

Taishan and its Pilgrims

This essay will with 'discuss the significance of Mt Taishan in Chinese society and its relationship to two main themes: filial piety and the union of three teachings, which include Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. Filial piety the primary ethical bondage of the Chinese family and state system is the unifying philosophy of these teachings. Taishan amplifies the unification of these three concepts through its pilgrims. In general, Emperors went on pilgrimage to Taishan to perform the *Fengshan* ceremony an act of filial piety to the Heaven. Officials traveled to Taishan to investigate the state of the temples and make offerings to Heaven or to venerate their ancestors. Scholars have often traveled to Taishan to find a spiritual awareness and inspiration. Many commoners journeyed to Taishan to ask for a son to fulfill their filial obligations and experience its natural beauty and salvation in every step. The purpose of this essay is to connect Taishan with its pilgrims through the union of the three teachings. Filial piety is the overarching connection between the three philosophies that continues to draw people to Taishan as pilgrims and tourists.

This essay will further clarify Daoist, Buddhist and Confucian ideology related to the pilgrims of Taishan. The bulk of the essay will be Confucianism with an emphasis on filial piety. This section will incorporate primary source material from master Confucius and Mencius, and secondary resources from Yao Xinzong, Marcel Granet, John Lagerwey, and Stephan Bokenkamp. In these sources themes such as the Mandate of Heaven, Son of Heaven, and Heaven and Earth will

emphasize the role of filial piety within society. Daoism and Buddhism and their connection to pilgrims will further an understanding filial piety in the union of the three teachings. The primary source material from Glen Dudbridge, Idema Wilt, Yutang Lin, Bernard Faure, Pei-yi Wu, and Robert M. Gimello contains; plays, letters, novels, and first hand accounts of pilgrimage.

The religious nature of Daoism is within texts by Marcel Granet, John Lagerwey, and Wang Y'ie; who express the deep connectedness to the environment and history of the religion. Henepola Gunaratana and an anonymous author offer insight into the eight step path and the four noble truths found in Buddhism that play a central role in the minds of pilgrims. Tourism will be the final piece to this work that will unite the religious philosophies with the people of today. Changjian Gou, Brian R. Dott, Eugene Law, Ying Liu, Zhisui Li, and Hylton C. Lucas Percy cover; tourism, modern developments, structures on the mountain, environmental concerns, plant and animal life, and Mao. It is through these sources that the essay will link Taishan with its pilgrims through the union of the three teachings and filial piety.

The Trinity of Heaven, Earth, and man is a main theme of Confucian philosophy. The *fengshan* rite is performed at Taishan, is located in the home province of Confucius. The *fengshan* ceremony ties the people to the Heaven and to the Earth. This ritual demonstrated the responsibility of the emperor and promoted the harmony the ruler had interacting with Heaven and Earth, and legitimizes his

reign.¹ The ritual identified the emperor as the head of a large family where elders were cherished and deeply respected and where the emperor was the ultimate authority in administrative matters. Filial piety was Confucian ethical bondage that strengthened family ties the people to their rulers. The *fengshan* ceremony represents the unification of the people and illustrates the greater cultural context of Taishan.

The *fengshan* rite is an important element to Confucian ideology to claim succession or legitimacy of authoritarianism. In this ritual ceremony the ruler worships the Heaven and Earth to officially ascend the throne of human. The word Feng is equivalent to the word Heaven and the word Shan is equal to the word Earth. These two key topics within Confucianism are spoken of in one essential phrase “The Way of the Heaven and Earth.” Heaven is a multifaceted term. Cheng Yi (1033-1107) of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), Xinzhong Yao a modern author, and Li Yen (1421-94) a government censor tried to unite the many different interpretations of Heaven into one paragraph:

Spoken of as one, Heaven is the Way. Spoken of in its different aspects, It is called heaven with respect to its physical body, the Lord (Ti) with respect to its being master, negative and positive spiritual forces with respect to its operation, spirit (shen) with respect to its wonderful functioning, and Ch'en with respect to its nature and feelings. In the mind of Confucians, Heaven is the transcendental power that guarantees harmony between the metaphysical and the physical, between the spiritual and the secular, and between human nature and human destiny.²

¹ Marcel Granet., Maurice Freedman (ed). *The Religion of the Chinese People*, (Universities of French Press 1922), 113.

² Yao Xinzhong. *An Introduction To Confucianism*, (Cambridge University Press 2006), 142.

Heaven and Earth have at heart to give life to all creatures and the emperor is the heart of Heaven and Earth, for he is the lord chancellor of birth and growth.³

The Confucian Heaven as explained by Xinzhong Yao, of Heaven's physical and metaphysical meanings, is often associated with Earth. In the realm of the Spirits it refers to the supreme lord of Heaven who directs the world. Morally Heaven refers the natural law and human conduct in sacred and secular spaces. Heaven functions as a different reality to which humans are answerable in respects to fulfilling ones' destiny and is the apex of the Confucian spiritual authority. It represents natural law and supreme authority has a different connotation attached to its overall meaning. The emperor is the essence of the heavenly and earthly realms and promotes the growth of the people. Heaven displays the essence of *yang*, or male energy. This energy is heavy so the *yang* descends to earth to become part of *yin* or Earth. Earth is the connection between the present and the past while helping humans to recognize the potential within themselves. It is commonly said that wherever the heavens overshadow, the earth sustains. The implications of the role of the Earth are to sustain life and continue to nourish it much like a farmer tending a field. The Earth is often described as the mother of the people and queen to the supreme emperor.

Fengshan ritual is a pilgrimage of filial piety. In the rite of *Fengshan* the emperor and officials of the Bureau of Rite demonstrated filial piety to the Heavenly, father, and Earthly, mother and set a model for people to follow. The Emperor must be filial to the Heaven and to the Earth so that the people will be filial to him.

³ John Lagerwey. "The Pilgrimage to Wu-tang Shan," in *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*. John, Lagerwey., Susan, Naquin., Chun-fang Yu (Eds), (University of California Press 2002), 301.

In *The Analects* master Confucius had several conversations with his disciples Zixia, Ziyu, Mengwu, and Fanchi, regarding the concept of filial piety, Confucius answers on various occasions in specific clarifications:⁴

Parents are anxious lest their children be sick.
 The support of ones parents
 [a reference to distinguish between human from animals].
 The difficulty is in the countenance. If, when their elders have any troublesome affairs, the young take the toil from them, and if, when the young have wine and food, they set them before their elders.
 It is not being disobedient.
 The parents, when alive, be served according to propriety; when dead, they should be buried according to propriety;
 they should be sacrificed to according to propriety.

Filial piety is expressed in the trinity of Heaven, Earth, and human; and the emperor is the ruler of human society and serves as the connection between heaven and earth and is responsible for the peoples conduct. Confucian philosophers believe that this connection between Heaven and Earth and the interactions between the two; lays down a structure of human moral codes and principles including the social structure of filial piety; Yao Xinzong elaborates:

Heaven is above and Earth is below, so too the sovereign is placed over his ministers and subjects, parents over their children, and a husband over his wife.⁵

Xinzong further explains filial piety as an important component within Confucian thought which later became interconnected with Buddhist teachings. Everyone who practices filial piety has a place within society and everyone even the emperor is filial to the Heaven and his ancestors like the peasants he rules. The peasants have further obligations to be filial to the emperor, but much like the emperor they must

⁴ Confucius. *The Analects*, (Filiquarian Publishing 2006), 9-10.

⁵ Yao Xinzong. *An Introduction To Confucianism*, (Cambridge University Press 2006), 142, 148.

also be filial to their parents, siblings, and close friends. Emperors in China periodically make tours of the sacred sites within their domain, and it is within this context that many performed the *fengshan* ritual on Taishan. The emperor, in performing the ritual, is being filial to Heaven and receives the mandate. The mandate binds the populous to the emperor through Heaven and filial piety.

Liu Xiu emperor (r. 25-57 B.C.) in the eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), orchestrated a journey to Taishan where he demonstrated the ritual of *fengshan* in the Year 56 C.E. Official Ma Dibo recorded the comprehensive process of the ceremony.⁶

The *Fengshan* ritual started a ritual of purification under the inspection of imperial ancestors and deities; normally it lasted one week. During the purification, the emperor was isolated in a special room away from women, entertaining, and adopted vegetarian food and regular baths, and intensive meditation. All the officials and staffers who would participate in the ceremony were also required to perform a purification ceremony.

The officials of the Bureau of Rite, after arriving at Taishan inspect roads, altars, items associated with sacrifice, temples, and on the way of ascending Taishan officials performed the rite of asking for blessings and spreading dates and pears along the path; and on the ultimate altar display large amounts of coins, dates, pears, silk, and other items. On the day of the *fengshan* ceremony, the emperor, followed by his officials, arrived at Confucius hometown to present worship in the Confucius Temple, showing reverence to the great philosopher and his descendants. This

⁶ Stephan Bokenkamp. "Record of the Feng and Shan Sacrifices," in *Religions of China in Practice*. (eds), Stephan Bokenkamp and Donald, S. Lopez. (Princeton University Press 1996), 251-260.

ceremony symbolizes the emperor as the son of Heaven who governs the state according to Confucian's teachings of filial piety. The emperor is a filial son devoted to his heavenly fathers. Standing on the alter platform, the emperor faced north, supported by the officials surrounding on both sides of the platform. The chief official, kneeling facing south, presented jade tablet and stone slats. The emperor facing north showed his subordination to heaven as a son; the jade tablet and stone slats the official presents symbolizes heaven granting legitimacy and authority to the emperor over human society, and the emperor received this ritual symbols to claim the Mandate of Heaven.

The Mandate of Heaven demanded a strict structure of obligation from the ruler to his people, this political model of Confucianism emphasizes the peoples right of rebellion against unjust rulers by means of peasant uprisings. The mandate is a concept that never remains constant as but evolved with the change of rulership; giving the rulers the divine right to rule, and justifies their position accordingly. In *The Annals*, master Confucius stated that the virtuous man is in awe of the Mandate of Heaven, while a petty man is disrespectful to it:

The gentleman have three things that they stand in awe of. He stands in awe of the Mandate of Heaven, of persons of high position, and of the words of sages. The petty man, not understanding the Mandate of Heaven, does not view it with awe. He treats persons in high positions with disrespect and scorns the words of sages.⁷

Yao Xinzong, in his study on Confucianism, discusses the obligations of a ruler. The ruler of the human society was granted the divine privilege to govern under the title of Son of Heaven. To maintain the Mandate of Heaven and continue to justify his

⁷ Burton Watson (trans). *The Annals of Confucius*, (Columbia University Press 2007), 116.

rulership, he was required to fulfill all the responsibilities and obligations to his people. The Son of Heaven must have continual reverence for the heavens and strive actively for further virtue; maintaining the wisdom of ones forefathers, ceremonies must be preformed without error, administration must be attended to, prayer and sacrifice must be done regularly and with sincerity. Rulers have an obligation to reduce the hardships of the people, maintain a benevolent nature, and ease suffering.⁸

Humaneness is another virtue highlighted by Mencius “If the Son of Heaven is not humane, he will be unable to protect all within the four seas.”⁹ Failure to maintain the Mandate of Heaven causes the people to complain to the heavens; which revokes the titled of ruler and his right to rule. The mandate would then pass to another qualified to ruler. The Mandate also gives the people the ability to revolt in times when leadership is no longer qualified. Confucius once said with regards to failing rulers:

When good government prevails in the empire, ceremonies, music, and punitive military expeditions proceed from the Son of Heaven. When bad government prevails in the empire, ceremonies, music, and punitive military expeditions proceed from the princes. When these things proceed from the princes, as a rule, the cases will be few in which they do not lose their power in ten generations. When they proceed from the great officers of the princes, as a rule, the case will be few in which they do not lose their power in five generations. When the subsidiary ministers of the great officers hold in their grasps the orders of state, as a rule, the cases will be few in which they do not lose their power in three generations. When right principles prevail in the kingdom, government will not be in the hands of great

⁸ Yao Xinzhong. *An Introduction To Confucianism*, (Cambridge University Press 2006) 139-237.

⁹ Mencius, P. Ivanhoe. J (trans)., Irene, Bloom (trans). *Mencius*, (Columbia University Press 2009), 75.

officers. When right principles prevail in the kingdom there will be no discussion among the common people.¹⁰

The Son of Heaven or emperor was chosen by the Heavens to perform certain tasks and is evaluated by his accomplishments.

In the ritual of *fengshan* Earth is the mother of humans. The Son of Heaven claimed his right to rule by submitting himself to Heaven for judgment. The ritual of worshiping the Earth was conducted on the northern side of Taishan after the ceremony of Heavenly worship. The directional shift is due to the Earth being associated with *yin* or female energy the north side of the mountain while Heaven is associated with *yang* or male essence and is therefore on the south side. The Sacrifice to the Heaven is made to High Thearch (Lord Di), the supreme ruler of the Heaven; while sacrifice to the Earth is made to the High Overseer, the wife of the High Thearch and mother of the people.

Filial piety is the connection between the religions that interrelates nature worship with Buddhism. Nature worship is derived from agricultural activities. All of the elements or natural phenomenon were given a deity or connected to the spiritual realm. When crops were abundant it was a gift from the deities and when crops were poor it was a punishment. Heaven as understood by the people was omnipotent and endless. The sun was worshiped for the heat it gave, its rise and fall and for its connections to the four seasons. Mountains have been worshiped before Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism manifested according to scholar Pei-yi Wu.¹¹

¹⁰ Confucius. *The Analects*. (Filiquarian Publishing. 2006), 75.

¹¹ Pei-yi Wu. "An Ambivalent Pilgrim to T'ai Shan in the Seventeenth Century" in *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*. (eds) Pei-yi Wu. Susan, Naquin., and Chun-fang Yu. (University of California Press 2002), 65.

Evidence for this nature worship occurred before Daoism solidified into a cohesive ideology. In ancient China, there was a shift from nature worship to ancestral worship and reverence to Heaven. This early version of nature worship was the beginnings of early Daoism. Spiritual elements maintained and the links between the dynasty and worship was strengthened with the mandate of heaven.¹² Deities begin to have a more consolidated and uniformed appearance. Buddhism furthered nature worship when it was introduced to China in the early part of the third century B.C.E.

Nature is the mother of the people, embraced by humans venturing into nature. In Daoist and Buddhist teachings, the return to nature for pilgrims is to seek relief of suffering, each step into nature relieves the soul of its burden and helps one attain salvation. Many made the journey young, old, physically impaired, and those from every economic background. In the black and white picture men, children, and women with bound feet have reached the summit of Taishan.¹³ The pain of ascending the many steps up to Taishan's summit with bound feet must have been excruciating yet these women still made the journey. The pilgrimage was important enough that enduring pain and other hardships did not matter. Strength of will is needed to demonstrate filial piety to ones ancestors and Heaven.

¹² Y'ie, Wang; Chuanhui, Zeng (trans); Chanzit, Adam (ed). *Daoism in China*, (China International Press 2004), 3-7. Daoist deities can be divided into eight groups the first having come from totem and nature worship; the second from ancestor, hero, and sage worship; third from the five sacred mountains; fourth from the heavens, earth and four directions; Fifth are those that rule the heavens, the pure ones, and the ultimate deities of Daoism; sixth Buddhist deities; seventh are local folk deities; and lastly masters of Daoism and those who founded it.

¹³Beverly, Jackson. *Splendid Slippers: A Thousand Years of an Erotic Tradition*, (Ten Speed Press 1998), 156.



Daoist practices seek harmony with nature to instill better health and enhanced communication between the deities. Many of the major Daoist festivals follow the natural cycles of the Earth including the rise and fall of the sun. Pilgrimages to Taishan were customarily done on the third or fourth month indicating the spring and summer according to the seventeenth century author Sheg Qingfeng.¹⁴ Pilgrims flocked to sacred localities, at night one could see hundreds of little flickering dots, lanterns, lining the mountainsides according to official statesman Wang Shi-zhen a Surveillance Vice-commissioner stationed near Taishan.¹⁵ Pilgrimage to sacred localities did not always occur during these months as Wang Shi-zhen and several officials went in the sixth month and were nearly driven off by rain. Buddhism likewise displays a deep connection to nature. Life from the plum tree to a young child is respected and admired. The importance of the earth and life, that dwells amongst the valleys, mountains, and streams, was

¹⁴ Glen, Dudbridge. *Books, Tales and Vernacular Culture: Selected Papers on China*, (BRILL 2005), 275.

Pei-yi Wu. "An Ambivalent Pilgrim to T'ai Shan in the Seventeenth Century" in (eds) by Pei-yi Wu., Susan, Naquin., Chun-fang Yu. (University of California Press 2002), 68.

revered. Buddhism respects life, or all things that suffer from humans to plants. In the Zen Buddhist tradition all forms of life including plants are destined for Buddhahood.

Visitors to Taishan often want to connect with the natural energy around them known as *Qi* another element of Daoism that can be linked with the natural realm and in part nature worship. *Qi* is the energy that flows through all living things and can be controlled through mediation and focus. Tai Chi is a form of exercise to learn to control ones energy and find inner balance. *Yin* and *Yang* are different forms of *Qi* energy. This is a direct connection with nature as it is the energy of all living things. In Buddhism one always seeks a balance in the mind and body through the control *Qi*. The idea of being connected to all forms of life has helped to promote a vegetarian lifestyle among many of the monks, nuns, and laymen that follow the Buddhist tradition. Pilgrims that journey to Taishan will often take on a vegetarian diet to cleanse the body before venturing up the mountain. The act of being vegetarian is an act of filial piety because it promotes the cleansing of the body, soul, and mind allowing a practitioner a step closer to enlightenment.

Mountains serve as a conduit for those seeking to open their mind, and reflect upon the self, and to promote solitude from the outside world. Many Buddhist temples are located on or near mountains for these reasons. Many who wish to give up the life of a layman to become hermits or monks/nuns will either wander in search of a master or seclude themselves in mountain hermitages.

Buddhism tended to emphasize the idea of a the wondering monk in search of a master this idea is emphasized by the Ch'an Master Kuang-jen (837-909):

My way goes beyond the sky,
Like a white cloud that has no resting place.
There is in this world a tree without roots,
Whose yellow leaves return in the wind.¹⁶

The cloud that has no resting place refers to the monk or nun in search of a master. All are connected together by the tree that gathers its disciples from the wind. This indicates a state of periodic travel for the monastic world. This poem can also apply to Pilgrims. Pilgrims were spiritually in a state of continual construction and deconstruction. The journey is the process of transformation. The first two lines represent the journey and deconstruction while the last two lines represent the return and construction.

Pilgrimage is one of those key components to attain salvation from continual reincarnation. The Four Noble Truths and the Eight Step Path are tools one uses to attain redemption and are often associated with pilgrims. With every step on a pilgrimage these themes are in the mind of the practitioner. The Four Noble Truths are at the heart of Buddhist beliefs and it is in these noble truths that enlightenment can be obtained with the help of the Eight Step Path.

Anonymous author of *Buddha, The Word* discusses the Four Noble Truths in great detail.¹⁷ First all things are in a state of suffering until they reach salvation. Suffering comes in many different forms such as, birth, despair, decay, death,

¹⁶ Bernard, Faure. "Relics and Flesh Bodies: the Creation of Ch'an Pilgrimage Sites" in *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* (eds) by Bernard, Faure., Wu. Susan, Naquin., Chun-fang Yu (University of California Press 2002), 150.

¹⁷ Annoymous. *Buddha The Word* (Kessinger Publishing 2004), 1-5.

sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and the inability to attain ones desires. Second suffering comes from ignorance and the inability to see within. Life is meant to suffer in order to be worthy of a higher state of being. Suffering is said to be self-discipline to further the process of enlightenment. Third, the objective of Buddhists is to remove the suffering from the world but this can only be attain if one has the heart to accomplish it. Lastly suffering does not have to be eternal and can be ended when one can truly see.

The Eight Steps is an idea explained by Henepola Gunaratana in her book entitled *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Path of the Buddha*.¹⁸ The first two steps are Skillful Understanding and Skillful Thinking. These two thought processes help to differentiate immoral and moral behavior. The mind must be trained in ethics and be in the right frame of mind to attain wisdom. Skillful Speech, Skillful Action, and Skillful Livelihood, are the next three steps that help to open the mind, alleviating those from what holds them back, and frees one from pride and excitement.

In essence these steps remove distractions that have evolved from immoral behavior from the mind of the practitioner. Concentration is the theme represented with the remaining steps starting with step six Skillful Effort. Skillful Effort help a practitioner develop mental focus. Skillful Mindfulness involves the ability to concentrate at all times so the mind is able to keep up with an ever-changing world and Skillful Concentration, the focus of the mind on one object or theme at any given time. Concentration allows the mind to be free of anger, despair, and want. A

¹⁸Henepola, Gunaratana. *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Path of the Buddha*, (Wisdom Publications 2008), 11-15.

practitioner's ability to comprehend the truth in life may be achieved through concentration. Morality is the theme of the first two steps and is the foundation for the birth of concentration. Out of concentration wisdom can be attained and it is through wisdom that one can be enlightened.



The Eight Steps and the Four Noble Truths are common themes found in the pilgrims of sacred sites. With every stride a pilgrim is a step closer to redemption. The purpose of going on a pilgrimage is to focus the mind and concentrate on an object or theme such as filial piety or past lives. 6666 steps lead to the summit of Taishan; each step is a step towards redemption just as one immoral step after another leads to reincarnation. Desire needs to be controlled by strong will and control is sought through step-by-step redemption. Buddhism pushes the idea that

pilgrimage should be done by the faithful often yet not excessively as a tool for saving the soul from reincarnation or gaining merit for the next life. In the picture above a man takes on the burden of man by carrying the weight upon his back.¹⁹ This man chooses to be filial rather than taking an easier route. To climb the 6,666 steps to the summit of Taishan one must be devoted spiritually and physically to their endeavor. Pilgrims would often bow every couple of steps to show their devotion, some would bow every step as a supreme act of filial piety. This man is exhibiting his spiritual devotion through an act of filial piety.

Families would often make pilgrimages together which is illustrated in a play entitled “Kanqiannu” by Zheng Tingyu.²⁰ Husband, wife, and son make the journey to Taishan and come across trouble. The Husband and wife have to sell their son to a rich man in order to save themselves from their great misfortune. Many years later the rich man has died and again the couple makes a pilgrimage to Taishan and meets a snobby rich young man who considers the couple low class citizens. It turns out this young man is their son who upon realization of his error in an act of filial piety enriches his parents with wealth and honor. This story illustrates the idea of family coming together to pilgrimage as does the picture above.

Another story entitled *A Nun of Taishan* details officials of the court and pilgrimage.²¹ Many of the more solitary monasteries are not well visited by laypersons and are instead journeyed to by those of higher rank. Teh Hueisheng, his

¹⁹ Simona. Shandong Province in China: Taishan. 2011. (Picture by Tourist).

²⁰ Idema L., Wilt. “The Pilgrimage to Taishan in the Dramatic Literature of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” *Chinese Literature: Essays*, Vol. 19, 1997: 35.

²¹ Lin, Yuiang. John, Day (trans). *Widow, Nun, and Courtesan*, (The John Day Company, 1950), 113-180.

two wives, and friend stop at a nunnery for lunch while pilgrimaging to the summit of Taishan where they meet Yiyun. Yiyun is able to open the eyes of the officials about problems in the nunnery, and guides them towards redemption. In the end the second wife of Huseisheng finds salvation in the nunnery, and the first wife follows her husband to redemption. Yiyun meanwhile plans a pilgrimage that will take her all over China to further her own spiritual enlightenment. Pilgrimage is synonymous with family and filial piety.

Officials frowned upon peasant pilgrimages to sacred mountain localities. Pilgrimages to Taishan can also be linked with danger, such is the case with the novel *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan*.²² This novel features a wife who wishes to go on pilgrimage and is tricked by two older women out of a large sum of money. This cautionary tale could represent the government's feelings towards religious pilgrims. Officials tended to dislike pilgrims venturing to sacred spaces calling them unfit and unclean.

In the opening of Idema Wilt article, there is a letter from the Surveillance Commissioner displaying this attitude towards peasants who venture to Taishan.²³ The pilgrims in his opinion are defiling Taishan and are ignorant of how a sacrifice should be conducted. Peasants when on pilgrimage neglect their businesses, farms, and other duties and this is not to the benefit of the state. Lastly the Surveillance Commissioner addresses the imperial court and beseeches them to put money into Taishan to stop popular festivals.

²² Glen, Dudbridge. "Women Pilgrims to Taishan: Some Pages From a Seventeenth Century Novel." Glen, Dudbridge., Susan, Naquin, Chun-fang Yu (Eds), (California University Press, 2002), 39-63.

²³ Wilt, Idema. "*The Pilgrimage to Taishan in the Dramatic Literature of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*. Chinese Literature." *Essays, Vol. 19, 1997*.

The anonymous author of *Buddha the Word*, further illustrates the ideas of reincarnation and the wheel of samsara.²⁴ All things are reincarnated; animals at one time may have been great men or striving to attain human form for the purpose of seeking enlightenment. The wheel of Samsara also known as the Wheel of Life, illustrates this idea. The wheel of Samsara is a symbol of the process of life, death, suffering, growing old, and being born. One lifetime is only a tiny fraction of time spent trying to attain salvation from eternal suffering. Once a person is able to see Samsara or gaze upon their many lives and see the lessons of those lives can a practitioner attain redemption of ones soul. If one has lived a morally poor life as a human may be reborn as a work animal in a constant state of toil as punishment.

If one attains salvation this transmutes to the rest of the family tree down to the family dog. In a story entitled *Mulian*, the son is a great Buddhist adept who goes to hell to save his mother from suffering.²⁵ This pilgrimage was necessary due to his mother's greed in life and refusal to correct immoral behavior. He shows his filial piety by saving his mother and sacrificing his finger for her benefit. Saving his mother would have been impossible had Mulian not been enlightened.

Enlightenment is not just attached to the person that attains it but to his or her ancestors as well. To become enlightened is to be extremely filial because by being enlightened one may save the souls of their ancestors from suffering.

Daoist deities are a mixture of beliefs from Confucianism to Buddhism that facilitate pilgrimage to Taishan. Taishan hosts two major deities Lord of the Eastern

²⁴ Anonymous. *Buddha The Word*. Kessinger Publishing, 2004. 1-5.

²⁵ William Throdore de Bary, Wing-tsit Chan, Richard John Lufrano, Joseph Adler (Eds). *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From the 1600 Through to the Twentieth Century* (Columbus University Press, 2000), 95-104.

Marshmount and Bixia Yuanjun. The Lord of the Eastern Marshmount is Lord of life and death. He rules over the lands of the dead punishing those who desecrate graves and at times giving longer life to those spiritually progressive. Many who ventured to Taishan went to venerate the lord of Taishan and in doing so help their ancestors, parents, siblings, or friends in the after life. Pilgrimage to Taishan was often the last request of dying family members. In a play from the fourteenth century *Xiao Sun tu* (by the writing club of Hangzhou), a mother and son make the trip to honor husband and father as per his dying request.²⁶ The mother dies upon reaching Taishan but the son is able to fulfill his filial obligations.

Bixia Yuanjun wife of the Lord of the Eastern Marshmount, resided over the birth of children an important concept in the Chinese culture, which prizes sons. Women and men ventured to Taishan to worship for the purposes of attaining a child or in most cases a son to fulfill their duty of filial piety.²⁷ Sons carried on the family name and thus the responsibility of venerating their ancestors. Filial piety towards the ancestor spirits was an important part of Daoist worship. Sons also take on more filial obligations to their aging parents while daughters are married off and their filial obligations change to those of their husband, wives have a filial obligation to produce sons for their new families upon marriage.

In the play “Handhan ji” by Zhang Guobin, the main character Zhang Xiayou attempts to make the pilgrimage to ensure the healthy birth of his unborn son. Unfortunately for Zhang Xiayou in the process of preparing for the trip he is unfilial

²⁶ Idema L., Wilt. “The Pilgrimage to Taishan in the Dramatic Literature of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,” in *Chinese Literature: Essays*, Vol. 19, 1997: 31.

²⁷ Kenneth, Pomeranz. “Orthopraxy, Orthodoxy, and the Goddess(es) of Taishan,” in *Modern China*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2007: 22-46.

to his father. The play ends with the theft of his unborn son and wife and Zhang Xiyou's death. To be unfilial is punishable by death, yet Zhang Xiyou's original intent was to be a filial son.²⁸ Visions often accompanied trips to sacred sites, which is the case for Wang Shi-zhen.

Wang Shi-zhen describes the entrance into what is now the modern city of Tai'an and the relationship between guide companies and pilgrims. Once pilgrims are close to any sacred mountain locality they will be greeted by guides who direct them to inns and entertainment venues. These guides are part of companies that employ actors, and prostitutes for the entertainment of pilgrims. The guide company had set rates for mountain fees, chair rentals, and food and lodging that was on a sliding scale from rich to poor. When visitors to Taishan descend the mountain they are greeted with a celebratory feast. Wang Shi-zhen estimates that nine to eight thousand people visited Taishan daily during the third and fourth months at the height of the pilgrimage season.²⁹

Brian Dott author of *Identity Reflections: Pilgrimages to Mount Tai in Late Imperial China* breaks pilgrims down into three groups: members of the imperial court or officials, scholars, and peasants. Each group of people had specific reasons for journeying to Taishan. Scholars journeyed to mountains to open their minds and find inspiration. Peasants pilgrimaged to ask the gods for favors such as granting a couple a son. The imperial court and officials ventured to Taishan for the *fengshan*

²⁸ Idema L. Wilt. "The Pilgrimage to Taishan in the Dramatic Literature of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," in *Chinese Literature: Essays*, Vol. 19, 1997: 26.

²⁹ Pei-yi Wu. *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*, "An Ambivalent Pilgrim to T'ai Shan in the Seventeenth Century," (eds) Pei-yi Wu. Susan, Naquin., Chun-fang Yu. (University of California Press, 2002), 74.

rite and to inspect the temples and grounds.³⁰ This interpretation is inaccurate because it defines a people in general terms; the Chinese people cannot be broken down this way. The average person went to sacred spaces for several reasons such as salvation, sons, penance, cures, and good health for the pilgrim and their families.³¹

In sacred localities the spirits of deities can manifest; this allowed pilgrims to commune directly with the spirits. In Chang Shang-ying's account of visiting Wu-tai Shan the idea of manifesting spirits is highlighted. Chang Shang-ying sees two garnet lights that flare with his chanting and mist accumulates from places unseen: "Four times I entered the Terraced Mountain beseeching wondrous visions. Five times did the clouds shimmer in the fastness."³² Visiting sacred locations one could acquire merit and benefits for their families towards their next life in the Buddhist tradition. All of these reasons can be directly linked to the observance of filial piety in society.

Taishan in the twenty first century is briefly described by Percy Hylton C. Lucas. Percy Hylton C. Lucas states that Taishan has over 2 million visitors yearly about 13,000 of which are foreign. Taishan is located in the Shandong province north of Taian city where many tourists find lodging and food after their visit. The Jade Emperor peak the tallest of the range stands at 1,524 meters above sea level and is surrounded by protected lands of about 150 square kilometers. Traditionally

³⁰ Dott, Brian R. *Identity Reflections: Pilgrimages to Mount Tai in Late Imperial China*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004).

³¹ Susan, Naquin., Chun-fang Yu. *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*. (University of California Press, 2002), 14.

³² Robert M. Gimello "Chang Shang-ying on Wu-t'ai Shan" (eds) Robert M. Gimello., Susan, Naquin., Chun-fang Yu, (University of California Press, 2002), 103-110.

much of the protected lands were used for farming, but reforestation occurred when Taishan became a protected site in 1987. The forests consist of over 989 different flora species. Eighty percent of Taishan's forest consists of broadleaved trees, conifers, and fruit trees. There are over 200 animal species 122 of which are birds. There are two very important and rare species located on or near Taishan including the red-scaled fish and the fresh water jellyfish.³³

Over seventy-two different emperors presented sacrifices at Taishan indirectly while twelve made the trek personally. Many came to the mountain to preform the *fengshan* ceremony and others to seek spiritual inspiration. Famous scholars such as Du Fu the poet, and philosophers, such as Confucius and Mencius, pilgrimaged to Taishan to open their mind and find inspiration. This makes Taishan a unique historical site that appeals to a multitude of people.³⁴

During the ascent up the mountain one encounters three gates: Heavenly Gate, Middle Heavenly Gate, and Southern Heavenly Gate. The Heavenly gate is called Daizong, from this point to reach the top of the mountain one must climb 6,666 steps; however today there is a bus at the foot of the mountain that will drive to the Middle Heavenly Gate. From the Middle Heavenly Gate people can take a gondola to the top. During the climb up the mountain a variety of different buildings, altars, and inscriptions can be seen. The most important temples are the Temple of Mount Taishan at the bottom of the mountain and the Temple of the Azure cloud at the summit. There are 22 temples, 97 ruins, 819 stone tablets, and

³³ Hylton C. Lucas, Percy. *Protected Landscapes: A Guide for Policy-Makers and Planners*. (Chapman and Hall Publishing, 1992), 116-119.

³⁴ Eugene, Law. *Intercontinental Best of China*. China Intercontinental Press, 2004.

over 1800 stone inscriptions of Buddhist, Daotist, and Confucianism texts which cover Taishan's cliff faces and boulders.³⁵

Destruction of religious symbols and Confucian rulers was common during the Cultural Revolution; however Taishan received minimal damage to its temples and landscape. Mao and many party officials visited Taishan to show their respects and marvel at its beauty, to justify the Mandate of Heaven, much like an emperor would. Mao may have been showing his filial piety to those he respected from history such as the yellow emperor, the forefather of China. After the Cultural Revolution many lost their connections with religious pilgrimages. Years after the Cultural Revolution Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism were reinstated back into society. This was done to ensure morally and ethics resumed which was previously lost. Mao was seen as the father of the Chinese state, which is comparable to an emperor's relationship to his people. In a book about Mao's life by Li Zhisui observes that Mao would often slept with young women who viewed the action as fidelity to the state.³⁶

The majority of those that visit Taishan today are pilgrims and tourists and with tourists come problems. Taishan is no exception. The mountain is in a continuous state of use and many of the stairs and temple buildings must be regularly repaired. Hylton C. Lucas believes that Taishan is overused and does not display a concrete plan for handling the influx of tourists. Tourism on Taishan has created a grouping of stalls for food and trinkets that takes away from the natural

³⁵ Gou, Changjian; Song, Jianzhi; Feng Lingyu. *World Heritage Sites in China*. (China Intercontinental Press 2003).

³⁶ Li, Zhisui. *The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao's Personal Physician*. (Random House Publishing, 1994).

beauty of the site. The summit has several more modern structures to accommodate the tourist trade on Taishan but they further a modern feel to a historical and religious area.³⁷

The government has taken steps according to Hylton C. Percy to remove some modern buildings and to preserve the natural beauty of the mountain. Protected forested lands were extended from 150 km to 426 km. Felling and thinning trees, and gathering firewood is possible but only in certain circumstances and with prior approval, the gathering of herbs, flowers, and hunting in reserve is illegal and areas dedicated to research in to endangered or rare species are not available to the public.³⁸

Modern tourists do not come to Taishan for the same reasons as past pilgrims. To many, Taishan is a historical site of great importance and a religious site, yet many no longer exercise the union of three teachings. Pilgrims still visit Taishan with their families to celebrate marriages and climb the steps for spiritual reasons. Yet many are still reclaiming their spiritually stripped during the Cultural Revolution. Many that lack the spirituality of the past are more aptly named tourists. Pilgrimage is still prominent and many still climb the 6666 steps, however a tourists most often ride the bus and gondola to avoid the stairs.

Taishan's pilgrims are drawn to the mountain to gain children, spiritual merit, sacrifice to Heaven, inspect temples, etc; but in the end it is fundamentally an act of filial piety. This essay connects Taishan with its pilgrims by understanding

³⁷ Percy Hylton C. Lucas. *Protected Landscapes. : A Guide for Policy-Makers and Planners*. (Chapman and Hall Publishing, 1992) 119.

³⁸ Gou, Changjian; Song, Jianzhi; Feng Lingyu. *World Heritage Sites in China*. (China Intercontinental Press 2003).

the ideologies that surround the mountain and their unifying concepts.

Confucianism highlights filial piety, which is associated fengshan rite, the son of Heaven, and mandate of heaven as a form of ethical bondage of the people to the state. Within Daoism and Buddhism, the connection with nature is an act of filial piety towards the ancestor spirits, deities, and Heaven. Pilgrims climbed the many steps in all states of health to demonstrate their fidelity. In Buddhism the four noble truths and the Eightfold path are on the mind of every pilgrim because with each step one attains merit.

Each step of the 6,666 to the summit of Mt. Taishan is a step towards salvation and Taishan is a conduit for those seeking spiritual salvation. The enlightenment of one person can save an entire family from continual suffering; the person that attains salvation has achieved a supreme act of filial piety towards their family. Tourism has engulfed Taishan today but the mountain still attracts a healthy number of pilgrims. With the Cultural Revolution people lost their connection to the three teachings but they did not lose their connection to filial piety. Taishan and its pilgrims expound filial piety as the overarching connection between the three philosophies.

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