Chinese Religious Life

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Communal Worship and Festivals in Chinese Villages

Wai Lun Tam

"Every five or ten miles, local customs are not the same."

Introduction

The Chinese word *shehui,* which is used to translate the English word for *society*, refers to a religious activity. The term is a combination of two characters: one meaning "the shrine of the earth god," and a second meaning "an assembly." In ancient China, the term *society* referred to the assembly for welcoming and parading the gods during the spring and autumn sacrifice to the deity of the soil.[1] In short, the Chinese word for *society* means "temple festival"—the temple festivals of the deity of the soil. Later it came to mean temple festivals in general. It is not accidental that the Chinese coined the word for *society* on the basis of temple festivals.

Chinese religion has long been understood in terms of the Three Teachings: Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. An obvious problem of subsuming Chinese religion under the category of the Three Teachings is that only a tiny minority of the Chinese population are formal members of the Buddhist or Daoist communities, while there is even less of a "Confucian" community. In this connection, the eminent Chinese scholar Hu Shih (1891–1962) claimed that China had no native religion, just customs, and that its only real religion was an import, namely, Buddhism. A deeper implication of representing Chinese religion as the Three Teachings is that it is compatible with a Western model of religion and is readily interpreted from a Eurocentric Christian perspective and, thus, serves to perpetuate Eurocentric values. This means that priority is given to canonical texts, to a focus on doctrinal belief, to an understanding that the goal of religion is transcendence, and to an emphasis on intellectual activity such as philosophy or theology.[2] Proceeding from such a normative viewpoint will lead to a misunderstanding of non-Western traditions such as China's (see chapters 4 and 10).

In this chapter, we will explore an alternative way of studying Chinese religion. Recognizing the contextual nature of all cultural practices, including religion, we propose to examine Chinese religion in a local and rural setting. Inasmuch as 95% of the Chinese population traditionally lived in villages and, despite the rapid urbanization process, over half of the population (57%) still live in villages, it is clear that any examination of Chinese religion sensitive to its context could lead us only to the countryside. If elite traditions characterized by texts and philosophies, as represented by the Three Teachings, are not the dominant modality of Chinese religious expression and most religious behavior, an alternative way to study Chinese religion should be on-site ethnographical observation and description of religion at the grassroots level. The vast area and enormous diversity of culture in China, as well as our limited resources, however, prevent us from considering the whole of China. This chapter focuses on southeast China, especially the mountain areas of the provinces of Jiangxi, Fujian, and Guangdong, where the scale of destruction of traditions during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) was relatively smaller than elsewhere. The situation is significantly different in other parts of China.

An important note on the use of vocabulary when doing fieldwork on Chinese religion in Chinese villages is that *customs* is a much more useful term to use in the field than *religion*. As it is commonly known, the term *religion* in China is typically understood as referring to the five officially recognized institutional religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism). Therefore, if we actually visit a Chinese village and ask about *religion*, we will never get to the real religious life of the villagers. Instead, we will be referred to a church or a monastery in the county seat. If, however, we ask the villagers about their customs, real conversation on religion and local community will begin.

As the saying goes, "So many countries, so many customs." In China, we perhaps should modify it to say, "So many villages, so many customs." In fact, there is a Chinese idiom that says, "Every five or ten miles, local customs are not the same." Sometimes it is not only customs that differ in two given villages; even their dialects are not the same. It would be an exaggeration to say that every village in China has its own customs and dialect, but it would not be difficult to find two neighboring villages that have different customs and dialects. This gives us some idea of the kind of diversity, complexity, and variety we are dealing with in Chinese villages.

Architecture, Fengshui, and the Use of Space in Chinese Villages

We will start our investigation by examining the structure and orientation of vernacular houses in southeast Chinese villages. The first thing we notice when we visit a Chinese village is the buildings. Since the Reform and Opening policy was launched in 1978, Chinese villages, especially those in the South, have been experiencing huge changes. These changes were brought about by the massive migration of the working population of the village to work in the factories in booming coastal cities such as

FIGURE 2.1 *Donglong village, Jiangxi province. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Xiamen. Only old people and mothers with children are left in the village, and many of the village houses are virtually empty. In the course of time, those working in the factories of the coastal areas send remittances back to their villages to build new village houses of two to three stories. As a result, three types of houses can be discerned, standing side by side, in contemporary villages in the South: traditional ancient gray brick or stone houses built before the Communist liberation in 1949; old clay houses built during the 1960s and '70s; and new multistoried houses built in the 1980s, '90s, and after. Our estimation, however, is that over 60% of Chinese villages are still traditional in appearance, dominated by mostly single-story bungalow-style houses.

In the very appearance of a village, we see the major role played by Chinese geomancy or fengshui. Fengshui represents the Chinese concept of space (see chapter 7). It is a symbolic system for gaining and keeping control of land and water, resources that are critical to survival and prosperity in the agricultural society of traditional China. Manipulation of fengshui is said to bring the village prosperity and fertility. Lineage registers, in which lineages (extended families going back several generations) record their genealogies, usually contain descriptions of the configuration of the whole village and the grave of the ancestor from a fengshui perspective. The basic idea of Chinese geomancy, as indicated by the compound word fengshui, is about capturing chthonic energy (energy represented by *qi* or *feng*, literally: "wind") and water (*shui*, literally: "water"). The chthonic energy to which

fengshui pays so much attention also takes the concrete form of water needed for agriculture and male children that stand for manpower for agricultural production. Thus, fengshui expresses the most coveted goods in villages; namely, vitality and fertility.

Except for the striking differences between the traditional and the newer houses, the architecture in villages is actually quite uniform. This is due to a fengshui concern. We are constantly told that a house in a village should not stand out from the rest or it will be blamed for any misfortune anywhere in the village. A house standing out from the rest is said to look like a man carrying a heavy load of buckets with a pole. A building protruding from the rest is said to look like a tumor and symbolizes one (because like produces like; or, an effect resembles its cause). Hence the height of the individual houses in a village should be standardized. This principle of standardizing the height of houses in a village also gives us a glimpse of the Chinese value system. Priority is attached to the group, with the group being put before the individual.

The other obvious aspect of architecture in Chinese villages is the presence of large entrance gates in front of villages, big houses, and temples.

These gates are oriented to capture the chthonic energy. This is, again, related to a fengshui belief that states that the gate of a building is four thousand times more important than the building.

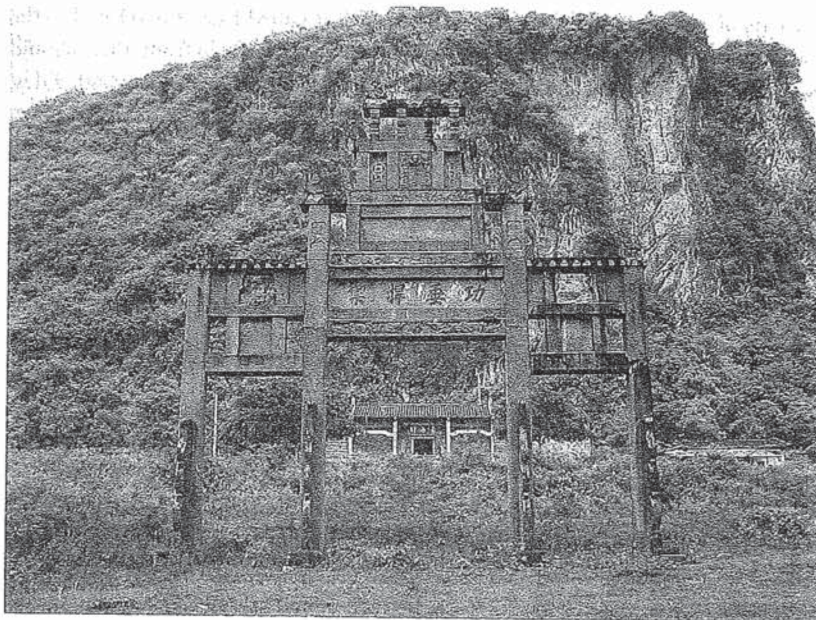

FIGURE 2.2 *Lineage hall gate at Qigong village, Guangdong province. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

The ideal geomantic condition of a village is such that it is surrounded on all sides by rising terrain. This same principle applies to a single house, a temple, a graveyard, or a village. There is no fundamental difference between secular and religious buildings (including graves and temples). A good site is one that captures most of the earth's energy currents. Houses are built around the "dragon node" where there is a concentration of energy, or an accumulation and concentration of *qi*. The first principle of Chinese fengshui is, therefore, to locate the earth energy or the *qi*. In fengshui, it is believed that the earth energy flows along the rising terrain. When a mountain opens up to flat land surrounded on all sides by such terrain, this is a first sign of a good site.

The basic configuration of a good fengshui location consists, therefore, of a group of mountains leading to a valley. In fengshui, the mountains are imagined in the form of a dragon due to undulations that resemble the rise and fall of a dragon's body. The earth energy that flows along a group of mountains is called dragon arteries or dragon veins. The last mountain of a group of mountains leading to a valley is called a back mountain because a village, house, temple, or grave will be built in front of it, thus backed by the mountain.

After locating the flow of *qi* by observing the terrain, the next step is to locate the point where the *qi* is most concentrated. In Chinese fengshui, water flowing crosswise is the means to retain advancing *qi*. It is also believed that where earth energy concentrates, the terrain will miraculously appear in the form of an armchair, that is, a central area surrounded on three sides. The belief is that most of the currents of energy flow through this area, and it is called the "dragon node," the spot where houses, temples, or graves should be built. Directly in front, there should be a large area of open flat land surrounded by small mountains on both sides; there should be another mountain in front, but far away. This flat land is also known as the "Hall of Light." The mountain on the left is usually called "Azure Dragon," and the one on the right "White Tiger." The mountain in front is called "Vermillion Bird," while the mountain at the back is called "Black Tortoise." These are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a good site with ideal geomantic conditions.

A fengshui master will sometimes summarize a basic configuration for ideal geomantic conditions by referring to the presence of the four animals: dragon, tiger, bird, and tortoise. This actually means a flat land surrounded by rising terrain. So far we have been concentrating on *qi* that is associated closely with mountain terrain. Another basic factor for a good site is water—ideally, water flowing from the back mountain along both sides of the site in a zigzag path and then flowing crosswise in front so as to stop the *qi* from flowing away. Trees are usually planted at the water exit—that is, where the water flows away from the house, temple, village, or grave. This is a device to help retain the water because, as the Chinese saying goes, "water stands for wealth." Trees are planted, and in addition a small shrine is usually found at the water exit to guide the water. When there is no water flowing crosswise, a pool may be dug as a replacement.

FIGURE 2.3 *Fengshui Geomorphology: 1. Dragon vein; 2. Back mountain; 3. Dragon's lair; 4–6. Inner, central, and outer Hall of Light; 7–8. Azure dragon (left); 9–10. White tiger (right); 11. Desk ridge; 12. Surrounding ridges; 13. Bowing front hill; 14–15. Side ridges. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

Once a site is chosen according to the above-mentioned principles, the final step is to choose the orientation. We were told that in considering the geomantic conditions of a site, the shape or landscape configuration accounts for 70% and the direction for 30%.

Fengshui in a village involves different rituals. Because the dragon represents the energy of the earth, once every few years a "dragon pacifying" ritual for revitalizing the chthonic energies will be performed.

Although one can also perform the dragon pacifying ritual for an individual house, it is more commonly performed at the lineage hall or a temple of a village. In some counties, dragons are paraded from the "back mountain" to their village.

Although the dragon dance today is used as a carnival performance to mark any important event, or as an urban recreational activity, the dragon dance in a village reminds us of its origin, which is closely related to the fengshui belief.

Fengshui in a village is also closely related to exorcism. After locating a good site, a geomancer often acts as a demon expeller as well, by killing a cock and sprinkling its blood on a building site. At the time of a burial and when a new house or temple is being built, a geomancer performs a ritual to "yell for the dragon," which helps to energize and consecrate a newly found site. It involves

FIGURE 2.4 *Dragon pacifying ritual. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

FIGURE 2.5 *Dragon dance at Liangcheng, Fujian province. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

burning a contract to announce the new owner of the site to the nether world. At times, geomancers will be possessed by the gods to help them locate a good fengshui spot.

Some scholars argue that fengshui is an amoral and competitive system of practices: families and lineages use it to direct energies for their own benefit, while diverting benefits away from others.[3] However, many geomancers are strong believers in the system of cosmic recompense described in chapter 1. This means that they would hesitate to find a good site for someone who does not deserve one, because punishment, in the form of misfortune, would befall the geomancer. Indeed, if his client has no moral merit, the cost for a good fengshui site would be deducted from the geomancer's moral merit.

Lineages, Ancestor Worship, and Lineage Halls

The geographical location of Chinese villages is a deliberate decision that is closely related to the fengshui concerns and local history of the villagers. As a rule, all lineages in the villages of South China trace their ancestry to immigrants from the North. Most claim to have arrived during the Song dynasty (960–1279). Each lineage has a legend describing its founding. These legends typically follow a pattern and always have to do with fengshui. The first settler of the lineage, usually a scholar official, passed by the area, sometimes during an official trip to the South; attracted by the good fengshui, he decided to settle down. Sometimes the story starts with a migrating lineage from the North. The migration is normally triggered by overpopulation in the original village. The story goes on to state that the ancestor's carrying pole broke when he entered the area during his trip to look for a new place to settle. This is interpreted as a supernatural sign from an ancestor or protector deity, an indication that he should stay in that spot. In other cases, the founder of the lineage received instruction from a local deity in a dream, telling him to settle down when he passed through the area. The foundation legends of lineages arriving later than others usually tell stories of herding ducks. A lineage founder might be the servant of another already settled lineage, who, alerted by the ducks' prodigious egg production, an indication of good fengshui, built his first hut on the site where the lineage then developed. The site might also later become the ancestral hall of the lineage. In another frequently encountered story, the founder of the lineage arrived as an indentured servant who had been slighted by his wealthy employer. A geomancer took pity on him, telling the founder the best site on which to build his first hut, and due to this good fengshui, the lineage grew strong. The ancestral hall built for the first settler of the lineage and other ancestors is an important focus of religious culture in Chinese villages.

Each Chinese village may consist of one or more lineages. A lineage is an extended family going back several generations. The founding ancestor of a

lineage, as well as the descendants of all his sons, are collectively venerated in a building called a *lineage hall*. Today, lineage halls in contemporary South China are often called "senior citizens' centers." This shift resulted from villagers' negotiation with the local government to keep their lineage hall without labeling it as a place for "feudal" or "superstitious" activity. This is a new development, of course, but the lineage hall in a Chinese village is itself a relatively recent development. In early days, during the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE), commoners were not allowed to have their own lineage halls. When their parents died, they would venerate them in their own homes. Another option for commoners was to venerate their ancestor in a graveyard or in a Buddhist temple. Sometimes a Buddhist shrine would be built next to the graveyard and monks hired to see to the veneration of ancestors. Until the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), only high-ranking officials could build a lineage hall, for the veneration of up to four generations of their ancestors. Even today, we can find relics of flagpoles that stood in front of most lineage halls, signs indicating the success of some lineage members in the Civil Service Examination in times past. A section to record the official titles of all lineage members who held official position in the court is a must in all lineage registers. It was not until the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), however, that the building of lineage halls by commoners became a widespread phenomenon in China.

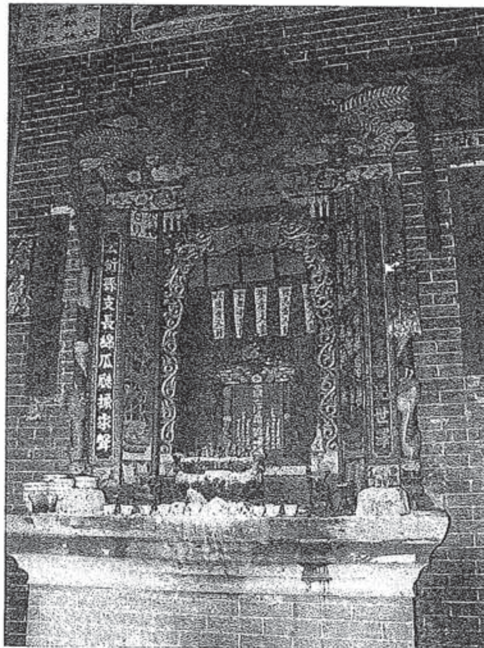

FIGURE 2.6 *Ancestors' tablet at Xicun village, Guangdong province. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

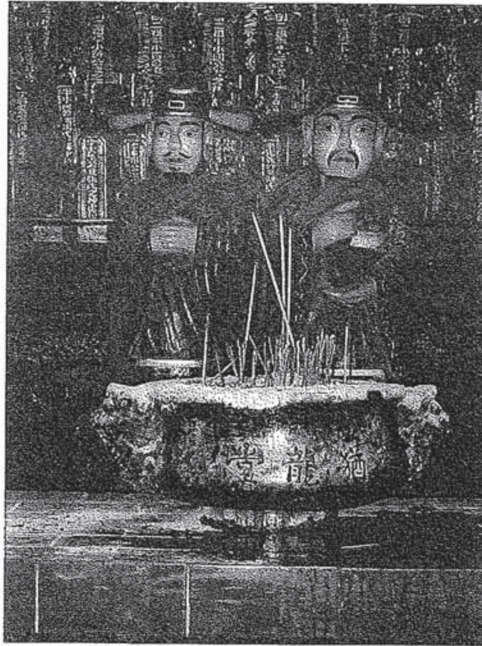

FIGURE 2.7 *Statues of lineage founders, Dachenggang, Guangdong province. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

Lineage halls may be arranged in a great variety of ways. We found lineage halls with a single tablet to represent all the ancestors and others with dozens of tablets representing individual ancestors.

Although the criteria to determine whose ancestor's tablet could be put in the lineage hall is solely a financial one in contemporary times, we were told that in the past the social status and contribution to the lineage of one's ancestor had to be taken into consideration. At times, an image of a god may be found in the lineage hall, violating a general principle that the lineage hall is a place to venerate ancestors, not to worship deities. Closer examination reveals that these images belong to ancestors who became immortalized as gods. Ancestors who became gods were frequently former Daoist masters, knowledgeable in Daoist magic and able to fight against evil forces even before they died. In one lineage in northern Guangdong, however, we found an image of the first settler of the lineage being venerated in the lineage hall together with the tablets of other ancestors.

The image of an ancestor is sometimes replaced by a portrait. In both Guangdong and Fujian, we found cases of ancestors represented by a portrait, rather than by wooden tablets. In individual homes, gods are usually represented by a list of names on red paper, in front of which a tablet is put for the ancestor. The list of gods might contain anywhere from seven to twenty-one names. In some cases, the gods

worshipped at home are not represented by written lists, but by actual images worshipped together with the ancestor's tablet.[4]

Lineage halls are used for the purpose of "red" and "white" life cycle rituals in the village. "Red" rituals refer to weddings, celebrations for old people's birthdays (usually over sixty) and the birth of a baby. The focus of these celebrations is a communal meal at the lineage hall. A "white" ritual is a funeral. A funeral ritual in a village lasts for two to three days, when priests are invited to perform the rituals.

On the first day, relatives will pay a visit to offer condolences. A big, satisfying meal for all is usually served in the lineage hall.

Ancestors are venerated during the last day and first day of the lunar year, when family members will bring offerings and burn incense in the lineage hall. Communal sacrifice to the ancestors takes place in the autumn and in the spring. Autumn veneration is usually performed on the Double Nine festival (the ninth day of the ninth lunar month) and spring veneration on the Qingming festival (literally, Clear and Bright Festival, a traditional Chinese festival on the one-hundred-fourth day after the winter solstice, or the fifteenth day from the spring equinox, which usually occurs in April). These are days when all the lineage members gather at the lineage hall to perform group veneration of their ancestor. Members who work far from the village return on these special days. For a large lineage, members from the same lineage branch will arrive together, accompanied by a hired lion dance troupe.

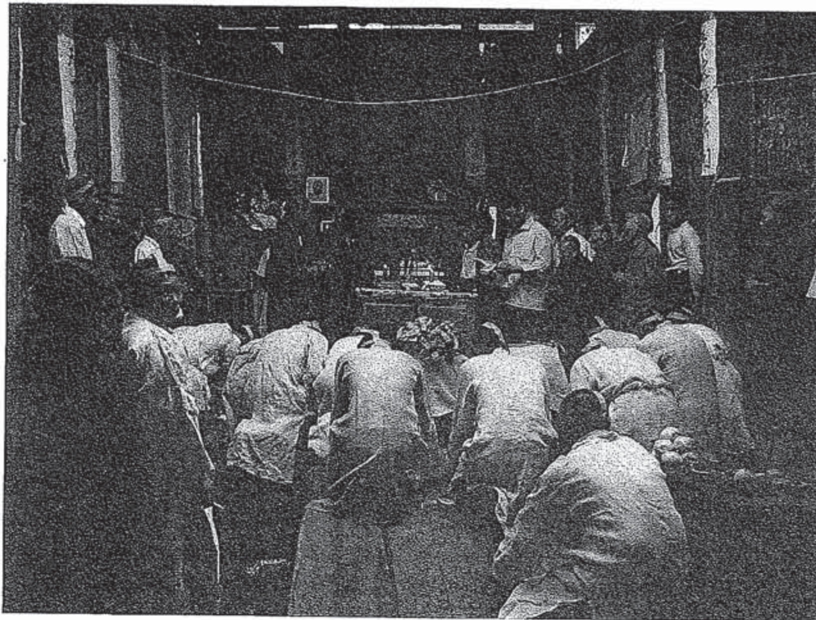

FIGURE 2.8 *Funeral in a lineage hall, Taining Fujian province. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

FIGURE 2.9 *Lion dance troupe in a lineage hall, Taining, Fujian province. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

Counting the number of lion troupes can, therefore, give us a rough idea of the number of branches in the lineage, again indicating the size of the lineage. The ancestor veneration in the lineage hall will usually take place in the morning. It consists of offering incense, food, and wine to the ancestors and a reading of a memorial to the ancestors by an elder member of the lineage. The ritual will be followed by a visit, known as "tomb sweeping," to the graveyards of the ancestors. The whole lineage will first visit the grave of the first settler and then break into groups according to lineage branches. The grave of the immediate ancestors will be visited last.

Gods, Ancestors, and Ghosts

As Mao Zedong (1893–1976) observed, both the lineage and the worshipping of gods were two basic constituents of traditional Chinese society.[5] The former was informed by Confucian ideology. The latter was constructed from the cultural resources of both Buddhism and Daoism. Scholars such as Francis L. K. Hsü (1909–1999) thought that lineages constituted the essential social fabric of China. Hsü is right to speak of life in South China as lived "under the ancestors' shadow."[6]

Lagerwey, however, claims that the ancestors, in turn, lived "in the shadow of the gods" who represented a public dimension of life that circumscribed and transcended the private life of the lineage.[7]

When we come to the religion of the village, local gods dominate the scene. Based on field observation, Lagerwey classifies village gods in South China hierarchically in three groups: (1) those with neither open-air altar nor temple; (2) those with an open-air altar; and (3) those with a temple.

The first type, which are sometimes called "Uncle King," are the spirits of rocks, fields, trees, or bridges. Sons and daughters with bad health are sometimes contracted out in adoption to tree or stone gods. Some may even be given names that include the character for "trees" or "stones," or other associated characters.

Elsewhere, sons and daughters are contracted out to Guanyin (Avalokitesvara) or other local deities. Parents of such adoptive children usually have to worship the divine foster parent annually, along with the child, and "ransom" the child when he or she reaches the age of sixteen. Local ritual specialists will be hired for this job.

Gods with open-air altars are usually called "Duke-King," or "Big King." Very often they are the protectors of a village, with their altar situated at and guarding the place where the river flows out of the village. At the start of the New Year, villagers pray there for good fortune. In the winter solstice, they thank the god, usually by performing a great communal sacrifice.

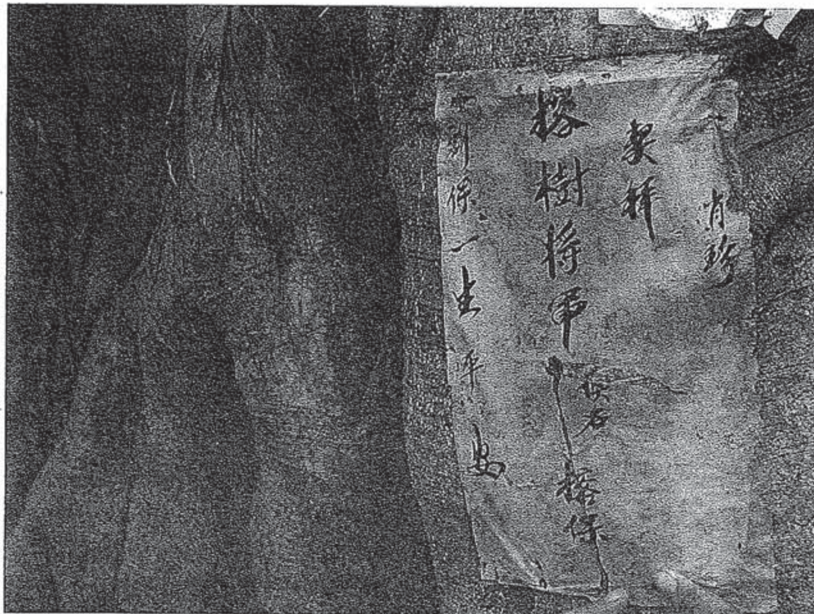

FIGURE 2.10 *Child Sale Contract with a Tree, Yangshan, Guangdong province. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

There is great variety with regard to the deities in a temple. Gods enshrined in a temple are, generally speaking, higher level gods, but such a temple could also be a small shrine for the earth god, or a temple for a single local deity. In most temples, gods are represented by images, but they can also be represented by a written tablet, or in some cases by a piece of red paper containing a list of the gods' names. Sometimes, only an incense burner and offering cups are found in the ruins of temples destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. At the other extreme, there can be as many as sixteen or more deities on the altar of a temple. In Jiangxi, there are temples where only the head of a god or his masks are worshipped; these depict generals who were beheaded. Masks of the gods will be worn for a ritual dance at the start of the year.

There are two main categories of temples: (1) altars and temples, and (2) monasteries and cloisters. The first category consists of three types: altars for local gods; temples for more widely known and higher-ranking gods, such as the city god, the renowned Empress of Heaven (Tianhou), and Lord Guan; and shrines for historical worthies and meritorious officials that reflect the Confucian ideology of righteousness and state loyalty. The temples of higher level gods are likely to be found in townships rather than villages. The second category refers to Daoist cloisters and Buddhist monasteries. They are frequently established in the surrounding hills and are normally occupied by monks, nuns, or lay female religious specialists known as "vegetarian mothers." They perform both village funerals and the communal ritual sacrifices.

This account of village gods would be incomplete without a mention of their opposite, the ghosts or demons. If gods occupy different vital points in the villages, ghosts, their opposite, are not tied to a single spot, but wander and make surprise appearances in solitary places. By definition, ghosts are the spirits of those who are not venerated as ancestors. Either they do not have any offspring to venerate them or, because they died violently, custom forbids their descendants from giving them offerings. One of the main purposes of the communal sacrifice is precisely to subdue the wandering ghosts of the area. A sacrifice is offered first, followed by an exorcism to drive away any uncooperative ghosts. The Ghost Festival, on the fifteenth night of the seventh lunar month, is the day when ghosts come out from the lower realm. Every family will prepare ritualistic food offerings and burn incense, joss paper, and papier-mâché imitations of items such as clothes, gold, and other fine goods to be burned for the ghosts on that day.

Rituals, Festivals, and Priests

The first and fifteenth day of each month and the last and first days of each lunar year are traditional dates for worshipping gods. Apart from these dates, one will find few visitors to most village temples. An exception is the birthday of the principal deity of a temple, when the temple is jam-packed with worshippers. Other

important dates are the final day of the renovation of a temple and the day to redeem a communal vow pledged before the gods.

After praying to the gods by burning incense, worshippers typically draw divination sticks to learn their fate (see chapter 1). The number of divination sticks varies from 12, 28, 36, 50, or 100, but the most common number is 100. The divination sticks are put in a canister that is shaken backward and forward until one strip rises above the others and falls to the ground. It is believed that when one shakes the canister, the deity of the temple comes forward to pick the strip for the worshipper. In some temples, mostly found in Taiwan, a big canister holding long strips is used.

Instead of shaking the canister, one goes forward and picks up the strip randomly without looking at the number marked on it. Each strip carries a number that corresponds to an answer that is printed on a piece of paper, or sometimes printed on cloth, or carved on a block and hung on the temple wall. The answers are framed as poetry and are usually classified according to category: family, health, fate, wealth, fame, marriage, offspring, livestock matters, and so on. One should finish one's divination by putting some money into the donation box of the temple. A diviner is usually needed to give an interpretation of the obscure meaning of the poem; in this case, he also receives a small reward. A study of a system of 100 divination sticks has shown that there are 13 good, 69 medium, and only 18 bad divination results; 60 sticks exhort one to go the right way and to do good.[8]

FIGURE 2.11 *Canister holding divination sticks. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

Divination blocks are used to check that the divination slip that has come out is the correct one. If it is not, the shaking process or the picking is repeated. Divination blocks are moon-shaped pieces of wood that are used to communicate with the gods. They are held at chest level usually from a kneeling position and dropped to the ground. One side of the block is convex and the other is flat. When they both land flat side up, one must ask again. When the blocks both land flat side down, the answer is no. When they are one up and one down, the answer is yes.

As mentioned earlier, it is common for a village or a group of villages to pray for good fortune, to make a pledge before their gods for a wish of prosperity and health at the start of a New Year. In the winter solstice, they thank the god, usually by performing a great communal sacrifice. Depending on the economy of a village, the service will last from two to seven days (see chapter 4). A three- to five-day event is most common when local ritual specialists are invited to perform the communal sacrifice. An organizing committee takes care of the whole event, including raising funds to build a temporary shed for the event and to hire the ritual specialists. The organizing committee also acts as a representative of the whole village, and its members take turns participating in every session of the whole ritual. For the rest of the villagers, a female member of each family will come with a basket of offerings for the individual worship of the gods on the main day of the event, usually coinciding with the birthday of the god.

FIGURE 2.12 *Deity on parade during festival, Donglong, Jiangxi province. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

A parade of some kind is usually organized during a communal sacrifice, during which the statue of the god is taken on a tour through his domain.

The route of the procession always coincides with the boundaries of the village's territory. Thus, the procession of the gods also serves to mark off the village's territory and, at the same time, has the function of demonstrating and reinforcing the economic and social power of its community. Like military exercises in modern countries, it shows neighbors the power of both the gods and the people (represented by the youths carrying the gods). The festival procession at once unifies the group and acts as the focus of local identity.[9]

The more complex rituals are conducted by priests, who are hired by villagers to perform their services. Most of them are part-time workers, agricultural laborers during the peak farming season and ritual specialists during the slack season. Scholars usually call them Daoist priests, although they often do not identify themselves as such.

Many priests in South China belong to the Lüshan tradition. This tradition can be easily identified, as the ritual specialist has to cross-dress as a woman when performing ritual. This is because the founders of the tradition were three ladies whose surnames were Chen, Lin, and Li. The ritual implements they use consist of horns and ritual knives.

FIGURE 2.13 *Lüshan Daoist priest in Gutian, Fujian province. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

FIGURE 2.14 *Buddhist priest, Huanghua, Guangdong province. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

In other cases, the Daoist and Buddhist gods are represented together by writings on a tablet.

A closer examination shows that many of them actually have a clear Buddhist identity, demonstrated by the setting of their ritual altar and their clothing during performance of a communal sacrifice ritual in the village.

A reading of their ritual memorials submitted to the god also shows their self-identity as Buddhist ritual specialists. Some of them have two identities, both Buddhist and Daoist. These Buddho-Daoist ritual specialists will change identity according to the ritual they perform. Indeed, Daoist rituals are seen as most effective for exorcising ghosts, whereas Buddhist rites are more concerned with the universal deliverance of souls.

Conclusion

There are two main aspects of village religion in China: seasonal sacrifice to ancestors in the lineage hall and religious festivals in the territorial temples. The former represents a "private" dimension of village life associated with family and lineage,

FIGURE 2.15 *"Hot and noisy" crowds at a festival, Lianzhou, Guangdong province. (Photo Wai Lun Tam)*

whereas the latter represents a "public" dimension that circumscribes and transcends family and lineage.

The overall rhythms of traditional Chinese life are marked by customs that divide the year into "ordinary time" and "festival time." Festival time is a time to relax and is filled with a carnival spirit, or in Chinese, a "hot and noisy" experience.

This applies to both lineage activities and communal temple rituals. These are important cultural resources of indigenous traditions that witness to the creativity, vitality, and diversity of the Chinese culture. They not only represent a precious heritage of intangible culture but are also an important cultural resource to resolve problems brought on by modernization and globalization. As Lagerwey once said,

> If I had to single out our one most important discovery, it would be the virtually infinite variety of local culture, even from one village to the next, let alone from one region to the next.... It is the cultural richness of these expressions of popular creativity that is, for me, the defining feature of these societies, especially when compared with the increasingly homogenized, not to say tasteless culture produced by the globalizing economy.[10]

Notes

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1. *Hanyu da cidian* (The Dictionary of Chinese) (Shanghai: Xinhua Shudian, 1991), 7:833, s.v. "She."

2. Jordan Paper, "Religious Studies: Time to Move from a Eurocentric Bias?" in *Religious Studies: Issues, Prospects and Proposals*, ed. Klaus K. Klostermaier and Larry W. Hurtado (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1991), 76–77. See also his *The Spirits Are Drunk: Comparative Approaches to Chinese Religion* (Albany: State University of New York, 1995), 7.

3. Ole Bruun, *Fengshui in China: Geomantic Divination between State Orthodoxy and Popular Religion* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003), 132, 175.

4. See, for instance, David K. Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: The Folk Religion of a Taiwanese Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

5. Mao Zedong, *Mao zedong xuanji* (Collected Works of Mao Zedong) (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1968), 31.

6. Francis L. K. Hsü, *Under the Ancestors' Shadow: Kinship, Personality and Social Mobility in China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1948, 1967).

7. John Lagerwey, "The Structure and Dynamics of Chinese Rural Society," in *History and Socio-economy: Proceedings of International Conference on Hakkaology*, ed. Cheng-Kuang Hsu (Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 2000), 4–5.

8. See Wu Lizhen, *Xianggang Huang daxian xinyang* (The Faith of the Immortal Wong Tai Sin in Hong Kong) (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1997).

9. See John Brim, "Village Alliance Temples in Hong Kong" in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur Wolf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 93–103.

10. John Lagerwey's concluding remarks in a two-volume collection of essays published in his Traditional Hakka Society Series, vols. 1 to 10. See John Lagerwey, *Kejia chuantong shehui* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), Part II: *Lineage Society and Its Customs*, "Introduction," 518–520.