could be found all over south and central China. By the late Ming, the obscure pedigree of the Five Manifestations/*Wutong* had become notorious. Tian Rucheng (*jinsshi* 1526), who launched campaigns against their cult, wrote of them: "the people of Hangzhou believe particularly in the *Wutong* deities, also known as the Five Sages, yet nothing reliable can be said about either their surnames or their origins."<sup>71</sup> Does this indicate that this same superscription of state-sanctioned cults over existing, distinct local cults was occurring in other places besides Fuzhou?

One question remains to our story. How did a group of demons named in Heavenly Masters texts dating from the Six Dynasties, who had become Heavenly messengers by the Song or Yuan, but whose demonic aspect still lingered, come to be the focus of a cult centred on Fuzhou? The answer to this question may well lie in the time of the Empire of Min during the Tang interregnum. It is now well established that the practice of alchemy and other arts once thought to be the preserve of Daoists existed in the south even before the penetration from the north of the Heavenly Masters movement beginning in the fourth century.<sup>72</sup> There is no reason not to think that the same is true of cults associated with epidemic disease. The devotion of several of the Min emperors centuries later to the Daoism of the Heavenly Masters has also been well documented.<sup>73</sup> It was said in Song times, recall, that temples to the Five Emperors had proliferated in this period, when Wang Shenzhi authorized construction of their temples in every locality.<sup>74</sup> On the basis of this evidence, it is tempting to speculate that a local cult of deities associated with disease existed in the region since before the Tang, and that even before the superscription of Guandi and of the *Wutong*/Five Manifesta-

71. Tian Rucheng, *Xihu youlanzhiyu* [Account of sightseeing at West Lake, continued] (SKQS), 26:10b.

72. Isabelle Robinet, *La Révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire du Taoïsme* (Paris, 1984), 1:21-34.

73. Edward Schafer, *The Empire of Min* (Rutland, Vermont, 1954), 96-100.

74. *Sanshan zhi* (1182) 8:7702-3.

Table 1: Names of the Five Emperors in Various Sources

<i>Nuqing guilu</i>	<i>Soushen ji</i>	CT 809	Doolittle	Chen Zhenrui	Li Fengmao <sup>1</sup>	Fuzhou temple <sup>2</sup>
張元伯	張元伯	張	張	張元伯	張元伯	張
劉元達	劉元達	田	劉	劉仁傑	劉元達	劉
趙公明	趙公明	趙	趙	趙公明	趙公明	趙
鍾士李	鐘仕貴	鐘	鐘	鐘面秀	鍾士李	鐘
史文業	史文恭	史	史	史	史文業	史

1. Li cites an apparently unpublished essay on the Five Emperors in Fuzhou which I have been unable to locate, interviews with Daoist priests of Fuzhou origin in Taiwan, and field investigation in Fuzhou. Li Fengmao, "Xingwen," 410.

2. Interview at the Auspicious Footprint Monastery, in the southern suburbs of Fuzhou, 6 April 1993. For further details, see Szonyi.

tions onto the local gods, a similar superscription had already taken place, of the Five Emperor-Commissioners onto this existing local cult. If this speculation is correct, the very earliest origins of the cult of the Five Emperors may well lie in the ancient indigenous Minyue cultures or in their interaction with early Han colonizers.

In this paper, I have argued that the role of local cults in Chinese cultural integration was much more complex than has previously been noticed. James Watson has argued that state sanctioning of particular deities led to the expansion of their cults at the expense of existing local cults. The evidence from Fuzhou suggests that what happened was not so much that state-approved cults expanded, but that local cults were represented in such a way as to bring them in line, in the official sources, as those approved cults. Most recently, the local cult was conflated with Guandi. Before that, the local cult had been conflated with the Five Manifestations. It seems possible that even before that, the local cult had been conflated with the Five Emperor-Commissioners. The earliest of these conflations is the most obscure; it is the second that has left the deepest impact on the historical record. On the ground, however, the effects of state sanction of particular cults on ritual practice, hagiography and iconography could be minimal. Local gods persisted in the guise of national cults.

#### Glossary

*chayan* 茶筵  
*huachuan* 華船  
*Kuangfu* 匡阜  
*Liu* 劉  
*Ma Yuanshuai* 馬元帥  
*qingxiang* 請相  
*Shi* 史  
*Wudi shizhe* 五帝使者  
*Wufu dadi* 五福大帝  
*Wuhuang dadi* 五皇大帝  
*Wutong* 五通  
*Wuxian lingguan* 五顯靈官  
*Xiao* 蕭  
*Zhao* 趙  
*Zhong* 鍾

*chuhai* 出海  
*jiao* 醮  
*Liren he qiu* 里人何求  
*Ma gong* 馬公  
*Nuo* 儺  
*shanxiao* 山魈  
*Wangye* 王爺  
*Wudi* 五帝  
*Wuguizhu* 五鬼主  
*Wuling* 五靈  
*Wuxian* 五顯  
*xian* 顯  
*Zhang* 張  
*zhishan wuai dazhai*  
 至善無礙大齋