Bodies of Sanctity: Ascetic Practices in Late Imperial China

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> Those disciples of "crazy wisdom" (*kuanghui* 狂慧) belittle it [blood-writing] as [involving] "corporeality" (*youxiang* 有相). But among the root causes of beginningless birth and death, none is deeper than the very perception of the body (*shenjian* 身見). Among [the practices of] wondrous world-transcending Dharma, none precedes destroying the spurious mountain of *satkāya* (*sajiaye* 薩迦耶).[1] When this perverse perception of *satkāya* is destroyed, the wheel of birth and death is forever stilled. This [practice of blood-writing] is called paying reverence to the Correct Dharma; it is also called using the Dharma to make offering to Buddha. The *Lotus* and *Śuraṃgama* [*sūtras*] have profound praise for incinerating one's limbs and fingers, as well as the merits from burning incense [into one's body]. The practices of severing the limb of afflictions and burning the body of ignorance are situated precisely in this very flesh and blood.
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> - Preface written for a layman's "blood scripture,"
> Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599-1655)

> In every case… the ideas of a human subject exist in his actions… *his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derives the ideas of that subject*.
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> - Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (1971 [rep. 2001], p. 114)

I. Situating the Project

My proposed dissertation is a cultural history of ascetic body practices in late Ming (16th-17th century) China.[2] It will examine the body as it has been variously perceived, experienced, and represented, publicly and privately, within the religious system of that period. Specifically, it will detail the ways in which the performance of self-inflicted violence on the body can create subjectivity, new social relations, and religious sanctity.[3] The range of body practices I intend to study includes burning parts of the body, such as incinerating fingers (*ranzhi* 燃指) and burning the arms (*ranbi* 燃臂), writing verses and copying scriptures with

[1] The word *sajiaye* (薩迦耶) is a transliteration of the Sanskrit word, *satkāya*, which means the "body" and has the connotation of body as self. In the Chinese Buddhist context, it is usually coupled with the word, *darśana* , which translates as "perception" or views. Since the text is speaking of *shenjian* (身見), I understand *sajiaye* as a reiteration of the perception or view that identifies the body as an object of one's self-grasping.
[2] On my usage of the term "asceticism" and the "body," see below.
[3] I will discuss this in greater detail below.

one's blood (*xieshu* 血書), slicing off pieces of one's flesh as expressions of filial piety to cook as medicine for one's ailing parents (*gegu* 割股), and extended fasting and inedia (*bigu* 辟穀; *jueli* 絕粒; *duanshi* 斷食). These interconnected practices are attested in numerous accounts in an unusually wide range of genres, demonstrating the centrality of the body and the widespread performance of self-mortification in Chinese culture. They were performed by clerics and lay practitioners, men and women, alike. By the late Ming, they reached a culmination of development and popularity.

A few of these practices have been studied in earlier periods of Chinese history, but scholars have typically framed them within the boundary of one academic discipline, religious tradition, or genre of texts. Yet these practices, such as extended inedia and body mutilation, are extremely complex and demand an interdisciplinary approach in order to appreciate their cultural significance. It is also necessary to build on the foundations of earlier scholarship to fully examine and understand ascetic body practices, which I see as an elemental dimension in Chinese religiosity. To date, this approach has never been followed systematically.

Scholars working in Western medieval Christianity have made great strides to bring nuance to our understanding of asceticism. They have already rejected an earlier view of sexual restraint and austere fasting as dualistic, masochistic, or irrational and sought instead to interpret them as an integral aspect of piety and religious expression. Peter Brown, for example, argues that ascetic practices are not necessarily world-renouncing, self-hating, decadent responses of a society wracked by plague, famine, heresy, war, and ecclesiastical corruption.[4] Caroline Bynum claims that late medieval asceticism for women was an effort

[4] Peter Brown examines the variety of attitudes toward the body and sexuality in light of theology, culture, and the relationship between individual and society. See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 222-223, 235-237. It appears that Brown's study of Christianity was in turn influenced by the work of such scholars as Aline Rousselle and Michel Foucault on topics of sexuality, desire, and gender in Greco-Roman antiquity. See Aline Rousselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity*, tr. Felicia Pheasant (Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Basil Blackwell, 1988); Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1; *The Use of Pleasure*, vol. 2*; The Care of the Self*, vol. 3, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1988-1990); see also Elizabeth Clark, "Foucault,

to plumb and realize all the possibilities of the "flesh"; it was a way of manipulating and controlling the self and the environment by ideologically fusing with and emulating a Christ whose suffering saves the world.[5]

In theorizing asceticism, scholars have also complicated our understanding of the body and have avoided the Cartesian fallacy of polarizing it against an exclusive category of mind, even though within the Western academy there are few resources for describing such a concept of the body that does not succumb to a version of the body-mind dichotomy.[6] Yet, despite their effort to complicate our understanding of asceticism and the body, their work is still bound to its construction found in medieval sources, and there is an excess of textual evidence by medieval ascetics themselves that accentuates the suppression of sexual passions and bodily pleasures.[7]

There is, of course, evidence to support similar discourses in China on disciplining the body and suppressing sexual desire for higher spiritual realizations, but such evidence occurs mostly in prescriptive canonical sources and limited contexts. Few Chinese ascetics

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the Fathers, and Sex," *JAAR* 56 (1988): 619-641.

[5] See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 208-218. Other research on Christian and non-Christian asceticism has emphasized the interrelationship between physical representation and manipulating of the body and theology, meaning, politics, and social relations. See John G. Gager, "Body-Symbols and Social Reality: Resurrection, Incarnation and Asceticism in Early Christianity," *Religion* 12 (1982): 345-363; Vincent L. Wimbush, Richard Valantasis, eds., *Asceticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); William E. Deal, "Ascetics, Aristocrats, and the Lotus Sūtra: The Construction of the Buddhist Universe in Eleventh Century Japan," PhD dissertation. Harvard University, 1988. These scholars are reacting to older models of asceticism best represented by E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[6] Explicitly rejecting earlier characterizations of asceticism as body-hating and dualistic, Brown argues that early Christian asceticism by its nature included matter and the body in spiritual process. See Brown, *The Body and Society*, 222-223, 235-237.

[7] Brown argues that the ascetic desert fathers engaged in the utmost privations not because of hatred of the body, but for the sake of a future glory for their bodies on the day of Resurrection. See Brown, *The Body and Society*, pp. 220-222. However, the concern for suppressing hunger and sexual drives through fasting, a practiced based on the understanding that the original sin of Adam and Eve was of ravenous greed, is overwhelming. See ibid., pp. 220, 230. Bynum argues for women's agency by showing the creation of new types of prominent religious life for twelfth through fifteenth century women saints. However, she admits the ambiguity that in many cases the self-image of the body by these women was negative and lustful by nature—as something to be punished, disciplined, and destroyed. This can also be seen in the poetry and instructions by these women on the suppression of passion and hunger; see Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 29, 184-185, and 208-216. There are, of course, other ascetics in the West who are more concerned with controlling the delusions of the mind, rather than suppressing sexuality, for example. Nevertheless, there is more textual evidence that supports the blatant fact that Western Christian and pagan ascetics vied with each other in heaping abuse on the body.

themselves talked about the body this way, at least to my knowledge. A clear division of body and mind simply cannot be found in premodern sources. Descriptions of how ascetic practices were actually understood appear to be different than how recent scholars have suggested.[8]

The ascetic body practices that I intend to examine focus on a different set of concerns than suppression and control of the body; they are more about the construction of sanctity and virtue grounded in what I consider as "self-inflicted violence," which has long been constitutive of law, religion, and social norms in Chinese culture. In fact, understood in the discursive context of "virtuous practice" (*dexing* 德行), many of the mainstream values such as sincerity, loyalty, religious piety, and filiality often inspired extreme ascetic behaviors. Far from being irrational[9] and purely ideational, ascetic practices embody mainstream values in elemental and visceral ways that altered familial and social relations.

Judith Butler has shown how subjectivity is a "site" in the network of cultural values and power relations where the individual asserts his or her ethical, political, and religious positions. Arguing against the view that mainstream values appear to be an external force that conditions the individual's bodily behavior, Butler contends that this force or power actually loses its dominating effect when it is wielded by the individual who makes power the *effect* of

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[8] Buddhist scholars who write about asceticism, influenced by earlier works on Western medieval asceticism, typically begin with the scriptural prescriptions of the body as "defiled" and "impure" and project them onto how practitioners actually viewed their bodies. Kenneth Zysk, for example, has argued that early Indian Buddhist ascetics' knowledge of and interest in the "body" mainly came from their intense observation of decomposing bodies combined with knowledge of the anatomy of animals. Their view of the body was basically atomistic, discrete, and impure—a view that is most evident in *Abhidharma* literatures. This view was congruent to the views held by other Indian non-Buddhist *śramaṇic* cultures; see Kenneth G. Zysk, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India: Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). See also, Elizabeth Wilson, "The Female Body as a Source of Horror and Insight in Post-Ashokan Indian Buddhism," in *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*, ed. Jane Marie Law, 76-99 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Steven Collins, "The Body in Theravāda Buddhist Monasticism," in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley, 185-204 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and in the same volume, Paul Williams, "Some Mahāyāna Buddhist Perspectives on the Body," pp. 205-230.

[9] That violence is seen as "meaningless" or "irrational" is really a modern construct. There are good reasons to reflect on violence from new perspectives. Ethnography and history give ample evidence that violence, in its endless manifestations in Chinese religions, is in all likelihood a constituting element of the culture; see Barend ter. Haar, "Rethinking 'Violence' in Chinese Culture," in *The Meanings of Violence: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, eds., Göran Aijmer and Jon Abbink, 123-140 (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000); and in the same volume, Virgil Kit-yiu Ho, "Butchering Fish and Executing Criminals: Public Executions and the Meanings of Violence in Late Imperial and Modern China," 141-160; also, T'ien, Ju-K'ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity*. This issue will be discussed below.

the subject, allowing for the subject's agency.[10] In a similar vein, I argue that in the late Ming, the mainstream cultural discourses of virtue and religious sanctity not only had a corporeal status, but also were sustained and perpetuated in ascetic bodies.[11]

I define the set of ascetic body practices as self-inflicted violence that involve culturally accepted performances of mutilating and transfiguring the body, which are a means of exercising sanctity, creating subjectivity, and forging new social relations. This definition recognizes the centrality of the body in performance and allows for the production of meaning in or through bodily practice.[12] However, it excludes performances that might first seem ascetic, such as foot-binding, operatic training, and gymnastics, but turn out to be neither self-inflicted nor public statements about sanctity.[13]

Ascetic body practices are performances that are public in that they take place before an audience, explicit or implied, immediate or future.[14] They also come to us as texts; in them, the body is already implicitly if not explicitly theorized, theologized, idealized, and

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[10] For example, Butler argues that subjectivity is dependent on the very source that subordinates the subject. "[A] subject is not only formed in subordination, but that this subordination provides the subject's continuing condition of possibility." For a fuller discussion, see Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1-30. Foucault's effort to establish the subject in its "self-production" allows for the subject's exercise of agency in similar ways; see Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996): 13.

[11] That ritual situates ideology in material practice is argued in the epigraph by Althusser in the beginning of this proposal. See Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster with a new introduction by Fredrick Jameson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001 [originally published in 1991]): 114. In the following pages I will discuss specific examples of ascetic practices, which will hopefully make this clear.

[12] My understanding of performitivity is informed by Judith Butler; see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 25, 14.

[13] For example, in foot-binding, the female is not doing the binding herself. But the practice of *gegu* 割股 or slicing one's flesh to cook as medicine for ailing parents, as we will see below, expresses a kind of public statement and religiosity of filial piety and is believed to demonstrate a kind of authenticity or sincerity that outweighs ordinary filial devotion. The religious conception of filial piety or *xiao* 孝 in China operates within a worldview of "cosmic sympathy" that blurs the boundaries between the religious and secular, gods and men, and seen and unseen forces. This worldview is expressed by many concepts: stimulus response (*ganying* 感應), merit transference (*huixiang* 回向), and karmic causality (*yinyuan* 因緣). As a shared worldview, it integrates sentient and insentient beings holistically. As early as the Han dynasty, the idea of cosmic sympathy had become a part of the general Chinese heritage. For a religious interpretation, see John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Buddhist Monk: Buddhist ideals in Medieval Chinese hagiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 97-101; Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 77-88.

[14] Body practices are always performances—the world, the religious community, or other ascetics always watch the performance of ascetic practices. Even when acts were done alone in private, the solitary ascetic has an audience in mind: himself or herself, another, or the divine. See Patricia Cox Miller, "Desert Asceticism and 'The Body from Nowhere.'" *JECS* 2 (1994): 138-139.

constructed with a particular subjectivity that defines the sort of agency and identity toward which the ascetic moves and away from which the ascetic withdraws. For example, as we will see below, they rest on a shared episteme that gives primacy to actual performance over mere rhetoric.

Ascetic body practices also complicate the prevailing view that late imperial China was religiously stagnant and dominated by humanistic and intellectual concerns. While some of these representations certainly existed, there is an overemphasis on them that should be addressed. Scholars who argue for religious stagnation typically portray Buddhist clerics as either coveting close social and commercial ties with the literati, performing "popular"—and somehow less sanctified—practices such as releasing animals (*fangsheng* 放生)[15] and chanting at funerals.[16] They tend to accept wholesale the contemporary Neo-Confucian rhetoric of Buddhism's decline and its dependence on the literati.[17] For example, Timothy Brook claims that the revival of Buddhism during this time was due *only* to gentry's monastic patronage, where it became a site for their alternative constructions of local authority independent of the state. The so-called revival of Buddhism in this time, as Brook sees it, had no internal causes whatsoever.[18]

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[15] See for example, Joanna F. Handlin Smith, "Liberating Animals in Ming-Qing China: Buddhist Inspiration and Elite Imagination," *JAS* 58, no. 1 (Feb., 1999): 51-84.

[16] The proliferation of monks conducting funeral services and plenary masses for the public can be traced back to the beginning of the Ming dynasty when the Buddhist monastic structure was completely reorganized by an imperial edict of 1382 into three classes: those who practiced Chan, those who engaged in doctrinal learning, and those who performed rituals. Evidence show that since the last category of monks was the majority, this restructuring had a lasting effect on the state of Buddhism. See Yü Chun-fang, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 147-149; Ryūchi Kiyoshi 龍治清, "Minsho no jiin" 明初の寺院 (Buddhist Monasteries in the Early Ming), *Shina Bukkyō shigaku* 支那仏教史学 2, no. 4 (December, 1938): 28.

[17] "Decline" and "revival" are convenient scholarly tropes that result from projecting the religious, social, and cultural standards of an earlier historical period onto later ones, or by grafting a modern standard onto earlier periods. In the early 1960s the Tang dynasty (early seventh through early tenth centuries) was touted as the "golden age of Buddhism" and from that point onwards Buddhism was marked by a long and inexorable decline that extended down to the late Ming where Buddhist clerics revived the tradition. These views have been redressed by the growing body of research beginning in the late 1980s. See Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); Peter Gregory and Daniel Getz, eds., *Buddhism in the Sung* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999). However, the view that Buddhism needed "revival" can be traced back to the scholarship of William de Bary and his students who saw Buddhism through the lens of Neo-Confucianism, and such a view has remained unchallenged in China studies.

[18] Brook neither gives attention to the wide-spread absorption of Buddhist teachings among literati nor explains *why* the gentry chose to support monasteries. Are we to believe that since power could not be seized from the

Scholars who argue that late imperial China was dominated by intellectual concerns usually focus on how Neo-Confucian's "liberal" and "pragmatic" ideology penetrated all sectors of society and religious traditions. Yü Chün-fang, for example, claims that "Neo-Confucianism inaugurated an era of intense intellectual creativity, manifested in new developments in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism… since Buddhism and Taoism were in a subordinate position vis-à-vis Neo-Confucianism… familiarity with Neo-Confucian ideas and the ability to engage in discourse with Neo-Confucians frequently were among the most important qualifications of an eminent monk."[19] Here, the axis of intellectual creativity, around which all other religious traditions orbited, lies with Neo-Confucianism, but a cursory glance at this so-called creativity reveals that much of it stemmed from precisely those subordinate traditions.[20] Recent scholarship has complicated this picture by drawing attention to the various networks of power relations between religious traditions.[21]

Yet late Ming China, especially in the lower Yangtze region, presents a picture so heterogeneous (*yi* 異)[22] that it can hardly be characterized with any thematic unity or allegiance to one tradition. The complexity of social, intellectual, and cultural forms and the

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state, it could only be taken surreptitiously through monastic patronage? Were Ming gentry so beholden to the state that only Buddhist monasteries could provide a basis for their autonomy? See Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University and Harvard-Yenching Institute: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1993).

[19] See Yü Chun-fang, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, pp. 1-2.

[20] Even the problematic portrayal of harmony between the three religious traditions (*sanjiao heyi* 三教合一) in this period is really a disguise to champion Neo-Confucian intellectualism. Yet, this trope is still being reproduced in China studies today; see Kwang-Ching Liu and Richard Shek, eds., *Heterodoxy in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004): 6-7. The force of this trope is the result of seminal works by William de Bary; see, *Self and Society in Ming Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970); *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1975); *Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage*, edited by Wm. Theodore de Bary and John W. Chaffee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). Some of the other scholars who follow this line of argument are Sung-peng Hsu, *A Buddhist Leader in Ming China: The Life and Thought of Han-shan Te-ch'ing* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979); Yü Chun-fang, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis*; and Timothy Brook, "Rethinking Syncretism: The Unity of the Three Teachings and their Joint Worship in Late-Imperial China," *JCR* 21 (1993): 13-44.

[21] For example, Jennifer Eichman argues that thrust of spiritual cultivation in the late Ming is dominated by the intellectual discourse on the "cultivation of mind" that stems from an alliance of Buddhism and the literati in figures such as Yunqi Zhuhong's 雲棲袾宏 (1535-1615) followers and Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) enthusiasts. See Jennifer Eichman, "Spiritual Seekers in a Fluid Landscape: A Chinese Buddhist Network in the Wanli Period (1573-1620)," PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2005.

[22] *Yi* 異 is usually combined with the character *duan* 端; as a compound, it can refer to "alternative" intellectual, political, and religious positions, or carry pejorative meaning of heterodoxy.

wide range of attitudes towards life, religious practice, and the state, set in a landscape rich in diversity, produced an exceptional toleration for all kinds of practices. For example, Daoists performed exorcism at the imperial court under the patronage of emperors; Neo-Confucians produced quasi-Chan enlightenments and developed their own meditation techniques; literati worshipped immortals; sectarian cults gained new vitality among commoners and officials; and shamanic practices were widespread throughout the society.[23] There is much to be explored in this period, especially in the area of what people actually performed.

This unprecedented phenomenon of heterogeneity seems to have brought China's long history of body practices to a culmination.[24] Here, I will only list a few body practices in order to provide a larger context for my discussion of ascetic body practices. The first is the category of disciplining the body, which included operatic training and gymnastic programs to perfect, manipulate, and orient bodily gestures and steps according to divinatory diagrams and matrixes.[25] The second is ritualizing the body, which included meditation, chanting, and bowing and prostrations that people performed individually or collectively as an expression of religious piety or social etiquette. Prostrations, for example, were directed towards parents, elders, superiors, clerics, and deities on a variety of occasions. This act not only demonstrates obeisance but also repeats and produces social distinctions. The third is controlling the body and preserving the corpse, which ranged from circulating internal bodily energies and

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[23] For emperors' patronage of Daoism, see Judith A. Berling, "Taoism in the Ming," in *The Cambridge History of China* (hereafter *CHC*), vol. 8, eds. Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank, 953-986 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 966-72. For Neo-Confucians' enlightenment and meditation, see Willard Peterson, "Confucian Learning in Late Ming Thought," in *CHC*, vol. 8, 753, 762. For literati worship of immortals, see Ann Waltner, "Visionary and Bureaucrat in the Late Ming: T'an-yang-tzu and Wang Shih-chen," *LIC* 8, no.1 (1987): 105-133. For sectarian movements and their widespread influence of the period, see Hubert Seiwert in collaboration with Ma Xisha, *Popular Religious Movements and Heterodox Sects in Chinese History* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2003), 209-267. For shamanic practices in the society, see below.

[24] Mainstream ideas regarding the body were extremely complex. The term normally used for the body, *shen* 身 and *ti* 體, covered a great deal more than the Latin term *soma*, which clearly denoted the physical. *Shen* included the individual personality, and may refer in a general way to a subject rather than the body. It may also refer (and still does) to juridical identity, as in *shenfen* 身份. *Ti* can refer to the concrete physical body, its limbs, or the physical form generally, and was composed mainly of vaguely defined bones and flesh traversed by circulations tracts. However, in most cases, it refers to "embodiment," and may refer to an individual's enactment of an ideal. For instance, late Ming practitioners speak of embodying the Way, *tidao* 體道 and embodying innate humanity, *tiren* 體仁. It is this last meaning that informs my understanding of body practices.

[25] See Jo Riley, *Chinese Theatre and the Actor in Performance* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9, 94-95.

absorbing external vapors, to fasting and inedia, to cultivating an incorruptible "flesh-body" (*roushen* 肉身) that does not decay after death. This last practice involved the cult of "whole-body relics," where flesh-bodies were perceived as proof of sanctity and worshipped as local deities that could grant favors and interact with people through dreams. Several late Ming clerics were known to have achieved the flesh-body.[26] At the other end of the spectrum from preserving the body is the widespread practice of religious suicide. One common site was the Cave of Tidal Sound (*haichao yin* 海潮音) at the mountain of Putuo shan 普陀山, the holy mountain of the bodhisattva Guanyin 觀音 (Skt. Avalokiteśvara). Numerous pilgrims were known to have flocked to this mountain for visions of Guanyin and for deliverance by jumping off cliffs.[27]

Between the two extremes of non-ascetic practices and religious suicide is a whole spectrum of performances that involved mutilating and transfiguring the body as an actualization of sanctity and virtue, the focus of my dissertation. My aim is to valorize various performances in this spectrum that are largely ignored in current scholarship.

II. A Survey of Scholarship

Buddhist Studies

In the late 1990s, two scholars worked on Chinese Buddhist asceticism. John Kieschnick argues that the ascetic Buddhist monk was one of the archetypes in the medieval era who gained religious sanctity by isolating himself from other social groups in sexual, dietary, and sumptuary practices and, in extreme cases, in self-mutilation and ritual suicide.[28] He also argues that the Buddhist practice of blood-writing derived its power from the "doctrine of merit, veneration for physical suffering, and the powerful symbolism of blood as a mark of

[26] See below for details.
[27] See *Putuo luojia shan zhi* 普陀洛迦山志 (Gazetteer of Putuo), by Hou Jigao 侯繼高 in 1589, 6 volumes (Tokyo: Naikaku Bunko), 3: 27a.
[28] See John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 16-66.

sincerity."[29] James Benn furthers these arguments by closely examining self-immolation in the *Gaoseng zhuan* (biographies of eminent monks) genre. He shows that self-immolation played a central role in the creation of "Chinese bodhisattvas" or enlightened saints as narrated in the Indian scriptures through "apocryphal practices."[30] The strength of Benn's and Kieschnick's works is that each in his own way opens the field of religious and Buddhist studies of China to new possibilities.[31] Yet, their research is either restricted to a particular period or to a particular genre of texts, making ascetic practices hermetically sealed within the medieval world of religious piety. There is much room to explore similar practices in later periods and to theorize their implications for a broader understanding of Chinese culture as a whole.

Daoist Studies

To the best of my knowledge, the *only* person who works on Daoist asceticism in a sustained way has been Stephen Eskildsen.[32] He challenges the received notion that medieval Daoist adherents avoided asceticism and only promoted methods for preserving the body to attain a sacred form of corporeality that embodies pacifism, equalitarianism, and non-striving.[33] Eskildsen shows that there was a strong strand of ascetic practices and attitudes that mediated "the two primary objectives of Taoist adepts: longevity and transcendence."[34] However, he establishes, unnecessarily, Daoist asceticism against an

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[29] See Kieschnick, "Blood Writing in Chinese Buddhism," *JIABS* 23, no. 2 (2000): 193.
[30] See James A. Benn, "Burning for the Buddha: Self-immolation in Chinese Buddhism," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2001.
[31] They have furthered earlier works by scholars such as Jacques Gernet and Jan Yün-hua; see Jacques Gernet, "Les suicides par le feu chez bouddhistes chinois de Ve au Xe siècle," *Mélanges publiés par L'Institute des Hautes Études Chinoises* (1960), 527-558; Jan Yün-hua, "Buddhist Self-Immolation in Medieval China,"*HR* 4 (1965): 243-265.
[32] See Stephen Eskildsen, *Asceticism in Early Taoist Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).
[33] See Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 113, 127-129.
[34] "Longevity" refers to the desire to render the body immortal; "transcendence" refers to the desire to transcend the body. Both these goals are urged in different parts of the *Lingbao* scriptures. This latent tension between longevity and transcendence was, according to Eskildsen, aggravated by the medieval adoption of Buddhist doctrines favoring transcendence—though this is a characterization of Buddhism with which I disagree. His evidence for the existence of such extreme asceticism comes from a sixth century work called the *Scripture*

outmoded and dichotomous paradigm of asceticism that divides the subject into mutually exclusive categories of body and mind. Eskildsen claims that in Western religious traditions, bodily self-denial of various kinds is associated with a view of "spirit . . . and matter as mutually antagonistic entities," such that the goal of asceticism is to weaken the bodily impulses that hinder "spiritual" progress.[35] To him, the fact that Daoists recognized no such contrast meant that for Daoists, asceticism "almost always purported to improve the strength and health of the human body" and "to render immortal both the soul and the body."[36] In arguing his cases, however, Eskildsen ends up reinforcing the very dualism of soul and body that he wishes to undermine.

Studies of Popular Culture

The study of public starvation and self-infliction of pain by Vincent Goossaert focuses on a peculiar late imperial practice called, "seated starvation in an enclosure" (*zuo eguan* 坐餓閔),[37] which was performed by Buddhist and Daoist clerics in urban settings such as Beijing and Shanghai.[38] Goossaert shows that this practice was a fund-raising technique, with its strange mixture of drama, spectacle, entertainment, trial, moral enactment, and economics, and that it was able to mobilize clerics and attract large crowds. It also provoked public contestation on issues of what was considered "authentic" religious practice. Goossaert

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on Jade Clarity (*Yuqing jing* 玉清經), which presents "gruesome depictions of heretical asceticism" that had infiltrated Daoism, in order to criticize them; ibid., pp. 155-156.

[35] Ibid., p. 156.

[36] Ibid., pp. 1-7.

[37] Goossaert shows that the setting of this practice took many forms, ranging from wooden shed with nails driven into it with the points projecting on the inside (*dingguan* 釘關), to locked or chained small brick enclosures (*suokou guan* 鎖口關), to small standing-room-only sheds (*zhanguan* 站關), to wooden sheds hung in the air by rope tied to a large tree (*tianguan* 天關) that prevented anyone from secretly feeding the ascetic inside of the *guan*.

[38] See Vincent Goossaert, "Starved of Resources: Clerical Hunger and Enclosures in Nineteenth-Century China." *HJAS* 62, no. 1 (2002) 77-133. The practice of *guan* 關 or locking oneself for a fixed period of time seems to be a common practice among Buddhist and Daoists in the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) onward, and has been documented by scholars repeatedly. See Johannes Prip-Møller, *Chinese Buddhist Monasteries: Their Plan and its Functions as a setting for Buddhist Monastic Life* (Hong Kong University Press), 149-152. For the Yuan dynasty invention of the practice of solitary confinement, or *guan* practice, see Yü Chün-fang, *The Renewal of Buddhism*, pp. 176-177.

has used an extremely wide range of primary sources in the 19th century in his research,[39] but unfortunately there is little discussion beyond a descriptive analysis of this practice to illumine its historical genesis.

Based on my preliminary findings, public ascetic practices were already evident in the late Ming. Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲袾宏 (1535-1615) was vociferous about this phenomenon:

> Recently there have been Buddhist and Daoist clerics who build brick walls around themselves. The space is so small that it can only contain one person… Some put nails on four sides and make the space into a box bed. There are some who cut off one hand and wrap the stump in a piece of cloth which is covered with dirt and tar; they then show this mutilated hand to passersby… [They] use this method to attract people's attention and beg for alms. They fool the world and deceive the people. All enlightened people should advise such people to give up this kind of evil practice.[40]

His condemnation can be interpreted as recognizing the inherent power in these practices. Zhuhong admitted that they attract large crowds and stirred public awe, and that ordinary clerics and laypeople believed that the performers wielded unmatched sanctity. Zhuhong subscribed to the same view of the spectacular dimensions of sacrality hailed by the mutilators themselves. We might even argue that Zhuhong was afraid that such practices might exercise power over him or the kinds of lay and monastic practice he advocated. Exploring these issues would yield a clearer picture of the distinctions late Ming people made among different forms of religious sanctity and cultural values and why they found those distinctions important.

Shamanic body practices and behaviors in rebellious movements constitute another area of popular culture that bears on issues of ascetic practices. While scholarship on this topic in

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[39] Goossaert's sources range from miscellanies (*biji* 筆記) to the celebrated newspaper, *Shenbao* 申報, founded in the Shanghai British concession in 1872, to missionary accounts. However, it is still difficult to arrive at a more complete historical picture of this practice as we are missing several factors such as the voice of the performers and ordinary observers, etc. I am hoping to find witness accounts of this practice in late Ming miscellanies (*biji* 筆記) and other anecdotal literature.

[40] See Zhuhong's *Yunqi fahui* 雲棲法彙 (Collected Works of Master Yunqi) (Nanjing: Jinling kejing chu, 1897), 31 *ce*, 47b. This passage is translated (a bit differently) by Yü Chün-fang; see *The Renewal of Buddhism in China*, p. 189.

the Ming is only beginning, Barend ter Haar has suggested that self-inflicted violence has a pattern similar to China's "demonological paradigm."[41] He argues that although this paradigm did not directly cause violence, it functioned to establish human targets and lay a foundation for actual violence. The paradigm defined the general parameters for shamanic body practices such as possession and then physically harming the body.[42] The general consensus among scholars is that shamanism supposedly "lost its influence" in the intervening period from the Song dynasty (960-1279) to modern times.[43] Much of the study on shamanism is focused either on early historical accounts (Han and before) or contemporary Taiwanese fieldwork.[44] However, this seems to me to be a result of "a division of labor" in the academic field. I have already found that shamanism not only continued in the Ming but was also accepted as a valid means of ritual performance and healing practice. The Ming government regularly summoned shamans (*wu* 巫) in the performance of ritual

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[41] See Barend J. ter Haar, "China's Inner Demons: The Political Impact of the Demonological Paradigm." *China Information* 11, nos. 2/3 (1996-1997), 54-88.

[42] Ibid., p. 85.

[43] Many of such practices can still be witnessed today in Taiwan, such as piercing the cheeks with skewers and cutting body parts. See footnote above, for example, and Kenneth Dean, *Lord of the Three in One: the Spread of a Cult in Southeast China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 32-33.

[44] Whether China had "shamans" or a "shamanic substrate" is a thorny issue in China studies. The argument seems to rest on terminological issues, which seem less fruitful to me. In my study, the term "shaman" is used as a catchall category to cover terms that appear in historical documents to describe a host of marginal figures who, in order to manipulate the gods or spirits, engaged in spirit-possession, exorcism, trance, and mediumship. The historical terms I came across include: *wuxi* 巫覡, *wushi* 巫師, *shipo* 師婆, *duangong* 端公, *shamen* 沙門, *shenwu* 神巫, *tongji* 童乩. For shamanism in early China, see David N. Keightley, "Shamanism, Death, and the Ancestors: Religious Mediation in Neolithic and Shang China (ca. 5000-1000 B.C.)," *ASEA* 52 (1998) 3: 763-828; Michael J. Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, Harvard University Press, 2002). For Song periods, see Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001); Robert Hymes, *Way and Byway: Taoism, Local Religion, and Models of Divinity in Sung and Modern China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002). For contemporary periods, see de Groot, J.J.M. *The Religious System of China: Its Ancient Forms, Evolution, History and Present Aspect, Manners, Custom and Social Institutions Connected Therewith*, vol. 6 (Taipei: Ch'eng Wen Publishing Co, 1976); Avron A. Boretz, "Martial Gods and Magic Swords: Identity, Myth, and Violence in Chinese Popular Religion," *JPC* 29, no. 1 (1995): 93-109; Philip Clart. "The Phoenix and the Mother: The Interaction of Spirit Writing Cults and Popular Sects in Taiwan," *JCR* 25 (1997): 1-32; DeBernardi, Jean, "Teachings of a Spirit Medium," in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Lopez, Donald S., Jr., 229-238 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Peter Nickerson, "A Poetics and Politics of Possession: Taiwanese Spirit-Medium Cults and Autonomous Popular Cultural Space," *positions* 9, no. 1 (2001): 187-217. I have only a couple of articles related to the Ming. However, there are several scholars who mention in passim scant references of shamanism in the Ming. For the two articles hat discuss shamanism explicitly, see Donald S. Sutton, "Shamanism in the Eyes of the Ming and Qing Elites," in *Heterodoxy in late Imperial China*, eds. Kwang-Ching Liu and Richard Shek, 208-237 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004); Terence C. Russell, "Chen Tuan at Mount Huangbo: A Spirit-writing Cult in Late Ming China." *ASEA* 44, no. 1 (1990): 107-140.

sacrifices (*ji* 祭) during times of flood and drought.[45]

Another form of violence to the body that has been taken up by scholars of cultural studies is footbinding (*chanzu* 纏足). Dorothy Ko has already given us a clear picture of this customary practice in 17th century China.[46] She argues that women embraced the intensity of pain because they saw pain as productive: they used scarification to mark their ranks in society, to beautify, and to eroticize. This practice was also a part of the Confucian discourse. According to Ko, a woman's willingness to destroy her body was taken as evidence of her virtue to remain chaste (*guijie* 閨節). Footbinding not only shared a semiotic resemblance with the embodiment and dismemberment of virtues, it also produced the power of *wen* 文.[47] Ko argues that, if we expand the vision of *wen* as "cultural values," then Ming urban women could be seen as engaging in their construction of subjectivity through footbinding.[48] Their bodies were either sites of social prestige or impropriety: those women who did not bind their feet were mocked "big feet" (*dajiao* 大腳), a designation for the country bumpkin,[49] and those that did were considered civilized and beautiful.

Because the practice of footbinding was forced upon young girls (often by their mothers)

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[45] Historically in ancient China, this is a practice where *wu* 巫 were ritually exposed to the sun naked to induce the sympathy of the gods to bestow rain. However, in Ming sources it is unclear whether such rituals involved the same practice of "ritual exposure" of the body (*baowu* 暴巫) in earlier times. See section on *Yiwu lushan bu* 醫巫閭山部 (Section of Medicine and Shamanic Arts of Villages and Mountains) of the *Fangyu huibian shanchuan dian* 方輿彙編山川典 (Classics on the Collection of Mountains and Rivers of the Great Land) in the *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 (Imperially Sanctioned Collection of Books and Illustrations Past and Present) Website. http://195.222.189.200/ChineseBookWebIP/home/content_level01.asp?cmd=search&seaTyp=vwTxt&hb=1&d=2&b=4&v=9&c=0&t=19/ (electronic Search at Gest Library, Princeton; accessed October 19, 2005). Under this section there are entries for each dynastic reign. See the section on the Ming dynasty. For descriptions on early *baowu* practice, see de Groot. J.J.M. *The Religious System of China*, p. 1193-1242.

[46] Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005); "Footbinding as Female Inscription," in *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam*, eds. Benjamin Elman, Herman Ooms and John Duncan, 147-177 (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series, 2002); and *Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001.

[47] *Wen* is an ambiguous concept. In a general and literal sense, *wen* is understood both as language and writing, but scholars have shown that *wen* meant more than that in Song times and onward; see Peter K. Bol, *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

[48] Ko argues that since women were denied of *wen* as language and words, they exercised their own understanding of *wen* through their bodies; see Ko, "Footbinding as Female Inscription," p. 154.

[49] Ibid., p. 174.

at an age when they could not have appreciated an understanding of sanctity and virtue, it is difficult to include it in my study as a form of ascetic body practice. However, Ko's theory of how social order produces distinct bodies and how bodies produce social norms has been helpful in my examination of other women ascetics.[50]

III. Types of Violent Body Practices

I plan to explore in depth the perceived actualization of different kinds of virtuous bodies as being attained through self-immolation, disfigurement, and mutilation. In the following section, I will first contextualize the historical roots of ascetic body practices and discuss their culmination in the late Ming.

Burning the Body

Many Indian scriptures, such as the *Avadāna* tales (or *benshi jing* 本事經; accounts of past lives of the Buddha's disciples) and the *Jātaka* tales (or *bensheng jing* 本生經; stories of the Buddha's previous incarnations), detail the meritorious and votive nature of burning the body (*fenshen* 焚身 or *shaoshen* 燒身). Scholars such as James Benn and John Kieschnick have argued for the sinification of this practice over time. Evidence of the practice of body-burning is first found in Indian scriptural narratives translated into Chinese in 255CE.[51]

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[50] For example, those who resisted rampaging soldiers by cutting off their noses or hurling themselves into wells. Stories of these violent acts often draw on both ethical and religious discourses, in that in many instances women often prayed to the Buddhist deities, especially Guanyin, during these acts; see T'ien Ju-K'ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity*, pp. 95, 124, 147, 152; Susan Mann, "Widows in the Kinship, Class, and Community Structures of Qing Dynasty China," *JAS* 46 (1987): 37-56. For accounts of virtuous women in Chinese novels of the late Ming and Qing, see Katherine Carlitz, "Desire, Danger, and the Body: Stories of Women's Virtue in Late Imperial China," in *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*, eds. Christina Gilmartin et al., 101-124 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1994).

[51] See chapter twenty-three of the *Lotus Sūtra* or *Miaofa lianghua jing* 妙法蓮華經, "The Previous Life of Bodhisattva Bhaiṣajyarāja" (*Yaowang pusa benshi pin* 藥王菩薩本事品), *T.* no. 262, 9: 53b. For an English translation, see Burton Watson, *The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 280-289. The earliest translation was by Dharmarakṣa (230?-316); see *T.* no. 283, 9: 63-133. But it is through the second translation done by the Central Asian scholar-monk Kumārajīva (344-413) in 406 CE (see *T.* no. 262, 9) that it has become widely known and read in China and other countries within the Chinese cultural sphere of influence. Other passages in the sūtra also seem to confirm the similar ascetic practice of self sacrifice, such as chapter twelve on Devadatta; see Watson's *The Lotus Sutra*, p. 187.

Later, in 406CE, the practice was cited as a Chinese Mahayana precept.[52] By the beginning of the sixth century, it was firmly established as a clerical ascetic practice, as shown by hagiographical records of eminent monks.[53] This process of development is, of course, never as simple as we would like it to be, and its interconnecting influences probably resemble the process of cross-pollenization. For example, I have found that in both Indian and China, body burning in whole or in parts seems to have pre-Buddhist antecedents.[54] In India, there were Vedic sacrificial texts that encouraged self-immolation. In pre-Buddhist China the earliest

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[52] See *Brahmajāla sūtra* (*Fanwang jing* 梵網經) and its collection of Bodhisattva precepts; the translation is attributed to Kumārajīva. Scholars generally view this sūtra as an apocryphal text. Hirakawa, for example, contends that this sūtra was allegedly a translation of the tenth chapter of a much larger Sanskrit text (120 fasc.) called the *Bodhisattva-śīla-sūtra* 菩薩戒經. Later, it was rewritten as n apocryphal text. Also known by the titles 梵網經菩薩心地品 and 梵網戒品, the *Fanwang jing* consists of two fascicles: the first deals with topics such as the stages of the Bodhisattva path and the second fascicle lists the ten major precepts and forty-eight minor precepts. By the end of the fifth century, the second fascicle was circulating in China as an independent text on the precepts, and had become a basic canonical work for defining the *vinaya* in Chinese Mahāyāna. It is there that the practice of body-burning is turned into an actual precept that all Mahāyāna Buddhists clerics must engage in; those who do not burn themselves are said to be in violation of the Mahāyāna precept. See *Fanwang jing* 梵網經, precept number sixteen, *T.* no. 1484, 24: 1006a. See Hirakawa Akira, *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna*, tr. By Paul Groner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 253.

[53] Various canonical "biographies of "eminent monks" (*gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳), beginning in early 6th century on through the 17th century, have reinforced such practices, lending it an air of legitimacy and making it a culturally accepted norm in Chinese Buddhism. See the list of various *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 genres in James Benn's dissertation.

[54] Since some Buddhist scholars have not been able to find historical precedence for this practice in Indian sources, except only in the Indian scriptures mentioned above, they have concluded that it must be that the Chinese understood this practice, originally intended as mythology, "literally." James Benn, John Kieschnick, Jan Yün-hua, Erik Zürcher, Jacques Gernet have all suggested this. Yet matters are not this simple. How can so many Buddhist sūtras and tales of the Buddha's previous lives expound this practice without any social basis whatsoever? Several examples are relevant to support a different view. One is Yijing's 義淨 (635-713) *Record of the Dharma Sent Back from the Southern Seas*, in which he cites a debate about the injunction against burning one's body. See *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸内法傳 (*Record of the Dharma Sent Back from the Southern Seas*), Yijing 義淨 (635-713), chapter 4 in *T.* no. 2125, 45: 231a-b. The other example is from the Chinese translation of the *Mahāsanghika-vinaya* (*Mohe sengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律), which states explicitly that monks are not allowed to burn themselves (*shaoshen* 燒身). See *Mohe sengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律 (*Mahāsanghika-vinaya*) tr. by Faxian 法顯 (d. 423), *T*. no. 1425, 26: 439b. These discussions can be used to suggest the precedence of self-immolation in Indian Buddhism. Other scholars working on Indian religion also attest this. While, in general, Vedic texts forbid suicide, there does seem to be at least one exception, the self-immolation sacrifice called *sarvasvāra*. It is apparently meant for an old ritualist "who desires to put an end to his life." See *Kātyāyana Śrauta sūtra* 22.6: 1, 6-8. Another text states that if, perchance, death does not arrive at that time: "If he lives, he should perform the final oblation of the soma sacrifice and thereupon seek his life by starvation." See *Lāṭyāyana Śrauta sūtra* 8.8: 40. For a treatment of this ritual and others, see J.C. Heesterman, "Self-Sacrifice in Vedic Ritual," in *Gilgul: Essays on Transformation, Revolution and Permanence in the History of Religions*, 91-106 (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1987). Citation of these sources comes from Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 111, fn. 170.

evidence for self-immolation dates to the 1st century, for the purpose of inducing rainfall.[55] In fact, as we will read below, this latter theme seems to have continued up to late imperial times.

By the Ming dynasty, our focus, burning the body, had become widespread. The eminent Buddhist cleric, Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599-1655), from the age of twenty-six to fifty-six burned himself on the arm (*ranbi* 燃臂) twenty-eight times and burned himself on the head (*randing* 燃頂) six times. Together this makes thirty-four times. But places in his writings where he states that he "again burned" himself are actually much more.[56] Ouyi also cites, in his writings, contemporaries who had performed the same types of practice. Even Daoists who supposedly practiced preservation of the body burned themselves as a form of spiritual cultivation.[57] In Minghe's 明河 *Bu xu gaoseng zhuan* 補續高僧傳 (Supplement to Extended Biographies of Eminent Monks) of the 17th century, there is a case of an ascetic Buddhist cleric, Yonglong 永隆, who offered to burn himself in order to pardon three thousand monks from emperor Taizu's order to conscript them to the army. When the emperor assented to this offer, Yonglong, accompanied by civil and military officials, ascended to an altar where he was to be burned. Before doing so, he took a stick and wrote on it, "The wind and rain will be favorable," and gave it to the officials urging them to present it to the emperor in times of drought. Then he burned himself. The three thousand monks were pardoned as promised and received official monastic certificates. Sometime later, when there was a drought, Taizu remembered Yonglong's predictions and used the stick to pray for rain. The region was rewarded with a heavy downfall. Delighted, Taizu wrote a poem commemorating Yonglong.[58] Here, Yonglong's burning of his own body not only negotiated

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[55] See *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han), comp. Fan Ye 范曄 (398-445), vol. 81, p. 2694 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965); Edward Schafer, "Ritual Exposure in Ancient China," *HJAS* 14 (1957): 130-184; Alvin P. Cohen, "Coercing the Rain Deities in Ancient China," *HR* 17 (1978): 244-165.

[56] See Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599-1655), *Linfeng zonglun* 靈峰宗論. Shihua guoji gufen youxian gongsi, 2004.

[57] For a story of an attempt by a Daoist hermit, see Eskildsen, *The Teachings and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 59-60.

[58] See *Bu xu gaoseng zhuan* 補續高僧傳, by Minghe 明河 (1588-1641), fascicle 20, in *Gaoseng zhuan heji*

and subverted state intervention in the monastic order, but was also able to summon rain.

Blood Writing

Another ascetic practice that predated the arrival of Buddhism in China is blood writing. For example, we have evidence of blood covenants and transmission rituals that appeared in China as early as the 3rd century BCE.[59] In Buddhism, the first documented instance of someone copying a Buddhist scripture in blood was Chen Shuling 陳叔陵 in 579 CE, who copied the *Mahāparinirvāna sūtra*.[60] This is a practice that involved pricking one's own fingers and tongue to draw blood for copying scriptures (*xiejing* 血經) or writing solemn vows (*xieshu* 血書).[61]

In the late Ming many illustrious clerics, such as Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭, Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543-1603), and Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546-1623), and many lay people[62] engaged in this practice.[63] Hanshan states:

> In the Spring of my thirty-second year, I returned from Yanmen [Wild Goose Pass, situated in the modern northwest corner of Daixian County, Shanxi Province]. At that time I recalled the benevolence of my [deceased] parents and the care they had given me. I also thought of all of the obstacles that stood between me and the Dharma. On reading the vow of the great master [Hui]si of Nanyue 南嶽[慧]思,[64] I vowed to make a copy

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高僧傳合集 (Combined Collection of Eminent Monks) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991), 738c-739a.

[59] For blood covenant, see *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義, Duke Ding, year five, in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979) 54, 435; Burton Watson, *The Tso chuan: Selections from China's Oldest Narrative History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 185. For blood rituals, see Gil Raz, "Blood Rites and Pure Covenants: Lineage Construction in Early Daoist Ritual and Narrative," AAR 2004 unpublished paper; also James Benn, "Where Text Meets Flesh," p. 297.

[60] See *Chen shu* 陳書, volume 36 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1937), 495. Citation from John Kieschnick, "Blood Writing in Chinese Buddhism," p. 177.

[61] See James Benn, "Where Text Meets Flesh," pp. 295-322; John Kieschnick, "Blood Writing in Chinese Buddhism," pp. 177-194.

[62] Hanshan mentions six clerics and laymen in his time who copied Buddhist scriptures in blood; see *X.* 127: 324c-326c. Zhixu's mentions thirteen who engaged in this practice; see *Linfeng zonglun* 靈峰宗論, fascicles 7, volume 1, 3, and fascicle 9, volume 4.

[63] See *Linfeng zonglun* 靈峰宗論, p. 540; for 紫伯真可 (1543-1603), see *Zibo zunzhe quanji* 紫伯尊者全集, *X.* 126: 314c; for Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546-1623), see the appendix to *Bashibazu daoying zhuanzan* 八十八祖道影傳贊, *X.* 147: 502; also *Hanshan dashi mengyou quanji* 憨山大師夢游全集, *X.* 127: 758c11.

[64] For the vows by Huisi of Nanyue 南嶽慧思 (515-577), see *T.* no. 1933, 786b. One of Huisi's vows is to

of the *Flower Adornment* [scripture] by mixing my own blood with gold. Above, this [act] would serve as a causal condition to realize *prajñā* [wisdom], and below it would repay the enormous debt to my parents for their benevolence.[65]

Hanshan's decision to copy a sūtra in his own blood was inspired by filiality and religious piety. The reasoning for Hanshan was that through this performance, wholesome karma could both accrue and be transferred to his deceased parents and, at the same time, enable him to overcome obstacles in realizing wisdom. The virtue of filiality also served as a basis for the literati practice of blood writing. There are numerous cases of sons who displayed their filiality by being willing to take on their fathers' grave illness or substitute for their (*daifu* 代父) impending death by vowing to copy a scripture (it is unclear whether it was Buddhist or not) in their own blood.[66] In these cases, it is the filial act that can potentially remove karmic obstacles; and engaging in ascetic body acts demonstrated one's sincerity.

Other virtues and circumstances, of course, also inspired blood-writing. There are many cases where wrongly accused officials would demonstrate their loyalty and sincerity by biting their fingers and using the blood to write (*niezhi xieshu* 齧指血書) testimonies rebuking their persecution and challenging the unjustified accusations.[67] These virtues were perceived as heroic acts and were repeatedly portrayed in popular drama and literature during this time.

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engage in ascetic practices (*kuxing* 苦行) for the next 56,000,000 years in all future rebirths so that the Dharma ending age (*mofa* 末法) will never arrive.

[65] See *Hanshan dashi mengyou quanji* 憨山大師夢游全集, *X.* no. 1456, 73: 401c-402b. See also Sung-peng Hsu. 1979. *A Buddhist Leader in Ming China*, 72.

[66] See *Mingshi* 明史, section on history proper (*shibu* 史部, *zhengshi lei* 正史類), fascicles 234 (Cao Xuecheng 曹學程) and *Ping En zhuan* 馮恩傳 listed in the *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成, 323 *ce*, p. 13.2 (En Ziren 恩子仁) (Electronic Search at Gest Library, Princeton; accessed October 19, 2005). In ancient China, stories of the exploits of filial sons, which developed largely independently of Buddhist influence, were lauded for their devotion and rewarded for their virtues; many records also detail miracles that result from such acts, either of speedy recovery of their parent's illness or of their own fortune. See Keith Nathaniel Knapp, *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children And Social Order in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

[67] Because there are too many cases to recount, I will cite only three as examples. See *Mingshi* 明史, section on history proper (*shibu* 史部, *zhengshi lei* 正史類), fascicle 143 (literatus Huang Cheng 黃鋮); fascicle 245 (Donglin literati 東林黨人, Zhou Shunchang 周順昌), and fascicle 294 (literati Lu Xuegu 盧學古); see *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Imperially Sanctioned Books in Four Sections). (Electronic Search at Gest Library, Princeton; accessed September 19, 2005).

The appearance of this practice in the literary world reflects the worldviews and values of the time.[68] Foucault speaks of "the deliberate stylization of daily life" that becomes the reiterated condition of the subject's self-production.[69] Embedded in the network of cultural values, blood writing seems to be a ritualized act in mainstream discourse that allowed those who engaged in it to create heroic subjects.

Slicing the Body

One of the most richly documented ascetic practices was *gegu* (割股), the act of slicing a piece of flesh from one's body and cooking it in broth for an ailing parent to drink as a specially blessed and restorative medicine. Literally, it means "to cut a piece of flesh from the thigh," but later included the flesh of any part of the body.[70]

According to Chinese historical sources, *gegu* was first thought of as having roots in medical lore. Some scholars have claimed that Chen Zangqi's 陳藏器 (d.u.) *Caomu shiyi* 草木拾遺 (Corrected Pharmacopoeia), written in 739, was the source of the belief that human flesh could be an effective medicine to cure the physical and mental decay of senility.[71] Others refuted this view and argued that its source lies in Buddhist ascetic practices.[72] A similar practice was already mentioned in three Buddhist scriptures,[73] one of which (possibly an apocryphal scripture) explicitly states that to slice one's own flesh three-times daily to serve one's parents is still insufficient to repay their benevolence in

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[68] See for example, Carlitz Katherine, "Desire, Danger, and the Body."
[69] See Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, p. 13.
[70] See T'ien Ju-k'ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity*, p. 153.
[71] Ibid., 153. Also see Yü Chün-fang, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 339.
[72] See T'ien Ju-k'ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity*, p. 152.
[73] In the Northern Wei (368-533) and the Tang (618-907), there were three translated Buddhist scriptures that deal with filial piety: *Xianyu yinyuan jing* 賢愚因緣經, alternatively, *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經, (Scripture of the Wise and the Fool) of Yuan-Wei 元魏 era (the state of Northern Wei), translated in 445 by Huijue 慧覺 (d.u.), et. al., *T.* no. 202, 4: 349; *Dafangguang fo huayanjing busiyi fojingjie fen* 大方廣佛華嚴經不思議佛境界分 (The Great Vaipulya Buddha Flower Garland Sūtra which [expounds] the Inconceivable Realm of the Buddhas) translated in 699 by Shiyi Nantuo 實義難陀 (Skt. Śiksānanda), *T.* no. 300, 10: 905a; and *Dasheng bensheng xindi guanjing* 大乘本生心地觀經 (Scripture on the Contemplation of the Mind Ground of Intrinsic Origination in the Mahāyāna) translated in 790 by Bore 般若 (Skt. Prajñā), et. al., *T.* no. 159, 3: 291a.

nurturing one's life for a single day.[74] This practice continued through the dynasties and by the Ming it was widespread and even touted in popular literature.[75]

Gegu was a contentious but prevalent practice.[76] According to the *Imperially Sanctioned Collection of Books and Illustrations Past and Present* (*Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成; hereafter, *ISCBIPP*) there are numerous cases documented in Ming local gazetteers. *Gegu* extended beyond specific regions and ethnic boundaries, and was practiced in areas such as Yunnan, Guizhou, the Northeast and Northwest by Muslims, Mongols, and Manchus.[77] Miracles, eulogies, and divine intervention were associated with it. There was a late Ming filial son, Zhou Xiqian 趙希乾, for example, who sliced a piece of his own flesh from his chest to use as medicine for his ailing mother. He bled profusely but somehow not only survived but lived until an old age. His mother drank the soup he made and was miraculously healed; she lived until an old age of eighty-two.[78] The miraculous recovery for both Zhou Xiqian and his mother demonstrates beliefs about the efficacy of virtuous practice and the power of this ascetic act.

Starving the Body

Fasting was perhaps the most widespread form of ascetic practice that people performed.

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[74] For example, see *Dasheng bensheng xindi guan jing* 大乘本生心地觀經: "If a virtuous man or woman, for purposes of repaying the gratitude to the mother, endures for a single *kalpa* the slicing his or her own flesh three times everyday to feed the mother, this would still not amount to the debt of [parental love] for a single day." (若善男子善女人。為報母恩經於一劫。每日三時自割身肉以養父母。而未能報一日之恩。); see. *T.* no. 159, 3: 297a.

[75] Among the dynastic histories, the first appearance of this practice is in the *New History of the Tang*, with three accounts of people who engaged in this practice. Subsequently, more cases were accounted in the *Song History* and *Yuan History*. For popular literature in the Ming about the virtues of *gegu*, see Yenna Wu, "Moral Ambivalence in the Portrayals of *Gegu* in Late Imperial Chinese Literature," in *Ming Qing wen hua xin lun* 明清文化新論 (New Theories in Ming Qing Culture), ed. Wang Chengmian 王成勉, 247-274 (Taibei: Wenjin chubanshe, 2000).

[76] In 1394, the Ming emperor Taizu bestowed imperial awards on three individuals who performed *gegu*, but the next year he proscribed the practice; nevertheless, *gegu* continued. See T'ien Ju-k'ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity*, pp. 158-159.

[77] Citation from Qiu Zhonglin 邱仲麟, "Buxiao zhi xiao—Tang yilai gegu liaoqin xianxiang de shehuishi chutan 不孝之孝—唐以來割股療親現象的社會史初探" (A socio-historical study of the phenomenon of *gegu* to heal parents from the Tang dynasty onwards), *Xin shixue* 新史學 6, no. 1 (1996): 52, 91.

[78] See case cited by Qiu Zhonglin, pp. 62-63.

Sometimes it involved limiting one's intake of food to pine bark, chestnuts, torreya nuts, grass, roots, and other uncooked cereal and foods; other times it involved avoiding grains (*bigu* 辟穀; *jueli* 絕粒); it also entailed complete abstention from all food, except water, or for an extended period of inedia (*duanshi* 斷食).

According to traditional Daoist lore, fasting is essential to purify the body. It is believed that while the body is a replica of the cosmos and hence thoroughly divine, it is also marked by decrepitude and death from the time of birth. Resulting from the mother's diet of grains, the putrefaction of which soils the embryo's nature, the newborn body becomes foul and defiled, causing it to lose divinity. Further, the body is populated with, among other demons,[79] the Three Cadavers, which gnaw at the organism and render it vulnerable to disease.[80] For Daoists, it is through fasting that bodily demons are starved to death and divinity is regained. In this process, Daoist adepts devised various techniques of exercise to absorb the sun's energy as a substitute for food. For them, dietary regimens like periodic fasting were also used to remake the body, most often to cause it to become lighter and purer.[81]

Fasting and extended inedia are also intimately related to preparatory practices for deliverance at death. Throughout Chinese history, numerous religious ascetic practitioners have demonstrated their mastery over death by the fact that their own corpse did not decay after death, which is associated with the practitioner's sanctity. This is called the attainment of the "flesh-body" (*roushen* 肉身). In many cases, the adept would engage in extended

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[79] Other demons that reside in the body are produced by the yin energy, such as the seven bodily souls, or *po* 魄, and they are responsible for generating desires and vexations.

[80] See Jean Lévi, "The Body: The Daoists' Coat of Arms," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, eds. Michel Feher; with Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi, 105-126 (New York, NY: Urzone, Inc.; Cambridge, MA: distributed by the MIT Press, 1989): 110-113.

[81] The longest early discussion of fasting occurs in the *Book of Rites* in the Han dynasty. See *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義, in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 49, 375b; James Legge, *The Li Ki*, vols. 27-28, ed. F. Max Müller, *Sacred Books of the East*, 50 vols. (Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1962-66), 28, 210-211; citation from Aat Vervoorn, *Men of the Cliffs and Caves* (Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1990), 38.

fasting prior to his or her predicted death to prepare the corpse to become incorruptible.[82] Those who have fasted seem to account for the majority of cases of bodies that exude sweet odors during life; also their corpses maintained a fragrant odor and suppleness after death. There are references of many Ming clerics who attained flesh-bodies.[83]

In the Ming, there are also many cases in which widows, ignoring their parents' wishes and refusing to remarry, decided to fast to the point of death.[84] Research by Mark Elvin and others has demonstrated beyond dispute that during this period thousands of women took drastic steps to preserve or affirm their sexual purity.[85] That fasting as intimately related to reducing sexual energies was a shared cultural discourse. By engaging in fasting, women used their bodies to negotiate social relations and earn prestige.[86]

Fasting as a way of demonstrating sanctity also blurred secular and religious boundaries and cannot be interpreted apart from the web of other practices. For example, Tan Yangzi (1558-1580), who came from the pinnacle of the bureaucratic elite, cultivated her widow chastity through periodic fasting and intense meditations. As a result of these austere practices, she experienced visions, gained a following, and fasted until her body became so

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[82] Buddhist ascetics who have attained the "mummified bodies" are often installed in temple altars (much like a statue) as reservoirs of spiritual power for worship. Noted by scholars of East Asian religions, this phenomenon of mummified bodies has a long tradition in China and India. Joseph Needham argues that the belief in the lingering presence of the soul can be attested by early Chinese mortuary rites aimed at preventing the decomposition of the corpse. See Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 5, p. 304, on the case of Lady Tai of Western Han discovered in 1972. There is also evidence that in India, the practice of mummification was practiced, see Mary Levin, "Mummification and Cremation in India," *Man* (February, 1930): 30.

[83] See for example Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546-1623). See Sung-peng Hsu, *A Buddhist Leader in Ming China*, 98-101; Bernard Faure, "Relics and Flesh Bodies: The Creation of Ch'an Pilgrimage Sites," in *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites*, ed. Susan Naquin and Chün-fang Yü (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 168. In fact, there is evidence that starting in the Ming, the mountain area of Jiuhua shan emerged as something of a flesh-body center, with many whole-body relics appearing there beginning with the monk Wuxia 無瑕 (1513-1623). See *Jiuhua shan zhi* 九華山志 (Gazetteer of Jiuhua), revised by Yinguang (d.u.), in *Zhongguo fosi shizhi huikan* 中國佛寺史志彙刊, 2nd section, volume 22 (Taibei: Mingwen shuju, 1980). Jiuhua shan in Anhui province is connected to the bodhisattva Dizang (Skt. Kṣitigarbha). Whole-body relics, especially those of Wuxia 無瑕 and Duduo 杜多 (d. 1660), played an important role in the development of the mountain into a pilgrimage center.

[84] See Wuyuan County Gazetteer 婺源縣志 in *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成, 402 *ce* (electronic search at Gest Library; accessed October 19): 10.1.

[85] See Mark Elvin, "Female Virtue and the State in China," *Past and Present* 104 (1984): 111-152.

[86] For sample cases, see cases listed in the appendix of T'ien Ju-K'ang's *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity*. T'ien claims that men were the culprit behind such practices. I am arguing the opposite: it is the women who engaged in such practices to exercise their agency.

light that it vanished. After death, her literati and official followers worshipped her as an immortal.[87] Her ascetic practices allowed her not only to transcend social hierarchies but also to drastically change relations between the sexes. In her story the distinctions between the religious and the secular, the elite and the populace, cannot be easily drawn.

All of the ascetic body practices discussed above carried with them a forceful discourse of self-inflicted violence and sanctity embedded in the mainstream cultural discourse of virtue. These acts were not sequestered from the larger social and cultural context in which they were performed, but were highly visible and public. They also show that the body was central to Chinese conceptions of virtue. There in fact was no way to realize such sanctity through incinerating fingers, blood-writing, and slicing up the body other than through a kind of "embodied subjectivity."[88] The building blocks of earlier scholarship have reached a height in the study of China that we can attempt to understand ascetic body practices as a category and proceed to re-imagine late Ming religiosity.

IV. Research Plan

It should hardly be necessary to mention that I am not concerned with whether the accounts from my sources of ascetic body practices, and the attendant visions and miracles, "really" happened. I will bracket the question of origin, either natural or supernatural. I am interested instead in how premodern Chinese people represented their experiences; I am interested in their models, the distinctions they saw between authentic and "lip-service" practice and between religious sanctity and theatrics. And I am curious about why and when they found such distinctions important. These webs of significance are my beginning point.

I also intend to theorize what my sources say about asceticism and the body, without, I hope, overshadowing the sources themselves. I take heed of the admonition by Patricia Cox

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[87] See Ann Waltner, "Visionary and Bureaucrat in the Late Ming: T'an-yang-tzu and Wang Shih-chen," *LIC* 8, no.1 (1987): 105-133.

[88] "Embodied subjectivity" is a term used in Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 22.

Miller, who argues that recent scholarship in religious studies threatens to over-theologize bodily acts, which has "the danger of bypassing the body in the very act of trying to bring it forward for consideration."[89] For this reason, my analysis will stress the actual *performative* aspects of ascetic practice, an approach that will enable me to focus on the doing and acting that are creative of meaning. Since my work is also for modern scholars, it is necessary to unravel the theoretical underpinning of our human condition, past and present. In doing so, I will make my language distinct from that of my informants.

The Ming period, compared with its predecessors, is rather well documented. It is the first dynasty from which the veritable records (*shilu* 實錄) of most of the reigns survive,[90] including the court diaries (*qijuzhu* 起居注) of the Wanli era (1573-1616), a period in which many of the informants lived.[91] There are also more than 200 works of official history and many more private ones written, including 1,500 collected works. There are, of course, the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書, the definitive imperial library collection of the Qing dynasty and the encyclopedia *ISCBIPP* commissioned by Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (r. 1736-96), both of which are searchable online through the Princeton University Gest East Asian Library website. Also available over the Internet are search engines for the twenty-five dynastic histories (*zhengshi* 正史) on the Academia Sinica website,[92] and the National Library of

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[89] Patricia Cox Miller, "Desert Asceticism," 144-148. Miller's point may be related to the broader tension, in the history of the body as well social or cultural analysis, between approaches to the "body" that emphasize the flesh-and-bones, biological, or "lived" body and approaches that emphasize the cultural or social "construction" of the body in representation or discourse. For three discussions of this tension form the perspective of different fields, see Bryan S. Turner, *Regulating Bodies: Essays in Medieval Society* (London, 1992), 31-66; Roy Porter, "History of the Body," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke, 206-232 (University Park: Penn State, 1991); and Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 38-42, 165-184.

[90] These are official records compiled after the death of each emperor and are based on archival documents, especially edicts and memorials. The official title of the veritable record in the Ming is *Veritable Records of the Ming* (*Daming shilu* 大明實錄). The best modern edition is the reproduction of the manuscript in the former National Library of Beijing and now in the Shiyusuo: *Ming shilu* 明實錄, 3,045 *juan* in 133 volumes, with appendixes in 29 volumes and corrections in 21 volumes, Shiyusuo, 1961-1966; Zhonghua shuju, 1987. See Wolfgang Franke, ed., *An Introduction to the Sources of Ming History* (Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, University of Malay Press, 1968), 30-33; also *CHC* vol. 7, 746-752.

[91] *Wanli qijuzhu* 萬曆起居注 (*Court Diaries of the Wanli Era*), 9 volumes, Beijing daxue, 1988. These records are an invaluable source for the period I work on.

[92] See Academia Sinica Computing Center Website, http://www.sinica.edu.tw/ftms-bin/ftmsw3/ (accessed October 15, 2005).

China website includes a searchable database of rubbings of stone tablet inscriptions that include thousands from the premodern periods.[93] I have already begun using these search engines with keywords and have turned up many cases. I will cull out from these cases those that I can unpack and reconstruct with the aid of official and secular sources.

The Ming local gazetteers (*fangzhi* 方志), in which biographies play an important part, is one place I plan to begin. There is a listing of 900 of them in *An Introduction to the Source of Ming History* (hereafter as *ISMH*), and Timothy Brook has geographically divided them in his book.[94] I plan to situate those clerics (and laypeople mentioned in those monks' own work that have performed ascetic body practices) mentioned above in their historical and cultural landscape, and supplement the gazetteers by combing through the relevant miscellaneous records (*biji* 筆記) by local literati.[95]

Research guides are indispensable for my research. Aside from the *ISMH*, the *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1344-1644* would be the first place to check for biographical information on any Ming figure. It contains some 659 biographies with bibliographical notes and main works written or compiled during this time. There are also detailed personal name, book title, and subject indexes.[96] The second place to find biographical sources is *Index to Biographical Collections of the Ming Dynasty* (*Mingdai zhuanji congkan suoyin* 明代傳記叢刊索引) by Zhou Junfu. This is the most complete index to biographical materials in this period.[97]

For the Ming and Qing periods, there are hagiographies for Buddhist ascetic

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[93] See Chinese National Library Inscription Collection Website, http://202.96.31.42:9080/ros/index.htm/ (accessed October 15, 2005).

[94] See Timothy Brook, *Geographical Sources of Ming Qing History*, Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies, no. 58 (Ann Arbor, 1988).

[95] For example, the literati Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1644) compiled the discourse record of Hanshan and wrote a preface for Deqing. He was closely related to late Ming Buddhist monks. I have already come across references in his *biji* on his relations with these monks. The *ISMH* (pp. 98-118) lists and comments on 75 Ming *biji* 筆記 and *zashi* 雜事 presenting direct information on the political and social history of the period. Xie Guozhen also provides some insight into 19 *Ming biji*; see Xie Guozhen 謝國楨, *Ming Qing biji tancone* 明清筆記談叢 (Collection of notes on Ming-Qing *biji*) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1960; enlarged edition 1962; new edition, 1981).

[96] See Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, eds. *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368-1644*, 2 volumes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976).

[97] See Zhou Junfu 周駿富, *Mingdai zhuanji congkan suoyin* 明代傳記叢刊索引 (*Index to Biographical Collections of the Ming Dynasty*), 3 volumes (Mingwen, 1991).

practitioners in the *Supplement to Extended Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Bu xu gaoseng zhuan* 補續高僧傳) of the Ming dynasty and the non-canonical *Newly Extended Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Xinxu gaoseng zhuan* 新續高僧傳) contained in the modern collection of *Combined Collection of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan heji* 高僧傳合集).[98] The electronically searchable Buddhist canons will also be used to detail the prescriptive dimensions and textual roots to many of the ascetic body practices.[99]

For Daoist practices, since the only existing version of the canon, *Daoist Canon Compiled in the Zhengtong era* (*Zhengtong Daozang* 正統道藏), dates to 1436 and 1499 (with an additional portion added in 1606) and may not include descriptions of people's practices in my period, I will refer to it minimally and draw from it only those key scriptures that bear relevance to my topic.[100]

The records kept by the state administrative office *Daolu si* 道錄司 in charge of Daoist affairs during the Ming might have been a rich source of information, but its archives seem to be lost, and I have been unable to trace any document emanating from it in any archive. Another source would be the Daoist monastic gazetteers, but they are far rarer than Buddhist ones and equally difficult to find. The publication of some in the *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書 and the *Zhongguo daoguan zhi congkan* 中國道觀志叢刊 collections has made some rare editions available and greatly expanded the available source-base.[101] The largest sources of Daoist biographical information, and the one most commonly used by historiography, are the

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[98] See *Gaoseng zhuan heji* 高僧傳合集 (Combined Collection of Eminent Monks) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995).

[99] The *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (The Newly Revised Buddhist Canon Compiled in the Taishō Era) is fully digitized and the *Xu zangjing* 續藏經 (Continued Buddhist Canon), which contains numerous post-Song material is only partially digitized. However, many of the sources, especially the section on history, in the Ming have already been digitized.

[100] See Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[101] See *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書 (Extra-Canonical Daoist texts) (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1992-1994). For an index of this work, see Louis Komjathy, *Title Index to Taoist Collections* (Cambridge: Three Pines Press, 2003). See also *Zhongguo daoguan zhi congkan* 中國道觀志叢刊 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe; Yangzhou Shi: Guangling shushe, 2000). A useful study of these works, see Tian Chengyang 田誠陽, "Zangwai daoshu shumu lüexi" 藏外道書書目略析 (A Brief Analysis of the Contents of the *Zangwai daoshu*) in *Zhongguo daojiao* 中國道教 1 (1995): 37-42; 2 (1995): 42-45.

genealogies. However, unlike their Buddhist counterparts, which are widely available, Daoist versions are rare and I have only been able to find one work.[102] I will have to rely on everything I can find to historicize Daoist and shamanic practices. One collection brought to my attention is the *Ocean of Learnings from the Vast Hundred Rivers* 廣百川學海 in the six volume by Feng Kebin, which gives some accounts of Daoist and shamanic body practices in the Ming.[103]

I will conduct the research for this dissertation mainly within Gest Library at Princeton. I will also spend time in Taiwan reading epigraphic sources with scholars at Academia Sinica. Scholars there are familiar with shamanic and popular religious practices in late imperial China; I hope to read some primary sources with them, which will familiarize me with the field and help me locate some cases for my dissertation. Ideally, I would also like to incorporate material evidence of "blood scriptures" from China. I know of a number of museums and monasteries that still house original manuscripts written in blood from the Late Ming and early Qing dynasties. I am interested in documenting these materials and including digital reproductions of them in my dissertation. But most of my time will be spent in Princeton, making use of the materials contained within Gest Library and consulting with my advisor and other scholars here. I plan to finish this dissertation by the summer of 2008, the conclusion of my fifth year at Princeton.

V. Chapter Outline

Because I intend this dissertation for scholars of Chinese religion and for readers with interest in the history of asceticism or history of China in general, I will provide background

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[102] See *Nanmo daopai zongpu* 南無道派宗譜, compiled by Liu Mingrui 劉名瑞 (1839-1931) and his disciple Piao Dazhi 票大志 (1852-?). Manuscript, shortly after 1932. Citation from Vincent Goossaert, "The Quanzhen Clergy, 1700-1950," in *Religion and Chinese Society*, *Volume II: Taoism and Local Religion in Modern China*, ed. John Lagerwey, 699-771 (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press; Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2004), 769.

[103] See *Guang baichuan xuehai* 廣百川學海, 6 vols. by Feng Kebin 馮可賓 (fl. 1630) (Taibei: Xinxing shuju, 1970). Volume three has a section on *wu* practices in local regions, but I have yet examined it carefully.

material for both groups. The first chapter of the dissertation is an introduction that briefly discusses some of the advances and problems in the study of ascetic body practices in medieval Western religions and Chinese cultures. The second chapter surveys all body practices available to men and women in 16th-17th century China. Chapter two contains material that will be somewhat familiar to specialists in Chinese religion, although I will present it in a new way. The third through sixth chapters, the heart of the dissertation, examine four basic ascetic body practices (each chapter devoted to one of the practices) of burning the body, blood writing, slicing the body, and fasting, and their variants, with attention to their historical, cultural, and religious roots. I will analyze how people were able to use body practices to shape their experiences and their place in both social and religious communities, revealing what asceticism meant to late imperial men and women. These chapters will be primarily for specialists of Chinese religion and cultural theorists. They will present collectively for the first time in one place a range of behaviors that I think will demonstrate my thesis for interpreting violent ascetic body practices as performance of virtue and sanctity. The concluding seventh chapter will summarize the complex discussions of ascetic body practices in light of the violence motif to raise fundamental questions about Chinese religiosity in the past and present.

Proposed Chapter Outline

I. Introduction: The Study of Asceticism and the Body
   - Literature on Western Asceticism and the Body
   - Scholarship on East Asian Ascetic Body Practices

II. Survey of Late Ming Chinese Body Practices
   - Operatic Training and Gymnastics
   - Meditation
   - Chanting
   - Prostrations
   - Foot-binding
   - Flesh-bodies
   - Chastity and Suicide
   - Pilgrimage Suicides
   - Fasting and Inedia
   - Shamanic Practices
   - Slicing the Flesh for Ailing Parents
   - Ritualizing the Body
   - Burning the Body
   - Scarring the Body
   - Piercing the Body
   - Conclusion

III. Burning the Body (*Ranshen*)
   - Case studies
   - Conclusion

IV. Blood Writing (*Xueshu*)
   - Case studies
   - Conclusion

V. Slicing the body (*Gegu*)
   - Case studies
   - Conclusion

VI. Starving the Body
   - Case studies
   - Conclusion

VII. Conclusion
   - Discourses on the Body
   - Meaning of Violence and Sanctity
   - Meaning of Performance and Miracles Tales
   - Meaning of Religious Vitality
   - Chinese Religiosity, Past and Present

Bibliography (in Progress)

Abbreviations

AM	*Asia Major*
ASEA	*Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques*
CEA	*Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*
CHC	*The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 12, eds., Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy. New York: CUP, 1999 (Chapter 12)
HJAS	*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*
HR	*History of Religions*
ISMH	*An Introduction to the Source of Ming History*, Wolfgang Franke, ed. Kuala Lumpur and Singapore: University of Malay Press, 1968 (49.5.1)
ISCBIPP	(Imperially Sanctioned Collection of Books and Illustrations Past and Present) *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JAAR	*Journal of American Academy of Religion*
JAS	*Journal of Asian Studies*
JCR	*Journal of Chinese Religions*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JIABS	*Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*
JPC	*Journal of Popular Culture*
JWH	*Journal of Women's History*
LIC	*Late Imperial China*
T.	*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, ed. Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaigyoku
TP	*T'oung Pao*
TS	*T'ang Studies*
X	*Xu zangjing* 續藏經

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