ONE

The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites: Elementary Forms, Ritual Sequence, and the Primacy of Performance

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In one important respect this collection of essays is the sequel to an earlier volume entitled *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*.[1] The popular-culture conference (held in 1980) considered the general theme of Chinese cultural diversity and uniformity, looking specifically at the question What held Chinese society together? There were, of course, many institutions and social processes that led to the creation of a unified, centrally organized culture in late imperial China. One of the most obvious was control over the written word as expressed in literature and religious texts;[2] equally important was the subtle manipulation of oral performing arts, notably opera and public storytelling.[3] The authors of *Popular Culture* approached the problem of diversity within unity from many angles, but conference discussions made it clear that one important dimension was missing, namely, ritual.

If anything is central to the creation and maintenance of a unified Chinese culture, it is the standardization of ritual. To be Chinese is to understand, and accept the view, that there is a correct way to perform rites associated with the life-cycle, the most important being weddings and funerals. By following accepted ritual routines ordinary citizens participated in the process of cultural unification. In most cases they did so voluntarily,

1. David Johnson, Andrew Nathan, and Evelyn Rawski, eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).

2. David Johnson, "Communication, Class, and Consciousness in Late Imperial China," in Johnson et al., *Popular Culture*, pp. 34–72; James Hayes, "Specialists and Written Materials in the Village World," in Johnson et al., *Popular Culture*, pp. 75–111.

3. Tanaka Issei, "The Social and Historical Context of Ming-Ch'ing Local Drama," in Johnson et al., *Popular Culture*, pp. 143–160; Barbara E. Ward, "Regional Operas and Their Audiences," in Johnson et al., *Popular Culture*, pp. 161–187; and "Not Merely Players: Drama, Act, and Ritual in Traditional China," *Man* n.s. 14 (1979): 18–39.

without the necessity of enforcement by state authorities. What we accept today as "Chinese" is in large part the product of a centuries-long process of ritual standardization.

This volume, therefore, is more than a set of essays about death and mortuary ritual: It is a study in cultural homogenization as expressed in performance, practice, and beliefs regarding the dead. The essays that follow demonstrate that there was a uniform structure of funerary rites in late imperial China. The elements of this structure are outlined below. It is my contention that the proper performance of the rites, in the accepted sequence, was of paramount importance in determining who was and who was not deemed to be fully "Chinese." Performance, in other words, took precedence over belief—it mattered little what one believed about death or the afterlife as long as the rites were performed properly. The polemical tone of this essay is deliberate. It is hoped that others will take up the cause of belief, thereby leading to an exchange of views regarding the role of ritual in Chinese society.

RITUAL: THE TRANSFORMATIVE ASPECT

Given that this volume focuses on funeral rites and mortuary practices, it seems appropriate to begin with a general discussion of ritual. There is, of course, a vast literature on this problem, and I do not propose to review all aspects of the topic here. Suffice it to note that anthropologists have long debated the meaning and definition of ritual; unfortunately, little agreement has been reached among contending schools, and there is still no generally accepted definition.[4] However, in all studies of the subject it is generally assumed that ritual is about transformation—in particular it relates to the transformation of one being or state into another, changed being or state. Most anthropologists would agree that it is this transformative aspect that sets ritual apart from other social actions. That which is merely repeated is not necessarily ritual. Rather, rituals are repeated because they are expected to have transformative powers.[5] Rituals change people and things; the ritual process is active, not merely passive.

4. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969); Jean La Fontaine, ed., *The Interpretation of Ritual* (London: Tavistock, 1972); Clyde Kluckhohn, "Myths and Rituals: A General Theory," *Harvard Theological Review* 35 (1942): 45–79; S. J. Tambiah, "A Performative Approach to Ritual" (Radcliffe-Brown Lecture, 1979), *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1979): 113–169; Sally Falk Moore and Barbara Myerhoff, eds., *Secular Ritual* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1977); Edmund Leach, *Culture and Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Ronald Grimes, "Ritual Studies: Two Models," *Religious Studies Review* 2, no. 4 (1976): 13–24.

5. Fred W. Clothey, *Rhythm and Intent: Ritual Studies from South India* (Bombay: Blackie and Son, 1983), pp. 1–5.

One of the most insightful studies of ritual to appear in recent years is Gilbert Lewis's *Day of Shining Red.*[6] This study is a minute "unpacking" of a puberty rite practiced by New Guinea villagers. The author works his way through the received definitions of ritual only to find them wanting. He concludes: "What is clear and explicit about ritual is how to do it—rather than its meaning."[7] The people he worked among knew how to perform rites, and they knew when something was performed incorrectly, but they could not provide ready explanations (in words) for what was being expressed, communicated, or symbolized. This, of course, is a familiar problem to all fieldworkers, not just those who work in New Guinea.

Lewis raises a fundamental question that, at one time or another, has haunted most scholars who attempt to analyze rituals: How can we go beyond what we are told by informants, texts, or documentary sources?[8] Many anthropologists try to create meaning by reassembling symbols, metaphors, and actions into a coherent set of messages—thereby engaging in structural analyses of various types. Lewis is not alone in questioning such procedures.[9] Whose meaning are we constructing when rituals are interpreted: our informants' or our own? Nor is it possible, as some have suggested, to present "value free" or "pure" descriptions of ritual, devoid of contaminating interpretations by the observer. The very act of description involves multiple judgments regarding the behavior being performed. Even the most detailed description demands that one isolate certain actions as being more significant than others.

Films and photographs of ritual present equally complicated problems of analysis. During the conference that preceded this volume participants observed nearly twenty hours of slides and films dealing with Chinese funerary ritual. It was fascinating, and enlightening, to learn that everyone present "saw" something different in the visual records of Chinese rites. Historians and anthropologists, in particular, did not even appear to be witnessing the same events, to judge from their comments (the historians were preoccupied with written messages and texts evident in the slides or films, whereas anthropologists tended to treat these messages as peripheral or at least secondary to the actions of ritual specialists; see Evelyn Rawski's observations on this matter, chapter 2). I might add that such variation in interpretation is also true for those who actually participate in funerals and perform the rites portrayed in ethnographic films or slides. Among Cantonese villagers in rural Hong Kong, for instance, there is no generally

6. Gilbert Lewis, *Day of Shining Red: An Essay on Understanding Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

7. Ibid., p. 19.

8. Ibid., p. 24.

9. See, e.g., Roger M. Keesing, *Kwaio Religion: The Living and the Dead in a Solomon Island Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 3–5, 181–187.

accepted agreement regarding the signification or symbolism of rituals. When I asked about the meaning of an act or a symbol I was usually told, "I'm not clear about that. We do it this way because that's how it has always been done."

Rituals must be routinized and conventionalized before they can be accepted as part of the standard repertoire at a Chinese funeral. But this does not mean that they are immutable. In fact, several chapters in this volume focus on cases of ritual variability and modification to suit changing political circumstances (see especially chapters by Rawski, Wakeman, R. Watson, and Whyte). These changes are always made, however, within a recognizable framework of cultural convention; modifications are never arbitrary, given that they must conform to general notions of "Chineseness."

Closely associated with the problem of convention are notions of performance and audience. All rituals must have an audience to judge the quality and conventionality of the performance. When considering Chinese funerary ritual the question of audience becomes very complex. Who judges, and thereby validates, the performance? the deceased? the community? the gods, ancestors, and guardians of hell? or the performers of the rites themselves? Among rural Cantonese all of these interested parties represent the audience or separate audiences. But most villagers make it clear by their actions that the general community, represented by neighbors and kin, constitutes the most important audience. It is the community that determines convention and affirms that a funeral has been performed properly (a botched funeral can have disastrous consequences for everyone involved; see chapter 5). As with Lewis's informants, Cantonese villagers know what is correct and what is not; they represent a hypercritical audience even though they may not be able to articulate the reasons for their strongly held views about ritual propriety. Lewis nicely summarizes these issues: "In ritual as in art, he who devises or creates or performs is also spectator of what he does; and he who beholds it is also active in the sense that he interprets the performance. The value of ritual lies partly in this ambiguity of the active and passive for creator, performer and beholder."[10]

At Chinese funerals the general audience plays an active role, together with paid professionals, in creating a ritual performance. Community members are both the observed and the observers; they play a leading part in performing the rites while at the same time acting as audience. It is the proper performance of the rites—by specialists, mourners, and community members—that matters most to everyone concerned. As I shall argue below, the internal state of the participants, their personal beliefs and predispositions, are largely irrelevant.

10. Lewis, *Day of Shining Red*, p. 38.

THE STRUCTURE OF RITES, I: THE IDEOLOGICAL DOMAIN

One of the central themes emerging from this study, as was noted earlier, is the view that there was a uniform structure of funeral rites in China during the late imperial era. This structure is still very much alive in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and some overseas Chinese areas, but it no longer dominates the ritual life of modern China as it did in the past. This is particularly true of Chinese cities, although it is evident that traditional rites are reemerging in many parts of rural China (see Whyte's discussion in chapter 12).[11] Pre-revolution burial practices are evident throughout rural Kwangtung, and in 1985 the ritual paraphernalia for traditional funerals were readily available in rural markets.[12] However, in comparison with Taiwan and Hong Kong, contemporary China seems peculiarly devoid of *public* rituals that have a religious content (i.e., festivals and collective displays of devotion). There is, of course, a great deal of public ritual activity in China, but it is strictly controlled by the party and is directly related to the political goals of the central administration.[13] The deritualization, and possible reritualization, of Chinese religious life is a subject that deserves a full-scale, interdisciplinary study by a team of scholars familiar with the traditional system. It is difficult to determine whether China, in the late 1980s, now has a uniform structure of funerary rites. Whyte suggests (chapter 12) that there is a growing dichotomy between rural and urban sectors in the People's Republic, with different rites emerging in city and countryside. The implications of this will be discussed below.

During the late imperial era (approximately 1750 to 1920)[14] rituals associated with marriage and death constituted a kind of "cultural cement" that helped hold this vastly complex and diversified society together. There are several ways to approach the problem of structural uniformity: It is not a simple matter of assembling a check list of ritual acts and routines, nor is it of particular concern that elements of the structure may be found in other societies. Rather, it is the unique *configuration* of ritual elements that makes a funeral acceptably Chinese. It was, in other words, a coherent package of

11. See also William L. Parish and Martin K. Whyte, *Village and Family in Contemporary China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 260–266.

12. Author's field investigations, Kwangtung province, summer 1985.

13. Martin King Whyte, *Small Groups and Political Rituals in China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974); Richard Madsen, *Morality and Power in a Chinese Village* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

14. The year 1920 might be accepted as a rough "cutoff" date for the late imperial era, although for certain features of cultural life (e.g., lineage organization, ancestor worship, folk religion) 1940 or even 1950 may serve as well. This is a matter of some debate among anthropologists.

actions, routines, and performances which constituted the structure of Chinese rites.

There are two domains within which the processes of ritual standardization can be analyzed. The first might be called the ideological domain, given that it is concerned with abstract notions regarding the relationship between life and death. Many of the essays in this volume deal specifically with the ideological aspects of mortuary rites (see chapters by Cohen and Martin). Among Chinese, there was a strong belief in the continuity between this world (life) and the next (death). Both worlds were governed by bureaucratic principles that mirrored the imperial bureaucracy.[15] There was, as Thomas Laqueur pointed out during conference discussions, no radical dualism in Chinese thought—separating body from soul—similar to the central concern that governed European notions of life and death. In other words, the "moment of death," whereby body and soul were forever parted, did not have the same meaning among Chinese as it had among Europeans.[16] One of the primary goals of Chinese funeral rites, in fact, was to keep corpse and spirit together during the initial stages of death; separation prior to the ritualized expulsion from the community was thought to bring disaster (see chapter 5).

Another key feature of Chinese ideology regarding the afterlife was the belief that one's social status remained largely unaffected by death. In particular, both worlds were dominated by kinship, and it was believed that death did not terminate the relationships between agnatic kinsmen (the status of women is more problematic and deserves further study).[17] It is important to note that, for most Chinese, it was patrilineal kinship that survived beyond death; matrilateral ties (through one's mother) and affinal links (through marriage) were generally terminated upon death. Ancestor worship was the concrete expression of this preoccupation with the patriline.

The ideological domain of late imperial China was also dominated by the notion that the soul, or spirit, was composed of several parts. There is considerable debate regarding the exact configuration of the soul,[18] but most observers accept a dual (*hun* versus *p'o*) or a tripartite (grave, domestic

15. Arthur P. Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 131–182; Emily Martin Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

16. Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Knopf, 1981).

17. On the ambiguous status of women in the afterlife, see James L. Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones: The Management of Death Pollution in Cantonese Society," in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, eds. Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 178–180.

18. Stevan Harrell, "The Concept of Soul in Chinese Folk Religion," *Journal of Asian Studies* 38 (1979): 519–528.

shrine, hall tablet) division.[19] The origin of the *hun/p'o* dichotomy is the subject of an important essay by Ying-shih Yü.[20] Associated with this ideological complex was a preoccupation with controlling, managing, and placating the dangerous aspects of the spirit of the deceased. Much of the ritual at funerals is aimed specifically at settling the volatile and disoriented spirit of the recently dead. There is, in other words, a need for social control in the nether world; ideally no one should be allowed to wander at will, outside the constraints of kinship and community, in life or in death. To bury a person without proper attention to ritual details is to create a hungry ghost who will return to plague the living. The analogy between ghosts and bandits is a conscious one in Chinese society.[21] Both exist outside the constraints of family, kinship, and community.

Another uniform feature of the ideological domain is obvious to those who are familiar with Chinese mortuary practices. This is the idea that there must always be a balance between the sexes, even in death. The notion of gender, a cultural construction, survives in the Chinese afterlife (this is not the case in all societies). If it is at all possible, married people are reconstituted as couples in death, usually by burial in close proximity. Posthumous unions, often referred to as "ghost marriages,"[22] are sometimes arranged for unmarried people, for it is considered unnatural, in life and in death, to be without a spouse.

Closely associated with these ideas of social continuity is the final, and some might say the most important, feature of the Chinese ideological domain: the idea of *exchange* between living and dead. Death does not terminate relationships of reciprocity among Chinese, it simply transforms these ties and often makes them stronger. A central feature of Chinese funerals and postburial mortuary practices is the transfer of food, money, and goods to the deceased (see Thompson's discussion in chapter 4). In return the living expect to receive certain material benefits, including luck, wealth, and progeny.

This notion of continued exchange between living and dead is the foundation of late imperial China's ideological domain. In other words, all rituals associated with death are performed *as if* there were a continued relationship between living and dead. It is irrelevant whether or not participants actually *believe* that the spirit survives or that the presentation of offerings

19. See e.g., Maurice Freedman, "Ancestor Worship: Two Facets of the Chinese Case," in *Social Organization: Essays Presented to Raymond Firth*, ed. Maurice Freedman (London: Frank Cass, 1967), pp. 85–103.

20. Ying-shih Yü, "O Soul, Come Back: A Study of the Changing Conceptions of the Soul and Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47 (1987): 363–395.

21. Robert Weller, "Bandits, Beggars, and Ghosts: The Failure of State Control over Religious Interpretation in Taiwan," *American Ethnologist* 12 (1985): 46–61.

22. Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," pp. 150–152.

has an effect on the deceased. What matters is that the rites are performed according to accepted procedure.

The ideological domain in China, in other words, does not assume universal belief or unquestioned acceptance of "truth."[23] Here is where China may have been unique among centralized societies. There was, of course, a close relationship between the ideological domain and what I shall call the performative domain (i.e., ritual; see below) in late imperial China. But, unlike the common pattern one finds in Christian Europe and Hindu India, the two Chinese domains do not seem to be totally dependent upon each other. There was a noticeable disjuncture between the requirements of ritual standardization (which were absolute) and the maintenance of a centralized belief system (loosely organized at best and rarely enforced).

In dealing with religious cults among peasants, Chinese imperial authorities were content to control and legislate actions, not beliefs.[24] Much the same was true for funerary ritual. As long as the rites were performed according to standardized and generally accepted sequence, it was of little consequence what people actually thought about the efficacy of those rites. As Jonathan Parry and Thomas Laqueur (Indianist and Europeanist respectively) noted in conference discussions, a radical distinction between belief and practice was never a central feature of Hindu or Christian social orders. In early Christendom, for instance, it was belief that carried more weight than practice, and in later eras debates regarding the proper performance of the Eucharist focused on ideological concerns underpinning practice.[25]

It is my contention that this was not the case in late imperial China. The standardization of ritual practice almost always took precedence over efforts to legislate or control beliefs. This, I would argue, had profound consequences for the creation of a unified cultural system. By enforcing orthopraxy (correct practice)[26] rather than orthodoxy (correct belief) state officials made it possible to incorporate people from many different ethnic or regional backgrounds, with varying beliefs and attitudes, into an over-

23. The concept of belief, its definition and cross-cultural applicability, has been the subject of considerable debate among anthropologists; see, for example, Rodney Needham, *Belief, Language, and Experience* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972).

24. James L. Watson, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou (Empress of Heaven) Along the South China Coast, 960–1960," in Johnson et al., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp. 292–324.

25. Charles Gore, *The Body of Christ: An Inquiry into the Institution and Doctrine of Holy Communion* (London: Murray, 1901); A. M. O'Neill, *The Mystery of the Eucharist* (Dublin: M. H. Gill, 1933); Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1952); Richard A. Watson, "Transubstantiation among the Cartesians," in *Problems of Cartesianism*, eds. Thomas Lennon, John Nicholas, and John Davis (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982), pp. 127–148.

26. Judith A. Berling, "Orthopraxy," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 11, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 129–132.

arching social system we now call China. Had this not been the strategy (conscious or unconscious) of state officials, Chinese culture could never have reached such heights of uniformity and coherence as it did during the late imperial era.

Before moving to a consideration of the performative domain, a clarification seems in order. I am *not* suggesting that belief and ideology are somehow irrelevant to the processes of cultural integration in China. Given the obvious uniformity of beliefs just surveyed, it would be absurd to make such a contention. Rather, I would argue that the Chinese state had no effective means of controlling beliefs regarding the afterlife in the absence of a unified church. There was, in other words, no centralized hierarchy of specialists charged with the responsibility of dispensing religious truth, as in Christendom. The closest equivalents would have been imperial bureaucrats, but these were relatively few in number,[27] and they were concerned primarily with good governance, not religious beliefs. What is truly intriguing about the Chinese case, therefore, is the fact that there *was* such a high level of uniformity in beliefs, attitudes, and conceptions regarding the dead. The creation of a unified culture obviously involved more than the conscious manipulation of the ideological domain by agents of the state, as some scholars have suggested.[28] I shall return to this point in the conclusion of this essay.

THE STRUCTURE OF RITES, II: THE PERFORMATIVE DOMAIN

A survey of ethnographic sources on Chinese funerals,[29] together with conference discussion, films, photographs, and the results of my own field research, leads me to conclude that there was indeed a prescribed set of ritual

27. On this point, see G. William Skinner, "Rural Marketing in China: Revival and Reappraisal," in *Markets and Marketing*, ed. Stuart Plattner (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America for the Society of Economic Anthropology, 1985), pp. 7–8.

28. See, e.g., Kung-chuan Hsiao, *Rural China: Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960), p. 225.

29. The Cantonese sequence is outlined in J. Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones." On ritual sequences in other parts of China, see Emily Ahern, *Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973); J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1892); Henry Doré, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions* (Shanghai: T'usewei, 1914); Bernard Gallin, *Hsin Hsing, Taiwan: A Chinese Village in Change* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), pp. 219–230; Sidney D. Gamble, *Ting Hsien: A North China Rural Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954), pp. 386–393; Francis L. K. Hsu, *Under the Ancestors' Shadow* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1967), pp. 154–166; and Arthur P. Wolf, "Chinese Kinship and Mourning Dress," in *Family and Kinship in Chinese Society*, ed. Maurice Freedman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), pp. 189–207.

ctions that had to be performed before a corpse could be expelled from the ommunity and buried. These actions are perhaps best referred to as the lementary structure of funeral rites, in the sense that they were performed, vith minor variations, throughout China during the late imperial era, irespective of class, status, or material circumstance. It is important to disinguish between *funerary rites* and *rites of disposal*.[30] The former involve ctions undertaken from the moment of death to the formal expulsion of the eceased (in a sealed coffin) from the community. Rites of disposal are disinct from funeral rites in that the procedures of burial, cremation, or coffin torage are not governed by universally accepted norms. In fact, once the orpse is removed from the community almost any form of disposal is ermitted. More will be said below about variations in burial practices.

What were the main features of funeral ritual in late imperial China? It ppears that by Ming and Ch'ing a uniform structure had emerged, based oughly on classical models outlined in the *Li chi* and later simplified by Chu Hsi and others (see Rawski's account in chapter 2). The standardized ites required the following actions:

(1) Public notification of death by wailing and other expressions of grief. Women of the household, in particular, announced the death to neighbors by high-pitched, stereotyped wailing. Such actions were required by survivors; they were not voluntary. Formal notification of death was also given by pasting white banners on the house of the deceased and hanging blue lanterns from the eaves (these actions were optional in some parts of China, whereas the wailing was not).

(2) Donning of white clothing, shoes, and hoods (made of sackcloth or hemp) by mourners. The degree of kinship between the deceased and the mourner was often coded in the style of dress.[31] There were, of course, many regional variations in color symbolism and garment ensemble, but the use of white as an unambiguous symbol of mourning was a key feature of Chinese funerary ritual.

(3) Ritualized bathing of the corpse. This act was often accompanied by a final change of clothing deemed to be suitable for the journey to the otherworld. The provision of new or special clothing was optional and may not have been common among the poor, but the bathing of the corpse was an essential feature of the rites. In south China the water was often purchased (for a token sum of real money) from the deity of a well

30. Rubie S. Watson (chapter 9) notes that there is also a fundamental distinction between *uneral rites* (which are prescribed) and *grave rites* (which are fluid and subject to political nanipulation).

31. Wolf, "Chinese Kinship and Mourning Dress."

or a stream; this rite is called *mai-shui* (lit. "buying water").[32] The bathing of the corpse varied from a full, vigorous scrubbing to a ritualized daubing of the forehead.

(4) The transfer of food, money, and goods from the living to the dead. Mock money and paper models of items to be used in the afterlife (e.g., houses, furniture, servants, vehicles, etc.) were transmitted by burning. Food was presented in the form of offerings, whereby the essence of the gift was consumed by the deceased while the remnants were often eaten by the mourners. It appears that there was an element of symbolic communication implicit in these prestations, with pork and rice being the irreducible food gifts (see chapter 4 by Thompson). In addition to food, the basic set of material offerings to the deceased included mock money and incense[33]—all other offerings were thus optional. This elementary feature of the rites was a concrete expression of the continuing relationship between living and dead.

(5) The preparation and installation of a soul tablet for the dead. All deceased Chinese, save those who died as infants or as wandering strangers, had to have a written tablet to serve as a repository for one aspect of their soul. This feature of the rites required the services of a literate person, usually a ritual specialist. The finished tablet of most married people was installed in the domestic altar of the deceased's household (tablets in ancestral halls—outside the home—were not an essential part of the rites but an option few could afford).[34] Unmarried women and other people who were not deemed to be members of households sometimes had their tablets placed in temples, convents, or institutions that provided such services for a fee. In considering funerary ritual as a mechanism of cultural standardization it is highly significant that the soul was represented as a written name (usually a posthumous *hao*) on a tablet; the repository of the soul did not take the form of icons, statues, or pictures.[35] It is surely no coincidence that the written script, a primary instrument of Chinese cultural unification, played a central role in the formal structure

32. J. Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones," pp. 161–162.

33. Strict codes govern the number of incense sticks offered; see, e.g., Stephan Feuchtwang, "Domestic and Communal Worship in Taiwan," in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 107.

34. Rubie S. Watson, *Inequality Among Brothers: Class and Kinship in South China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 41.

35. Among Hong Kong boatpeople small wooden statues of ancestors were sometimes kept on boat altars. It is significant, however, that the boat people (mostly illiterate) also maintained written ancestral tablets; see Eugene N. Anderson, Jr., *The Floating World of Castle Peak Bay*, Anthropological Studies no. 4 (Washington: American Anthropological Association, 1970), pp. 149–150.

of funerary rites. In order to follow the prescribed rites one had to have a Chinese written name—irrespective of social background,[36] education, or general level of cultural assimilation (for those of non-Han origin).

(6) The ritualized use of money and the employment of professionals. The proper conduct of Chinese funerary rites required the services of specialists who performed ritual acts in exchange for money. It was not possible, given the complex structure of rites, for mourners or untrained neighbors to perform all of these essential services. The payment of money to specialists was more than a simple monetary exchange; it was a required feature of the rites (see chapter 5). Someone, in other words, had to accept money from the mourners (or the deceased's estate or a public charity) before the corpse could be safely expelled from the community. The implications of this exchange have yet to be thoroughly analyzed, but it is evident that monetary exchange, in numerous forms, permeates Chinese funerary ritual.[37] This is testimony, perhaps, to the extent that money—as a universal medium of exchange—had penetrated into the cultural domain of late imperial China. Even in death one continued to engage in monetary exchange.[38]

(7) Music to accompany the corpse and settle the spirit. Two forms of music seem to have played a key role in the structure of funerary rites: high-pitched piping (from an oboe-like instrument) and percussion (particularly drumming). The sound of piping and drumming accompanied the corpse during critical transitions in the ritual, most notably when physical movement was required.

(8) Sealing the corpse in an airtight coffin. This action was considered by many Chinese to be the most important feature of the traditional funerary ritual. The use of coffins, usually constructed of wood, has

36. There are some interesting gender distinctions that might be pursued in future research. For instance, a deceased Cantonese woman is represented in writing by the surname of her father—not her own, personal name. Males, on the other hand, have their full posthumous names on soul tablets, tombstones, and funeral banners. This symbolic negation of female names suggests that Cantonese women are not perceived as complete human beings, at least in the context of mortuary ritual; see Rubie S. Watson, "The Named and the Nameless: Gender and Person in Chinese Society," *American Ethnologist* 13 (1986): 619–631.

37. Discussed in chapter 5; see also Hill Gates, "Money for the Gods: The Commoditization of the Spirit," *Modern China* 13 (1987): 259–277.

38. Among Cantonese in the Hong Kong New Territories, the dead sometimes continue to make annual prestations to popular deities. The offerings are made possible by the profits of the benefactor's ancestral estate, established during his lifetime. The offerings are often elaborate, and the benefits are said to accrue to the spirit of the deceased. In one case the benefactor has been dead for over four hundred years, but he continues to worship T'ien Hou (Empress of Heaven) every year on the occasion of her "birthday."

been common in China since at least the Neolithic.[39] Settling the corpse in the coffin and packing it so no movement was possible were tasks often assigned to paid specialists. Securing the lid, with nails and caulking compounds, ensured that the coffin was airtight. The ceremonial hammering of nails to seal the coffin was a centerpiece of the ritual sequence; this act was usually performed by the chief mourner or by an invited guest (i.e., someone of high social status relative to the mourners).

(9) Expulsion of the coffin from the community. When the coffin had been sealed, it was ready for removal from the village, town, or neighborhood of the deceased. This expulsion was the last formal act in the sequence of funerary rites,[40] but it need not be accomplished immediately. In fact, high-status families (including the imperial household; see Rawski's discussion in chapter 10) often kept the coffin in the domestic realm for months—even years—as a mark of respect for the deceased. But, in the end, the coffin must be expelled from the domain of the living.

As was noted earlier, there were no generally accepted guidelines—applicable everywhere in China—for the conduct of burials, cremations, and other means of disposal. In contrast, the formal expulsion of the coffin was orchestrated with considerable uniformity. At a precise moment chosen in advance by a specialist, the coffin was carried quickly out of the community by a team of pallbearers (often paid professionals). A procession of mourners and neighbors was formed to accompany the coffin to the point of disposal. When the procession had passed beyond the boundaries of the deceased's village, town, or city (often symbolized by walls and gates), the formal sequence of funeral rites had been completed.

VARIATION AND UNIFORMITY: RITES OF DISPOSAL

By isolating these nine acts as the elementary features of Chinese funerary ritual I do not mean to imply that there was no variation in performance. So long as the acts were accomplished in the approved sequence, there was room for infinite variety in ritual expression. For instance, the bathing of the corpse and the sealing of the coffin were performed differently in almost

39. David N. Keightley, "Dead But Not Gone: Cultural Implications of Mortuary Practices in Neolithic and Early Bronze Age China," paper presented at the conference on Ritual and the Social Significance of Death in Chinese Society, Oracle, Arizona, January 1985.

40. The implication of this act is that the deceased can no longer be treated (in ritual) as a member of the community once the coffin has been formally expelled. The dead retain their membership in (patrilineal) kinship organizations, but neighbors and other non-kin cease engaging in exchange with the dead at this point. The funeral, therefore, also serves as a rite of severance from the community.

every Chinese community. In my own experience of two closely related Cantonese villages (only six miles apart) there were striking contrasts in the conduct and organization of funerals, but the overall structure of the rites was similar.[41]

Herein lies the genius of the Chinese approach to cultural standardization: The system allowed for a high degree of variation within an overarching structure of unity. The rites of disposal constitute an excellent example of this principle (variation within unity). As long as the sealed coffin was removed from the community in the accepted fashion, mourners were free to dispose of the corpse according to local custom. Research on Chinese burial customs (as opposed to funerary rites) is surprisingly underdeveloped; there are whole regions of China for which we have little information on final disposal of the dead.

Most of our data derive from the south, notably Fukien, Kwangtung, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Secondary burial is practiced in these areas, and it is intriguing to see how local people have accommodated to the standardized rites. Briefly summarized, Chinese secondary burial involves an initial burial of the coffin for approximately seven to ten years, followed by an exhumation of bones, which are placed in a large pot and eventually reburied in a permanent tomb (see R. Watson's discussion in chapter 9 for details). As was outlined above, one of the fundamental features of Chinese funerary ritual is the evacuation of the corpse in an airtight coffin. This procedure is diametrically opposed to the requirements of secondary burial, which puts a premium on the rapid decomposition of the flesh (thereby allowing for the retrieval and reburial of bones).

Peasants in south China had no difficulty following the standard rites, given that the prescribed actions of a proper funeral ended when the coffin left the community. In Taiwan, Hokkien villagers sometimes bash in one end of the coffin with an axe just prior to burial; in another part of Taiwan a specialist is hired to drill holes in the coffin.[42] Among Cantonese the seal around the coffin lid is often broken before interment. All of these practices, of course, are designed to hasten the decomposition of the flesh.

In north China, secondary burial is not practiced, and in fact northerners are often revolted when they first learn about southern customs. But northerners do things that shock southerners, such as storing coffins above ground, sometimes for decades, until the death of a spouse or a parent—thereby allowing family reconstitution by simultaneous burial (see Naquin's summary in chapter 3).

41. For instance, in one village attendance at funerals depends upon neighborhood (hamlet) affiliation, whereas in the other funerals are organized by voluntary associations.

42. Photographic slides presented at the 1985 Death Ritual Conference by Emily Martin and Stuart Thompson respectively.

In the borderlands of Szechwan where Han and non-Han have interacted for centuries, many who consider themselves Han do not bury their dead at all; instead, coffins are left in hillside caves that serve as family sepulchers.[43] And finally, when considering methods of disposal, we must not forget that cremation was practiced in many parts of China, even though it was condemned by Neo-Confucian scholars and regularly banned by the state.

What is significant about these diverse practices is that they could all be accepted as "Chinese" customs. By excluding disposal from the standard set of funeral rites, state officials implicitly condoned the cultural expression of ethnic and regional differences. This may have been the consequence of a conscious policy, given that any attempt to control burial practices would have been disastrously expensive and impossible to enforce (as Communist authorities were to discover during the 1950s and 1960s). Following the standard funeral sequence, on the other hand, did not impinge very deeply into regional sensitivities, and it was a small price to pay for the privilege of being accepted as proper Chinese. Those who chose not to perform funerals according to standard procedure were marked as non-Chinese or, worse yet, as dangerous sectarians.[44] This is why it was in everyone's interest to embrace the funeral rites as an expression of cultural identity and as an affirmation of loyalty to the imperial state.

The Chinese cultural system thus allowed for the free expression of what outsiders might perceive to be chaotic local diversity. The performative domain of ritual, in particular, gave great scope for regional and subethnic cultural displays. The system was so flexible that those who called themselves Chinese could have their cake and eat it too: They participated in a unified, centrally organized culture and at the same time celebrated their local or regional distinctiveness.

The imperial state, of course, was intimately involved in the standardization of funerary ritual, but it would never have been possible to *impose* a uniform structure of rites on a society of such vast size and complexity. More subtle means were required. There is good evidence that imperial officials were engaged in the promotion of a standardized set of funeral and mourning customs throughout the empire. These norms were enshrined in county gazetteers and in ritual manuals,[45] available throughout the empire (see Naquin's discussion in chapter 3). Given what we know about the distribution of power in late imperial China, it is probable that local elites

43. See, e.g., Shih Chung-chien 石鐘健, "Ssu-ch'uan hsuan-kuan tsang" 四川懸棺葬 [Szechwan hanging burials], *Min-tsu hsueh yen-chiu* 民族學研究 [Ethnological Research] 4 (1982): 100–118.

44. J. J. M. de Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China* (Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Reprints, 1976 [original 1901]), pp. 231–241.

45. Manuals (printed from wood blocks) outlining the sequence of funeral ritual, with crude illustrations, can still be found in Cantonese villages, Hong Kong New Territories.

subscribed to the accepted customs and enforced a kind of ritual orthopraxy in the communities under their control. Unacceptable rites were gradually suppressed or modified to conform to centralized models.

This may well have been the mechanism for the superimposition of a standard ritual structure, but we still know little about the process of acceptance. Is the standardization we now perceive a consequence of state-sponsored social engineering carried out over a period of many centuries? Or is it the result of voluntary adoption by the general populace? Need we assume that these processes are mutually exclusive? It is obvious that there must have been some strong incentives for people of all classes and regional backgrounds to cooperate in the cultural construction of a standarized set of rites. Much more work needs to be done before we can even begin to answer these questions. What is clear, however, is that the preoccupation with performance—rather than belief—made it possible for imperial authorities, local elites, and ordinary peasants to agree on the proper *form* for the conduct of funerals.

The fact that all Chinese, irrespective of personal circumstance, appear to have been subject to the same basic set of rites is an interesting commentary on the traditional Chinese class system. This uniformity of ritual structure is not found in all class-based societies. In nineteenth-century England, for instance, paupers were treated very differently from property-owning citizens. As Laqueur notes, England was changing rapidly during this period, and notions of what constituted a minimally acceptable funeral (i.e., the basic ritual form) were changing as well.[46] Ariès, in his now classic study, *The Hour of Our Death,* documents similar changes in European mortuary customs and attitudes toward death.[47]

It is probable that China has also undergone transformations in funerary ritual over the centuries. There is some evidence, for instance, that a major change in mortuary customs occurred during the T'ang–Sung transition, corresponding to changes in the Chinese kinship system.[48] Furthermore, we may be witnessing a radical transformation in China's ritual structure today, with a new sequence of rites inspired by socialist ideology replacing the old (see Whyte's survey in chapter 12). Can we expect to find something characteristically "Chinese" in these emerging rites, or are they basically

46. Thomas Laqueur, "Bodies, Death, and Pauper Funerals," *Representations* 1 (1983): 109–131.

47. Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, pp. 559–588.

48. See, e.g., David G. Johnson, *The Medieval Chinese Oligarchy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1977), pp. 94, 108; Patricia B. Ebrey, *The Aristocratic Families of Early Imperial China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 91; and Patricia Ebrey, "The Early Stages in the Development of Chinese Descent Groups," in *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China, 1000–1940*, eds. Patricia B. Ebrey and James L. Watson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 20–29.

indistinguishable from socialist forms practiced in other parts of the world?[49] Whyte's account makes it clear that the ritual structure that helped hold China together as a coherent culture for so many centuries no longer has meaning to millions of Chinese (particularly in the cities). One wonders whether a new set of rites, together with new categories of ritual specialists, will emerge to fill the void.

49. Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society, the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Christopher A. Binns, "The Changing Face of Power: Revolution and Accommodation in the Development of the Soviet Ceremonial System, Parts 1 & 2," *Man* n.s. 14 (1979): 585–601 , and 15 (1980): 170–187.

TWO

A Historian's Approach to Chinese Death Ritual

Evelyn S. Rawski

There are several reasons why a historian's overview of Chinese death ritual is different from an anthropologist's. Anthropologists have made it their business to look closely at death ritual performance "on the ground"; they rarely do diachronic analysis. The cultural "givens" of the anthropologist are all variables in the perspective of historians, who want to trace the evolution of death ritual over long periods of time and analyze how and why ritual may have changed. Most anthropologists work with peasant communities and underplay, indeed often ignore, the existence of a written, literate tradition in Chinese culture that reaches down to and encompasses the peasant village. The historian's understanding of death ritual by contrast is dominated by the texts that are constantly cited in writings on ritual, beginning with the *Li chi* (Treatises on ceremonial usages), a work from the fourth to the third century B.C., which was one of the "Five Canons" (*wu-ching*), and the *I li* (Rites and ceremonial usages), dating from the same period.[1] These texts were the reference points for subsequent compilations of ritual into the late Ch'ing period, and for historians one major question is To what extent were these texts the guide to actual ritual practice?

The differences produced by disciplinary outlooks and training were very evident during the conference that preceded this volume. One of the most revealing events of the conference came at the nightly presentation of slides of funerary and grave ritual taken by anthropologists at their field sites. It was startling for a historian to discover that the six anthropologists present, who had been acquainted with one another for many years, had not previously seen each other's slides. Since the anthropologist's "text" (the village studied) is for all intents and purposes inaccessible to other researchers, whose occasional visits cannot provide them with real access to the site, this discovery underlined the latent problem of verification. Without a counterpart to the historian's primary sources, which can be read and checked by others, how are anthropologists to defend themselves against charges that their analysis is a personal and arbitrary creation?

1. De Groot's detailed analysis of death ritual faithfully reflected the Chinese tradition in its frequent reference to these texts: J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China: Its Ancient Forms, Evolution, History and Present Aspect, Manners, Customs and Social Institutions Connected Therewith.* 6 vols. (1892–1910 ed.; reprinted Taipei: Ch'eng-wen, 1969).

The methodological issue raised above, which is recognized as an important problem by anthropologists, lies outside the scope of our conference volume. More directly relevant were the dichotomous perspectives of the two disciplines, revealed at many points as we viewed hundreds of slides. The historians unanimously clamored for information on the many pieces of writing displayed on the mourning altar and elsewhere; the anthropologists showed clearly in their response that they regarded these writings as peripheral to the inquiry (frequently the anthropologists could not explain them). Indeed, some anthropologists seem to have adopted the attitude that their peasant informants are the standard of evaluation of cultural information—if something cannot be explained by the peasant, then it is not central to the research enterprise. This stance, of course, ignores the ways in which Chinese peasant culture was embedded in a complex literate civilization with a long historical tradition. It precludes an attack on the broader problem of how to link a very specific culture found in one village, in one region, in one historical period, to the larger abstract entity we call "China," and to analyze the changes in Chinese culture over time.

What does a historical perspective contribute to our understanding of death ritual? I would contend that the historian's primary source materials and perspective necessarily raise questions and produce hypotheses (if not answers) that are different from and perhaps complementary to the anthropologist's. The theme raised in James Watson's introductory essay concerning the primacy of performance over belief in Chinese ritual is a specific case illustrating this point.

BELIEF AND PERFORMANCE

Watson's introductory essay asserts the central role of standardized ritual in the maintenance of a unified Chinese culture. The agents of cultural uniformity are the imperial state, officials, and educated local elites, who tried to disseminate a standard ritual structure. The success of this effort also rested in part on the receptivity of Chinese of all strata and regional backgrounds to this kind of homogenization. But a key element in successful ritual standardization, Watson argues, is that "the preoccupation with performance—rather than belief—made it possible for imperial authorities, local elites, and ordinary peasants to agree on the proper *form* for the con-

duct of funerals." Earlier in his essay Watson states, "Performance . . . took precedence over belief—it mattered little what one believed about death or the afterlife as long as the rites were performed properly."

While many historians might agree that the Confucian state emphasized orthopraxy, they would not agree with Watson's conclusion that the state did not link orthopraxy with orthodoxy. Watson's thesis, an elaboration of a statement he made in an earlier essay on the subject of imperially sanctioned cults,[2] takes issue with one of the assumptions concerning Chinese culture most widely held by historians, namely that the Chinese state, its officials, and its local elites attempted to propagate approved values and beliefs. Most historians would assert that despite obvious variations, Chinese culture in the late imperial period (the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries) had achieved important commonalities in belief that cut across the boundaries of regions and social strata.

That Watson's argument is directly based on the nature of the fieldwork experience is made clear in the opening pages of his essay, which cite Gilbert Lewis's *Day of Shining Red*. Watson quotes Lewis's argument that the villagers' understanding of ritual is "how to do it—rather than its meaning." Like Lewis, Watson rejects structuralist interpretations of ritual because of their subjectivity, even though he admits that all observation is selective and therefore to some extent subjective. Because variations in perception attend every human event, Watson concludes that we can have no accepted agreement regarding the meaning of ritual acts.

The fact that participants and observers of ritual performance may be unable to articulate signification, and that their interpretations of the meaning of the ritual may vary, should not be surprising. This phenomenon has been frequently observed in all kinds of performances. Literary critics studying theatrical performances accept the notion of multivalence; different individuals will read different meanings into a given play, and these differences will vary with personality, gender, age, life experience, and education.[3] Similarly, participants in a culture frequently only partially comprehend many cultural events, but that does not mean that a complex structure of meaning does not exist.

The fact is that belief and performance are very difficult to separate. Indeed, the chapters in this volume both by anthropologists and by historians

2. See James L. Watson, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou ('Empress of Heaven') Along the South China Coast, 960–1960," in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 323–324, and the "Preface," x–xiii in the same work.

3. For one attempt to systematize this phenomenon, see David Johnson, "Communication, Class, and Consciousness in Late Imperial China," in Johnson et al., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp. 34–72.

refer to beliefs as well as to ritual performance. Myron Cohen's examination of why salvation beliefs did not take greater hold among Chinese, and Emily Martin's discussion of a female ideology in representations of life and death, are only the two most conspicuous examples of essays that assume that it is important, when studying ritualized action, to understand what people believe. Elizabeth Johnson's study of Hakka death laments sung by women notes their value as windows into women's grievances and values. Stuart Thompson's structuralist analysis of food prestations—a mode of analysis that aims to arrive at content from a close scrutiny of form—also proceeds on the assumption that belief matters, in this case the belief (widely held, not just among peasants but among China's elite) that beings in the other world require nourishment from the living. Rubie Watson's paper on the politics of grave ritual in south China notes the centrality of peasant beliefs about geomancy, or *feng-shui*, itself linked to the notion of multiple souls in Chinese eschatology. Even James Watson's own analysis of funeral specialists refers to underlying *emic* views and interpretations that override individual differences—for example, the Cantonese notions of death pollution and the male/female realms. The inclusion of a discussion of "ideology" in Watson's introductory essay contradicts his argument rejecting "beliefs" as an important element shaping ritual, for Watson's "ideology" turns out to be the historian's "beliefs," that is, the overarching fundamental assumptions concerning the world held by Chinese of varying social strata across China's diverse regions.

There is thus no basic disagreement on the thesis that important notions or beliefs, cutting across class and region, were held by Chinese in the late imperial and contemporary periods. What are these basic elements of the belief system? Some have already been cited, and the reader is referred to Myron Cohen's essay in this volume for another explication of this subject. Many were present in Chinese culture from the earliest periods for which we have information, in the components of "ancestor worship," which has been recently described by Benjamin Schwartz as "omnipresent" and "central" to "the entire development of Chinese civilization" from ancient times.[4]

Ancestor worship—the emphasis on the continuity of kinship links between the living and the dead, the belief that ancestors could intercede with deities on behalf of their living descendants—was an essential stimulus for the evolution of the elaborate death ritual practiced by the Chinese. Belief in ancestor worship cannot be separated from death ritual performance. From

4. Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 20–21 and chap. 1 generally. See David Keightley, "Dead But Not Gone: Cultural Implications of Mortuary Practice in Neolithic and Early Bronze Age China, ca. 8000 to 1000 B.C.," paper presented at the conference on Ritual and the Social Significance of Death in Chinese Society, Oracle, Arizona, January 1985.

the Bronze Age, Chinese have asserted a continuity of ties (what Watson calls "exchange") between the living and their dead ancestors. The lack of a radical dualism between body and soul, which Watson notes, is in fact characteristic of Chinese culture from at least the Bronze Age. And the notion of multiple souls had been elaborated by Han times.[5] The historian would argue that the early date of these beliefs and their ubiquity through subsequent periods of Chinese history must be taken seriously. What is most impressive is that the first enunciations of these notions appear in written elite texts of the classical period. When the same ideas are expressed by the twentieth-century peasants of the Canton delta and New Territories, the historian argues that the Chinese were remarkably successful in disseminating and perpetuating belief systems and not simply standardized ritual. From the perspective of what Braudel called the *longue durée*, belief did shape ritual performance—in short, rituals expressed beliefs.

Not only did specific beliefs concerning the afterlife influence China's ritual structure. We can also discern the influence of some fundamental notions about the cosmic order on Chinese ritual. In his analysis of Cantonese death ritual Watson notes the *emic* view of his informants that bones are male in essence (*yang*), and flesh is female (*yin*).[6] The *yin-yang* dualism pervades Chinese culture at many different levels and helps shape the way in which people think about their world. Its own history illustrates the complex interaction between levels of culture and ritual. Historically, *yin-yang* theory developed along with the theory of the Five Phases in a system of "correlative cosmology," systematized by Tsou Yen in the fourth to third centuries B.C.[7] Tsou Yen's correlation of the Five Phases with the cycles of dynastic rule was elaborated in the Han dynasty by the scholar Tung Chung-shu (ca. 179–104 B.C.), who incorporated numerological, anatomical, psychological, and moral correspondences between human and cosmic affairs.

Like notions of the ancestors, *yin-yang* and Five Phases theory must have originated in concepts that were widely shared among Chinese people; once these concepts were articulated in written form, they became products of

5. See Ying-shih Yü, "O Soul, Come Back!—A Study of the Changing Conceptions of the Soul and Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47 (1987): 363–395.

6. For a full exposition of this analysis, see James L. Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones: The Management of Death Pollution in Cantonese Society," in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, ed. Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 155–186.

7. See Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, chap. 9, pp. 203, 221, 356–369 ; John Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), chap. 1. See also Stephan D. R. Feuchtwang, *An Anthropological Analysis of Chinese Geomancy* (1974: reprinted Taipei; Southern Materials Center, 1982).

"high culture," the culture of China's creative thinkers, then were reintroduced into the belief systems of Chinese of all social strata. Geomancy (*feng-shui*), the proto- or pseudo-science of harnessing the topographical forces of nature for the benefit of man (reported among Cantonese peasants by the Watsons and other anthropologists) developed out of correlative cosmology. Most of the major modes of correlative cosmology were embedded in geomantic theory and literally incorporated into the geomancer's compass; Henderson has in fact suggested that geomancy may have been one of the major channels for the transmission of correlative thought from high culture to popular culture.[8] But it was not just peasants who believed in *feng-shui*. Geomancy became the essential guide for the auspicious siting of houses and of graves, of emperors and of peasants. Graves, houses, temples, and the emperor faced south, the *yang* direction. The placement of the seat of honor in the east, to the left hand of the ruler or deity, influenced the assignment of hierarchical ranking in the ancestral halls of commoners as well as in the chambers of the court.

Correlative thought assumed that the actions of humans (led by the ruler) should "resonate" with the cosmos. Elaborate systems were devised by thinkers for harmonizing the ritual acts of the ruler with the cyclical rhythms of nature, and recorded in books like the *Yueh ling* (Monthly ordinances), a third-century text that became part of the Book of Rites (*Li chi*) from Han times. The notion of "cosmic resonance" percolated down to China's masses, who in the Ming and Ch'ing periods consulted their almanacs, as they do even today, for a guide to "lucky" and "unlucky" days for travel, setting up a business, marrying, and burying the dead. In diet, in their analysis of sickness, and as we have seen, in their *emic* view of death ritual, the peasants of south China continue to adhere to a world view that is profoundly influenced by *yin-yang* theory. When James Watson's villagers talk about *yang* bones and *yin* flesh, discuss marriage and death as a *yang-yin* pair of events, and when they nonetheless try to break the dualism by exorcism or expulsion of *yin* (as Watson asserts they do by the preservation of the bones and elimination of the flesh), the villagers are working within a cultural vocabulary that was embraced by all traditional Chinese.[9] The vocabulary is not individualized or idiosyncratic, and it does not suffer from

8. Henderson, *The Development of Chinese Cosmology*, p. 49.

9. Ibid., pp. 20–21. On almanacs, see C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 17–136. Manfred Porkert, "The Intellectual and Social Impulses Behind the Evolution of Traditional Chinese Medicine," in *Asian Medical Systems: A Comparative Study*, ed. Charles Leslie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 65–66; Angela Leung, "Autour de la Naissance: La Mère et l'Enfant en Chine aux XVIe and XVIIe Siècles," *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* 76 (1984): 51–69; E. N. Anderson and Marja L. Anderson, "Modern China: South," in *Food in Chinese Culture*, ed. K. C. Chang (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 368–370.

the flaws Watson describes in his introductory essay. A historian would say that Watson's own and other anthropological fieldwork observations reinforce rather than detract from the argument that there are important shared cultural orientations, call them beliefs or ideologies, that bind Chinese together.

BELIEF AND PERFORMANCE: THE ELITE VIEW

Watson, in his introductory essay, argues that it was orthopraxy and not orthodoxy that the state promoted. Most historians, surveying recent work on the subject, will agree with the first half of this statement but dispute the second. The Chinese officials and local elites did indeed try to disseminate approved values as well as behaviors; but they frequently chose to disseminate values through enforcement of orthopraxy. This is evident in the Confucian discussions concerning filial piety.

Watson stresses the importance of funerary ritual for settling the soul of the dead and smoothing the transition from corpse to ancestor. For Confucians, the social value of death was to educate individuals in filial piety, a cardinal value in the family-oriented Chinese state of the Ming and Ch'ing periods. "The root of the state is the family"; this notion, found in a Confucian text of the fourth century B.C.,[10] was reiterated and elaborated by emperors and officials in subsequent dynasties. Just as the family became the metaphor for the state, filial piety, the central expression of familial relations (which of course supported a hierarchical order), was from the time of Confucius identified with the observance of mourning. By the late imperial period, the state's promotion of filiality was spelled out in the legal code, which punished infringements of mourning observance.[11]

The importance of filial piety in reinforcing the legitimacy of the emperor is detailed in my study of Ming and Ch'ing imperial death ritual, included in this volume, and the reader is referred to that chapter. Here I will simply sketch in the ideological underpinnings of that development.

Filial piety was well articulated as a central Chinese value by Confucius's day. Filial piety, as explained by Confucius (551–479 B.C.), was the natural repayment for the care bestowed by parents: three years was the appropriate length of the mourning period because it was the interval in which a child did not leave the arms of its parents. In the *Analects*, which records conversations of the master with his disciples, we find frequent references to filial piety, and expression of this sentiment is linked with death ritual. Asked to define filial piety, Confucius answered: "That parents, when alive,

10. *Mencius*, IV.i.5.; the translation used is James Legge's *The Chinese Classics*, 3d ed. (Hong Kong: University Press, 1960), 2:295.

11. De Groot, *The Religious System*, 2:568–569.

should be served according to *li*; that, when dead, they should be buried according to *li*; and that offerings should be made according to *li*."[12]

We see here another central element in the Chinese cultural order, the emphasis on *li*, translated as "ritual" but also meaning "proper behavior." *Li*, which has been described as the "cement of the entire normative sociopolitical order," refers in early Confucianism to all behavioral prescriptions, "involving rites, ceremony, manners, or general deportment, that bind human beings and the spirits together in networks of interacting roles within the family, within human society, and with the numinous realm beyond."[13] Initially *li* seems to have referred to religious ritual, and even in its more generalized usage in Confucian thought it retains a religious or sacred dimension. In the *Analects*, the repository of early Confucian thought, *li* (performance) is paired with *jen* (perfect virtue). *Li* without the proper spirit is meaningless: "*Li* performed without reverence, the forms of mourning observed without grief—how can I bear to look on these things?" *Jen*, the "inner" goal of the realized man, could only be achieved through *li*, the performance of one's appropriate role. When Confucius was asked, "What is *jen*?" he replied, "Curb your ego and submit to *li*."[14]

Early Confucianism thus conceived of *li*, the performance of one's role, and "inner spirit" as an integrally linked dualism. In Confucian theory, *li*, both in this broader sense and in the specific sense of ritual, was a means of ordering the state and creating a stable hierarchical society. Confucians emphasized ritual as a promoter of order and a preventive for disorder. *Luan*, a problem frequently raised in Confucian discussions, meant internal confusion and chaos, to be feared perhaps more than the external invading army. *Luan* was also the direct outcome of death. Stuart Thompson in his essay analyzes death ritual, *li*, as the means of restoring a proper moral order after the disorder (*luan*) of death. In the process of restoring order through *li*, *yang* overrides *yin*, men affirm symbolic superiority over women, agnates over affines, rice over pork, purity over lewdness, structure over *communitas*.

Luan in a broader context was the disorder arising within the household, community, or state when ethical norms and social roles were subverted. The desire to promote order and prevent *luan* was held by persons all through the society. For the elite, one way to prevent *luan* was to inculcate proper values and behavior in the populace.

Rituals expressed the asymmetrical relations between superior and inferior, parent and child, husband and wife, senior and junior, and at the

12. *Analects*, XVII.xxi.1–6; also XIV.xliii.1–2; II.v.3. Modified quotation from *The Chinese Classics*, trans. James Legge, 3d ed. (Hong Kong: University Press, 1960), 1: 147.

13. Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought*, p. 67.

14. See ibid., pp. 67–75, 77. The quotes, discussed by Schwartz, are from *Analects*, Book 3, chap. 26, and Book 12, chap. 1, respectively.

same time they taught, through performance, core values such as filial piety. Confucians did not assume that belief preceded and was the stimulus for performance; they also understood that *performance* could lead to inculcation of belief. Rather than making a sharp distinction between belief and practice, therefore, Chinese ruling elites tended to see belief and practice as organically linked to one another, each influencing the other. For children, as for the illiterate mass of the populace, Confucians might put primary stress on practice; for advanced students seeking Confucian cultivation, the stress would be differently placed, on the degree to which one's internal state could be translated into morally perfect action; but that the two were always necessarily part of a unity was not in doubt.

The Confucian ideas of education or moral transformation elucidated by Donald Munro help us understand better exactly why Confucians began with concrete performance when they sought to inculcate values. Confucians assumed that people were attracted to and learned to cultivate the mind through the imitation of (virtuous) role models: "Teaching by example surpasses teaching by words."[15] The Confucian texts, from the elementary primers on to advanced texts, were full of exemplars from the past; Confucians themselves were aware of their obligation to serve as good models for others to emulate. The Confucian form of learning emphasized the presentation of abstract moral principles through their concrete embodiment in an individual's life, but both elements, the specific biographical detail and the abstract principles, were present. As Munro notes, "Models manifest the link between knowledge of principles and action in accordance with them and help to make this link habitual in the learner. They stand for principle in action."[16]

The adoption of Confucianism as an approved doctrine by the state in the second century B.C. and its central position in state doctrine for the past millennium ensured that the early texts were not neglected or forgotten. Subsequent developments in Neo-Confucianism, most notably the development of the Wang Yang-ming school from the sixteenth century, also stressed the unity of knowledge and action. Ch'ing officials writing about the expansion of education to peasants stressed that schooling would help promote cultural orthodoxy as well as "ritualized perfection," and thus stabilize the society.[17] Historians would thus argue that the primary agents of cultural integration cited by Watson—the state, officials, and local elites—did intend to promote orthodoxy through orthopraxy.

15. Donald J. Munro, *The Concept of Man in Contemporary China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), p. 136.
16. Ibid., p. 138.
17. Alexander Woodside, "Some Mid-Qing Theorists of Popular Schools," *Modern China* 9, no. 1 (1983): 3–35.

Before ending this discussion, let us turn again to the main issue of belief versus practice. In his introductory essay, Watson argues for the primacy of orthopraxy in the Chinese state by contrasting China with Christian Europe. "In early Christendom," he notes, "it was belief that carried more weight than practice, and in later eras debates regarding the proper performance of the Eucharist focused on ideological concerns underpinning practice." The contrast between Christian Europe and Ch'ing China is a telling one, for Confucian ritual was never so sharply doctrinal. One could argue that China before Mao never required the levels of commitment to a specified dogma that were demanded by the Catholic and later the Protestant church. The contrast between Chinese and Christian practice is identical to the contrast made by Richard Madsen between the pre-Maoist "ceremonies of innocence" and the Maoist "rituals of struggle" in post-1949 China.[18] "Ceremonies of innocence" are the traditional village life-cycle and seasonal rituals, which unite participants "in a common experience that is drenched with meaning but cannot be expressed by any single set of discursive ideas." By contrast, "rituals of struggle" celebrate one set of doctrines: "Ritual becomes the expression of sharply focused sacred doctrine," and aims to separate believers from heretics.[19] Chinese orthodoxy in the late imperial era never possessed this quality; but that there was an identifiable orthodoxy cannot be denied.

THE PROPAGATION OF DEATH RITUAL

The Chinese state played an enormous role in shaping belief systems. The reader is directed to chapter 8 in this volume, where Myron Cohen looks very broadly at this subject. This essay will limit itself to a brief survey of the standardization of rites by the state, officials, and local elites. The purposive propagation of ritual to the commoner population is relatively late in China; its success owed much to underlying social and economic changes that began in the Sung but were most marked in the late Ming and early Ch'ing periods.

Until the Sung (960–1279 A.D.), ancestral ritual (and hence death ritual) was the preserve of rulers and the *shih-ta-fu*, or gentleman-official class, a hereditary ruling elite which had dominated affairs for centuries. Sumptuary restrictions on ritual performance demarcated the ruler from officials, and officials from commoners. Ancestral rites were largely the preserve of the privileged: legally, the erection of ancestral shrines (*chia miao*) was forbidden to commoners, and in ritual texts commoners were denied the right to

18. Richard Madsen, *Morality and Power in a Chinese Village* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), chap. 1.
19. Ibid., p. 22.

make offerings to ancestors earlier than their grandparents.[20] This (largely unsuccessful) attempt to limit ancestor worship was a natural concomitant of the strong historical link between political authority and access to the gods, manifested already in the Late Shang state (ca. 1200–1045 B.C.).[21]

The effect of limiting the audience for classical ritual prescriptions to the ruling elite was to permit other belief systems, notably Buddhism and Taoism, to dominate popular practice, and many Sung officials complained of uncanonical (i.e., non-Confucian) marriage and funeral practices. The great philosopher Chu Hsi, while a prefect at Chang-chou, Fukien, in 1190, issued a proclamation to the citizens expressing his shock at meeting a degree-holder who had ignored the rules for mourning dress. Chu Hsi explained why one should mourn one's parents, by citing passages from the *Analects*; henceforth, those mourning the death of parents must wear mourning clothes and abstain from liquor, meat, and sex for three years, thus repaying the labors of one's parents. Chu Hsi warned that those who disobeyed would be punished. Elsewhere, Chu Hsi proclaimed that households should "never" employ "Buddhist monks, offer sacrifice to the Buddha, or make extravagant display at funerals" and stipulated punishments for citizens who violated the rules.[22] The Neo-Confucian philosophical attack on Buddhism and Taoism thus simultaneously sought to replace errant practices among commoners with approved classical rites and signaled an important reorientation toward the propagation of standards that would cover commoners as well as the gentleman-official.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries a newly vigorous Confucian officialdom began to look closely at and to correct popular mores through reform

20. See J. Friedman and M. J. Rowlands, "Notes towards an Epigenetic Model of the Evolution of 'Civilisation,'" in *The Evolution of Social Systems*, ed. J. Friedman and M. J. Rowlands (London: Duckworth, 1977), pp. 201–276, which presents a scheme of historical evolution of societies in which monopoly over the supernatural through ancestors was the means by which a royal line emerged to form an "asiatic state." The authors use examples from Chinese history as support for their construct and note the hierarchical nature of ritual for pre-Ch'in China. Our discussions indicate that many elements echoing their descriptions of the "asiatic state" of Shang times could still be found in the late imperial era. On the Sung situation, see Patricia B. Ebrey, "Early Stages of Descent Group Organization," in *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China, 1000–1940* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 16–61, and Patricia Ebrey, "The Formulation of Family Rituals during the Sung Period," paper presented at the Conference on Neo-Confucian Education, August–September 1984. On Chu Hsi's magisterial actions, see Ron-guey Chu, "Chu Hsi and Public Instruction," paper presented at the same conference.

21. The sharp break in the imperial tradition comes with the T'ang dynasty; see Howard J. Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk: Ritual and Symbol in the Legitimation of the T'ang Dynasty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). Wechsler argues that with the T'ang, there was an attempt to shift the emphasis in state ritual from worship of the imperial ancestors to more "public" worship of Heaven.

22. Ron-guey Chu, "Chu Hsi and Public Instruction," Appendices 3, 5.

of marriage and mourning customs. The impact of the Neo-Confucian concern with the social transformation of commoners and not merely the ruling elite was heightened by the many fundamental changes occurring in Sung society. The development of printing, for example, enabled wide dissemination of books, and Confucians were quick to seize on this medium to spread their ideas: indeed, a central impulse promoting the advance of printing was the urge to standardize Confucian texts. From this period, the written medium was to become, more and more, a common tool for transmission of norms.

By the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Chinese state was recruiting more than half of its new officials through the system of civil service examinations that had begun in the sixth century and developed gradually thereafter. This shift to recruitment through examination spelled the end of the old *shih-ta-fu* class and heralded the beginning of a more mobile society. The Ming and Ch'ing dynasties refined the system of granting degrees by establishing regional quotas to ensure representation from every province in the empire; the result was a group of degree-holders educated in the Confucian curriculum, committed to the dynasty, and strategically placed throughout China. As the ability of the central government to intervene directly in local affairs waned (the average population in the lowest administrative unit, a county, increased consistently from the ninth century on), the central authorities began to place more and more emphasis on indirect means of social control and to rely on the informal leadership of the degree-holding elite to maintain local stability and order.

The late imperial government's reliance on indirect modes of local control emphasized broadly educational efforts, such as the rural lectures, presented twice monthly in localities by officials and notables, which featured the Sacred Edict successively promulgated by Ming and Ch'ing emperors. Early Ch'ing officials and educated men wrote handbooks presenting the normative rituals, culled from earlier compendia, to the population at large. The eighth-century compendium, the *K'ai-yuan li*, and Chu Hsi's *Chia li* (Rituals for family life) set the standard followed by the *Collected Statutes* of the Ming and Ch'ing. Chu Hsi's Family Rituals continued to enjoy wide influence. The "Family Rituals," according to de Groot, explaining how the practices he observed in late nineteenth-century Amoy replicated classical usage, "has ever since circulated throughout the empire as a standard authority," cited in numerous genealogies, encyclopedias, and in legal codes. As Patricia Ebrey notes, of all of Chu Hsi's writings, this work may have been most often consulted by persons with little schooling.[23]

The continuous transmission of ritual texts, promoted by the centralized

23. See Patricia Ebrey, "The Formulation of Family Rituals"; de Groot, *The Religious System*, 1:235–240.

state, was thus an important factor in the uniformity of death ritual. Private efforts to promote social reform through correction of marriage and funeral customs among the people paralleled official action. Concerted public and private efforts to transmit normative values and behavior relied on the increased ease of communication from urban to rural areas and between regions, a consequence of the sixteenth-century commercial expansion, which produced a highly developed, increasingly integrated market hierarchy. As a result, orthodox norms were disseminated more broadly than ever before.

The ritual system also changed subtly in its symbolic dimensions and its social significance. The sumptuary regulations that had limited ancestral rites to the elite were replaced by simplified rituals that thus narrowed the social distance between different strata. By the Ch'ing, one could truly say that the mourning observances for an emperor were in their essentials the same as the mourning observances for commoners; this was certainly not the case in the Sung and earlier periods. So ritual hierarchical distinctions decreased sharply over time; the society also became more mobile, not only because of the erosion of elite privilege produced by the examination system, but also because wealth became a factor of more and more importance in high status, apart from degrees. As old social boundaries dissolved, proper performance of ritual became more and more a symbol of status in its own right. Conspicuous consumption in ritual observance was now an important social reality, precisely because social structure was more fluid; in this perspective, the increased wealth spent on funerals was an investment in social climbing.

Ritual could also, in the *longue durée*, help shape social organization. This is the argument presented by Patricia Ebrey, who notes that grave worship was not commonly practiced until the mid-T'ang period, when collective worship at *ch'ing-ming* became an important addition to kin-group activities. Ebrey argues that the custom of grave worship originated, not with the Confucian elite, but among commoners, influenced by Buddhism. T'ang agnates who worshipped together at graves were thus able to express reverence for distant ancestors; this was otherwise difficult for commoners, who were prohibited (in law but not in reality) from erecting ancestral shrines. The practice of worshipping early ancestors together on one day helped foster kin-group consciousness among local agnates and may well have stimulated the formation of lineages.[24]

The symbolic significance of correct ritual performance attained additional meaning as a consequence of China's repeated involvement with other cultures. Rites, properly performed, were an essential component of Chinese identity in the late imperial period, and probably for a long time before. Originally spurred by the desire to differentiate the agrarian Han Chinese

24. See Ebrey, "Early Stages of Descent Group Organization," pp. 20–29.

from their nomadic neighbors to the north, Chineseness became defined by dietary habits (the Chinese did not eat dairy products), by clothing styles, and especially by traditions concerning marriage and death. Over the centuries, as China was repeatedly conquered by tribes from the steppe (China was ruled in whole or in part by non-Han dynasties for over five hundred of the last thousand years), the Chinese emphasis on culture over ethnicity increased. Anyone could become "Chinese" by adopting Chinese customs and behavior. During the eighteenth century, the expansion of Han Chinese settlement into southwest China, Taiwan, west China beyond the Kansu corridor, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Manchuria brought intensified interaction between Chinese and the aboriginal and non-Han tribes residing there, and undoubtedly contributed to underlining the concept of Chinese identity. Acculturation was expressed by Chinese as the transformation of "raw," or "uncooked," people into "ripe," or "cooked" (*shu*, meaning civilized) Chinese.[25] In the Ch'ing period, as the empire expanded to its largest extent in history, incorporating many non-Han tribes, adoption of Chinese surname exogamy, mourning observances, and correct performance of ritual had become crucial markers of membership in the Chinese cultural community.

The death rituals of the Ch'ing and later years must thus be seen as the product of the state and its Confucian elite, sustained by widespread, regionally dispersed literacy that was itself in part the consequence of the examination system. As Susan Naquin demonstrates in chapter 3 of this volume, information from texts that were available to the fully literate and highly educated members of the literati stratum was also transmitted to more humble households by religious and other mortuary specialists who were employed by all but the poorest families. In addition to the geomancer, found in all parts of China, the funeral priest, who could be a Buddhist, a Taoist, or an adherent of the numerous popular religious sects that flourished in the late imperial period, was most likely to have access to written texts of some kind. Even peasant death rituals used a wide variety of written materials. The presence of written texts signifies direct ties to the elite tradition, but as James Watson suggests in citing illiterate old women specializing in "checking" the correctness of ritual practice, there was

25. For a historical survey of the expansion of Han Chinese settlement, see Harold J. Wiens, *China's March Toward the Tropics* (Hamden: Shoe String Press, 1954), and Hisayuki Miyakawa, "The Confucianization of South China," in Arthur Wright, ed., *The Confucian Persuasion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), pp. 21–46. On the cultural interaction of Han Chinese and Inner Asian tribes, see Owen Lattimore's *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1940). For a discussion of the problems of incorporation of large numbers of non-Han peoples into the Ch'ing empire, see Susan Naquin and Evelyn S. Rawski, *Chinese Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

always a living oral tradition with which the textual tradition interacted. A work by James Hayes in another context demonstrates the efficacy with which written and oral modes of communication were combined through the ubiquitous village specialists who were called upon for many and varied services.[26] The activities of these specialists provided the final link between the written traditions of the elite and the villager. They helped ensure a remarkable degree of uniformity—in ritual performance, but also in the underlying belief system—in late imperial and contemporary China.

26. James Hayes, "Specialists and Written Materials in the Village World," in Johnson et al., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, pp. 75–111.

PART II

THREE

Funerals in North China: Uniformity and Variation

Susan Naquin

More than a decade ago in a provocative essay, Maurice Freedman asked whether, despite considerable diversity, one Chinese religion did not exist. He called upon others to find ways of demonstrating that there was "some order—of a kind that should allow us (if we take the trouble) to trace the ruling principles of ideas across a vast field of apparently heterogenous beliefs, and ruling principles of form and organization in an equally enormous terrain of varied action and association."[1] He criticized recent work in Chinese anthropology for being too close to its informants and thus having a fragmented, peasant's-eye view of Chinese religion that emphasized diversity and variation. He could easily have taken Chinese historians to task (as he did one generation of sociologists) for a similar dependence on their sources and a resulting preference for seeing China through the unifying vision of its elites, a vision in which differences were minimized and deviations deplored.

Despite growing interest in the last decade in the relationship between class and culture in China, not a great deal of progress has been made in developing a method for studying uniformity and variation in ideas and organization.[2] A consideration of the role of funeral ritual seems a suitable

I wish to thank the conference participants, and especially the editors, as well as members of the Ethnohistory Workshop at the University of Pennsylvania and the Traditional China Seminar at Columbia University for their comments and suggestions. The much longer conference-paper version of this article contains a more detailed text, many illustrations, a full glossary, and far more extensive footnotes.

1. Maurice Freedman, "On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion," in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 20.

2. See D. Johnson, A. J. Nathan, and E. S. Rawski, eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).

occasion for raising these issues once more. As in other cultures, ideas about death are central to Chinese religion (or religions), while rituals are carriers of important cultural information, especially in a peasant society. Moreover, we have reason to believe at the outset that there was considerable uniformity combined with bewildering diversity in Chinese funeral practices extending across the geographic range of China, up and down the social scale, and far back in time. I hope to use an investigation of uniformity and variation in funeral ritual in one area (north China) and one period (the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) to analyze this larger issue: the existence of common elements in Chinese culture and their perpetuation in the face of entropic pressures toward cultural diversity and change.

The most detailed studies of Chinese funeral practices in the modern period in Western languages are ethnographies done in south and central China. Although sketches of funeral rituals in north China were left by twentieth-century visitors, and other accounts can be found in Chinese local histories of the late Ch'ing and Republican periods, a general description of the ritual sequence for the north, presented so as to make possible comparisons with other regions and times, does not, to my knowledge, exist. This chapter will begin with such an account and then turn to the problems of variation and uniformity.

The description that follows is based on Chinese gazetteer (that is, local history) accounts mostly written in the period 1870–1940 from a pie-shaped wedge of north China (see the Appendix to this chapter). I have tried to present the fullest set of those common funeral rituals that together constituted the repertory from which individual families could select.[3] I will attempt to encompass all of the rituals, from imminent death to encoffining, funeral, and burial, through the third-year anniversary of the deathday. The most elaborate (and, in a sense, ideal) funeral was performed at the death of an elderly parent, and I will occasionally follow Chinese practice in describing the ritual in terms of a son mourning his father. Abbreviations of and variations on these rituals will then be discussed in more detail. Let us first turn to the funeral rituals themselves.

THE RITUAL SEQUENCE

Although preparations for a funeral (buying a coffin, locating a burial site, readying grave clothes) might be made well in advance, the rituals themselves began (if circumstances permitted) just before death. It was unlucky for anyone to die on the communal *k'ang* (the brick platform, heated in winter, that served as both living area and bed in north China), and so when the delicate decision was made that recovery was impossible and death imminent ("only one breath left"), the dying person had to be transferred to a special bed. This bed (a flat board) was then moved into the main ceremonial room of the house. Family members, who were expected to assemble as speedily as possible, stood around the bed, and at the moment the dying person breathed his last, the formal expression of grief began. They knelt and began the wailing indicative of mourning (the "death howl," J. J. M. de Groot calls it) and, following practices of considerable longevity, beat their breasts and stamped their feet in grief. The characteristic appearance of mourning was supposed to include loosened hair, unwashed face, plain clothing, and the absence of all ornaments. Family members might kowtow to the corpse as they keened, embracing it, praising the deceased, and lamenting their loss.

The corpse was immediately prepared for eventual encoffining, a process called *hsiao-lien* (dressing the corpse). An unpadded quilt served as a shroud and, together with a pillow, was placed under the body. Sometimes the children or spouse washed the face or body. The corpse was dressed in special "long-life" clothing, which could be, depending on his class, official robes and embroidered gowns or new but plain cotton clothes, shoes, and hat. Special objects were usually placed in the mouth of the deceased (e.g., pearls, coins) and some on the body (e.g., jewelry, mirrors); the face was covered with a piece of cloth or paper, and the feet were tied with colored string. A makeshift altar table was set up near the body at this time. A temporary spirit-tablet (*ling-p'ai*) and lighted lamp were placed on it; there paper spirit-money (currency in the otherworld) was burned as an offering. Sometimes relatives beyond the immediate family were present for these procedures.

Public notice of the death was made immediately by pasting white paper streamers on the main gate of the house. These strips of paper were hung on the left side of the gate if the deceased was a man, on the right for a woman; sometimes the number of strips represented the age of the deceased. (A paper pennant on a pole or pieces of spirit-money might be used instead of the paper streamers.) The red auspicious couplets that were pasted on many doors at New Year's were covered over with white paper.

The all-purpose diviner used as a consultant on most aspects of funerals (known in this part of China as a "yin-yang master") was promptly called in. He not only took measures to protect the family against the harmful and inauspicious influences of an unburied body and calculated the auspicious times for key events (encoffining, moving the coffin, burial), but determined the geomantic siting of the grave. When the schedule of ritual events had

3. The accounts on which my study is based have several obvious biases: toward presentation of the unchanging, normative, elite, "Confucian" view of funeral ritual, and against more varied, popular, "superstitious," local practices. I have tried to correct this bias by relying on a large number of accounts to reconstruct the full ritual, eliminating the disparaging comments sometimes made by the authors, and drawing on foreign observers for underrecorded aspects of the ritual.

been determined, the deceased's family's relatives and acquaintances were formally notified (*pao-sang*). Messengers (relatives, servants) were sent out to tell close relations; a written announcement could be placed on the gate; handwritten or printed notices (*fu-wen*) might be sent out. The dates of the deceased's birth and death, an account of his career, the schedule of funeral rituals, and the names of close surviving relatives might be given on these announcements.

It was essential that the local gods be quickly notified as well. The immediate family of the deceased reported the death at the nearest shrine of the earth-god (or city-god) who was responsible for the local community. Taking candles and spirit-money, the family went to the temple, wailing all the way, made an offering, announced the death, and returned home. (In some places this ritual—called *pao-miao*—was repeated three times.)

Close relatives began coming to pay their condolences soon after the death, but the encoffining (*ta-lien*) was a more public event, involving not only more distant agnates but affinal relatives as well. Monks or a diviner might be present. Ideally, this ceremony took place on the third day. A sturdy coffin would hold the corpse. Certain objects were placed in it first (e.g., ashes, copper coins, lime), and then close relatives lifted and lowered in the body. The eldest son or the wife would personally wipe the eyes of the deceased with cotton floss (*k'ai-kuang*). Other objects were placed on or around the body, and cakes and sticks made of dough, intended for feeding and beating vicious dogs believed to lie in wait in the otherworld, were sometimes placed near the hands of the corpse. When the body was packed in the quilt, the coffin was then closed, to the accompaniment of wailing and calling to the dead ("Avoid the nails! Fear the nails!"). Offerings of real food were now made every day at mealtimes on a nearby altar.

The encoffining was followed immediately by a set of rituals collectively referred to in this region as the "third-day reception" (*chieh-san*), but sometimes known as "calling back the soul" (*chao-hun*) or "sending off [the deceased]" (*sung-lu*). Although there was considerable local diversity in these practices, two general activities usually took place: making sure that the spirit of the deceased remained with the body in the coffin, and sending useful objects to accompany the deceased in the otherworld. First, family, relatives, and sometimes Buddhist monks went again to the earth-god temple to call for the soul (then in the custody of the local god) and, returning with it, secured the soul to the encoffined body. This ritual involved different quasi-magical procedures for bringing the soul back home and was sometimes accompanied by sutra chanting. In a connected ceremony, paper representations of a variety of objects that would be useful to the deceased's journey in the otherworld—carts, attendants, horses, chests, clothing, money, and other items—were burned that evening in a public place outside the house, usually at the intersection of two lanes.

For the more formal and more public rituals that accompanied and followed the encoffining, a ceremonial area would have been set up within or beside the house. Near the coffin was the table for offerings to the spirit of the deceased; a plain-colored curtain screened the coffin from general view. An adjacent courtyard or open space was covered with a straw-mat awning and then decorated with gifts brought by friends and relations (spirit-world objects, and commemorative odes and couplets written on large paper or cloth scrolls); a small room with a desk was reserved for financial transactions and the recording of gifts. If a feast was planned, tables and chairs were set up and a separate cooking area was established. Shops that specialized in funerals usually provided the necessary equipment and services.

After the encoffining, most families engaged Buddhist monks (or Taoist priests) to come and "do the sevens" (*tso-ch'i*). Scriptures were supposed to be chanted every seventh day (from the death) until the seventh seven (the forty-ninth day), although three sevens or five sevens (twenty-one or thirty-five days) was sometimes deemed quite sufficient. This chanting was intended to see the soul of the deceased through the underworld to its next rebirth. As the monks and priests chanted to the accompaniment of music, relatives and friends came again to pay their condolences, the family wailed by the coffin, offerings of food and spirit-money were made, and the guests were feasted. Procedures for the funeral and burial proceeded independently of the seven sevens and usually took place before those rituals were completed.

Because the immediate relatives not only were assumed to be absorbed in their grief but also were expected to be principal actors in the funeral rituals, an experienced senior relation or acquaintance was usually asked to come and help manage the funeral. He saw to it that all relatives and friends within the family's social circle were invited, hired the necessary professionals, paid the bills, made sure that accurate financial records were kept, and orchestrated most of the funeral activities.

The cluster of rituals that I am terming the funeral proper took place either on the day before or the day of the removal of the coffin from the home. They included the formal offerings to the coffin in full ceremonial mourning attire, the receiving of more condolences, the feasting and entertainment of guests, the wake, and the farewell to the soul.

The receiving of condolences (*k'ai-tiao*) could be a very elaborate ceremony. All relatives and acquaintances were expected to attend and bring gifts; these usually included offerings (food, spirit-money), ceremonial objects (candles, incense, spirit-world objects, elegiac scrolls), or simply money to assist the bereaved family with expenses. Gifts were displayed in the courtyard and during the burial procession. It was during these rituals that ceremonial mourning clothes had to be worn (*ch'eng-fu*). Each of the five grades of mourning (*wu-fu*) had its special clothing or marker so that the status of

every relative was immediately apparent. The chief mourner wore a coarse, loosely fitting, unbleached cloth outfit and plain hat and carried a staff. Guests were expected to wear seemly clothing and to put on a white sash when approaching the coffin.

Several (usually four) men who were distinguished friends of the family were invited to serve as masters of ceremony (*hsiang-pin*) during the funeral. Formal offerings were made by the mourners at the altar, and an invocation was read, and then, as the family knelt beside the coffin, the arrival of each guest was announced by musicians at the gate. During these *t'ang-chi* (also called *chia-chi*) rites, the condoler was brought in by the master of ceremonies, given a sash or a marker of mourning, and then led to the coffin. After the guest had wailed and made an offering there, the chief mourner kowtowed to thank him, and the guest then retired to the courtyard where he might stay and chat with friends and await the feast.

The ritual of "completing the tablet" (*ch'eng-chu*) usually took place at this time. The wooden tablet that would become one home for the soul of the deceased after burial was prepared in advance, leaving only the single dot in the character *chu* 主 (host, owner) to be filled in. The most distinguished literary acquaintance of the family would be invited to mark with a brush, perhaps in red ink or even blood and often with considerable pomp, the finishing dot that gave life to the tablet. He was known as "inscriber of the tablet" (*tien-chu* or *t'i-chu*). This ritual had the effect of transferring the deceased's spirit to the tablet and was sometimes called "saying goodbye to the spirit" (*tz'u-ling*) and was accompanied by wailing and offerings to the tablet. It was sometimes followed by the more cheerful rite of placing the tablet on the altar (*an-chu*) and thus reincorporating it into the family.

If these rituals took place on the afternoon before the departure of the coffin for burial, members of the family kept the deceased company during the night (*pan-su* or *tso-yeh*). This wake could be the occasion for storytelling and operas performed for the deceased, the guests, and the neighborhood.

The coffin was not always put in the ground immediately after the funeral, and the burial itself might occur long after the death. In order to bury a husband and wife in the same grave, the coffin of the one to die first would often be put in storage. Some families waited for months or years for a suitable grave site or auspicious date, and apparently the sight of coffins awaiting burial was a common one. Coffins were housed temporarily in temples, on vacant land, or in out-of-the-way spots, sometimes covered with makeshift roofs, sometimes exposed to the elements.

The initial movement of the coffin from the home—a dangerous moment of transition when the spirit was liable to drift away from the coffin and the tablet—was accompanied by a number of rituals, and monks or a diviner were often present. The chief mourner broke a pottery bowl (variously explained, but indicative at one level of the symbolic transformation of the child-parent relationship), and offerings were made to the coffin, to the catafalque on which it would be carried, and to the pennant that led the spirit in the procession. As soon as the coffin left the house, firecrackers were set off, and measures were taken to protect the residents against its residual inauspicious influences. (Some of the objects that had been in contact with the corpse were thought to have regenerative power for women and young children and were saved by them—dust and coins from the coffin, a piece of the shroud, earth from the grave.)

The funeral procession (*fa-yin* or *ch'u-pin*) itself could be of immense size in its fullest form, involve large numbers of people hired for the occasion, and cost a great deal of money. Most processions included the following elements in roughly this order: men who scattered spirit-money along the road; displays of mourning couplets, written testimonials to the deceased, and plaques with his titles or official posts; a testimonial banner (*ming-ching*), sometimes of enormous size on which the name, ranks, dates, and survivors of the deceased were written; spirit-world objects to be burned at the grave; musicians; monks and priests in ceremonial robes; the chief mourner, carrying the spirit-pennant; other close male relatives; the coffin itself borne in a large wooden catafalque carried by hired pallbearers or by men close to the deceased; women and children riding in carts; other guests.

Acquaintances, friends, and neighbors set up small roadside altars along the route to the grave (a practice known as *lu-chi*). The funeral procession moved slowly, stopping at each altar (and at bridges and intersections) for offerings to be made, mourners to kowtow their thanks, and musicians to play. The socially relevant portion of the funeral ended at this point. Most of those who set off with the procession turned back at the suburbs or edge of the village. Long delays could ensue, and whether the coffin was taken directly to the grave or to another place for storage was largely a private affair. If burial was taking place immediately, only close relatives went all the way to the cemetery.

The grave site itself, always distant from human dwellings, would ideally be a plot within a family cemetery selected by a yin-yang master with close attention to its alignment in the natural setting. Burial (*tsang*) in a coffin was the preferred way of disposing of a body; cremation was appropriate only under unusual and unnatural circumstances. When the procession reached the grave and the forecast auspicious moment arrived, the coffin was lowered into the ground. With it were placed a crock containing food (which had been carried to the grave by a close relative), sometimes a lamp, and usually the testimonial banner folded on top. The chief mourner was the first to put dirt on the coffin. When the grave was filled, offerings were made to the newly housed ancestor, and more spirit-world objects were burned and sent to the deceased. Offerings were also made at this time to the spirit of the

soil (*hou-t'u*) who protected the grave, preferably by a respected person with some military experience, someone who could scare off evil spirits.

Dirt was piled up to make the cone-shaped mound characteristic of graves in north China. The spirit-pennant was temporarily planted in front of the grave, and sometimes a stone slab was later set up in front of the mound. In family plots where many generations had already been buried, the preferred pattern of burial was to place the founding ancestor under a larger mound at the apex of a triangle, with subsequent generations placed to each side in descending order, sometimes alternating generations. Wives and concubines who had produced heirs were interred together with their husbands.

It appears that in north China, bodies once interred were rarely exhumed and reburied. Sometimes, in search of a more auspicious site or in order to open up a new burial ground, bones would be dug up and moved, but these were not common practices, and a small empty coffin could substitute symbolically for bones.[4]

The ancestral tablet was returned by the chief mourner with some fanfare to the family altar (*hui-ling*). Ceremonial mourning attire was removed, and the *yü* sacrifice was performed at home to formalize and celebrate the relocation of the soul in the tablet and of the tablet on the altar.

After the burial, the more extreme forms of mourning behavior were terminated, though a few rituals remained. It was important to make sure that all lingering inauspicious auras associated with the dead were exorcized from the home, and a diviner was often hired to write charms and chant spells to this end. It was also necessary for the chief mourner to thank those who had come to pay condolences, by going to their homes personally or sending symbolic gifts.

On the third day after the interment, the immediate family returned to the grave to "round it off" (*yuan-fen*)—piling up earth to make it a proper size and shape, burning incense and spirit-money and sometimes the spirit-pennant, and wailing for the last time. Care of the ancestral tablet and of the grave followed special procedures for several years, until which time the deceased had become a routinized ancestor. Offerings were made on the sixtieth and the hundredth day and on the first *ch'ing-ming* (the sweeping of the graves in the spring). Moreover, on the first, second, and third anniversaries of the deathday, special ceremonies were performed. The longest mourning (e.g., a son for his father) was supposed to last twenty-seven months, although some stopped on the second anniversary of the death. By this time, the soul of the deceased had been relocated in three places: to rebirth in another form, to the ancestral tablet, and to the grave.

4. Only a few sources even mention reburial. For a discussion in English, see Sidney D. Gamble, *Ting Hsien*, p. 393.

Relationships within the family had been redefined and the social networks of the family reinvigorated.

The practice of routine "ancestor worship" has been adequately described in the secondary literature. It should be sufficient to note here that such "worship" consisted of the making of special offerings (*chi*) (food, wine) on an altar usually located in the central hall of the home. Gazetteers from north China often note the lack of ancestral halls (*chia-tz'u*, *chia-miao*) relative to other parts of China. The ancestors were generally represented by wooden tablets, although the poor might use paper and the rich add portrait scrolls above the altar. Offerings were made before the ancestors collectively at least bimonthly (on the first and the fifteenth of the lunar month), as well as on holidays, whereas individual ancestors were remembered on the anniversaries of their births and deaths.

Offerings at the grave were made on a few key occasions during the year. On New Year's eve, the family might go to the graveyard to invite the ancestors home for the holiday or else burn spirit-money and set off firecrackers at the grave on New Year's day. A visit to the graves of recent ancestors was mandatory on *ch'ing-ming*, the solar holiday that generally fell in the third or fourth lunar month. The entire family was expected to participate, taking wine and special delicacies for their offerings. These were presented at the grave, and spirit-money was burned. Family members made clear their ownership of the grave (especially important when burial was not in a private cemetery) by building up the mound, removing weeds, and sweeping clear the area around the grave. A family or lineage feast might follow at home. The family returned to the cemetery to make fresh offerings on the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month as part of the rituals directed toward spirits in general during that month, and came again on the first day of the tenth month for the ceremony of "sending winter clothes" (*sung han-i*) (spirit-clothes made of colored paper and burned at the side of the grave). It was rare that the grave became the focus of worship by anyone except the immediate descendants of the deceased. Although the graves of prominent individuals were often preserved, they were still private sites.[5]

The rituals described here are presented in their most common sequence, but the timing of each segment could vary considerably. Generally speaking, the two fixed events around which the others were organized were the encoffining and the removal of the coffin from the home. Ideally, encoffining took place on the third day, and saying goodbye to the soul, that evening;

5. Ch'ing rulers took responsibility for maintaining and making offerings at the tombs of emperors of their own and previous dynasties but did not permit their development as pilgrimage sites. The impressive public mausoleum built by the Republican government for Sun Yat-sen, discussed by Wakeman in chapter 11 in this volume, thus represented a significant break with tradition.

sutra chanting lasted seven, twenty-one, thirty-five, or forty-nine days; the funeral immediately preceded the moving of the coffin and ideally occurred within the seven sevens. In real life, the sequence could be and often was both compressed and simplified. The corpse could be dressed and placed in the coffin by the second day, the rituals of reporting to the temple and calling back the soul (both of which required a temple visit) could be performed together that evening, and on the third day monks came in to chant sutras, condolences were received, and the coffin was interred. Hot weather and a lack of resources were probably the two factors most likely to promote the performance of rituals in a speedy and simple fashion.

VARIATIONS

The rituals so far discussed were, as I have indicated, generally performed at the deaths of elderly parents; for those who died childless or unmarried, modifications were made. When infants died, the bodies could be buried perfunctorily in shallow graves or simply abandoned. The older the child, the more elaborate the ceremony. Within private graveyards, certain (less desirable) areas were apparently reserved for infants and children. Families sometimes tried to arrange posthumous marriages for unwed children with a ceremony that combined a wedding and a funeral.

The religious community served as a surrogate family when Buddhist monks and nuns died. Following centuries-old practices, the corpses of these religious professionals were cremated. When a monk died, his fellow monks washed and dressed his corpse, chanted sutras over the body through the night, and then moved it (on a board or in a box or an urn) to the funeral pyre or crematorium, where it was burned the following day. Sutras were of course chanted on each of the seven sevens, at which times members of the deceased's family (who may have contributed money for the funeral masses) might attend. The ashes were most often placed in collective graves or preserved in urns that were stored in nearby pagodas. Tablets for deceased brethren were housed in a hall of the monastery, and offerings were made to them there. It was the responsibility of a disciple of the deceased to make offerings to the paper spirit-tablet that was used during the funeral and then to the wooden "ancestral" tablet itself.[6] The corpses of ascetics or exceptionally devout monks were sometimes preserved miraculously in a dried form and, lacquered and dressed, treated as sacred relics; sometimes,

6. J. J. M. de Groot, *Le Code du Mahayana en Chine* (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1893), pp. 144–146; J. Prip-Moller, *Chinese Buddhist Monasteries* (Copenhagen, 1937; reprinted. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1967), pp. 163–179. These descriptions are based on these authors' experiences in south and central China, but appear to reflect common practice throughout China.

despite government discouragement, they became objects of veneration and pilgrimage.[7]

There were, of course, a great many people who died alone and without family, especially those who were poor, single, and far from home. What happened to them? Although public services in China were far from systematically developed, some public and private charities attempted to cope with these problems. Government and community leaders were most likely to step in when many people died during large-scale disasters. Shallow pits might be dug and the bodies hurled in; if possible, however, men and women were interred separately. If many people had died by fire, leaving no bodies, the ashes were collected and carefully buried. The rules of one Tientsin association make clear several basic (and more generally applicable) principles of burial: if possible, rebury on the spot without moving the remains; keep separate the bodies of men and women who were not husbands and wives; build a mound over the grave so that others will not disturb it.[8]

Local leaders also periodically donated money or income-producing property to endow funds that could provide the needy with the essentials for funerals on a more routine basis. Such funds, often administered through local temples, appear to have had a natural life-cycle of several generations before the money was exhausted and new endowment needed. In nineteenth-century Tientsin, for example, there were a number of charity organizations (probably funded by wealthy merchants) that undertook to bury abandoned bodies. These bureaus variously gave out straw mats for the simplest form of burial, hired people to cover over or rebury unclaimed bodies or exposed coffins, buried the corpses that floated down the rivers into the city, paid to ship bodies back to their home communities, gave away coffins to people "who had died on the road or were so poor that they couldn't afford a coffin," and even helped manage funerals.[9] It is well known that native-place associations also provided a place for the temporary storage of coffins (and sometimes burial grounds) and funds for shipping bodies home.

There was generally a pervasive concern with the dangerous power of the spirits of those who had died by violence, especially those who had left no descendants. It was not in the interest of any community to be vulnerable to the vengeful acts of the unhappy spirits of the dead. In every county, the Ch'ing state had altars to untended spirits and maintained shrines for heroes, martyrs, and other people of virtue whose lives were cut short unnaturally. Many communities in north China had public graveyards for

7. P. W. Yetts, "The Disposal of the Buddhist Dead in China," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, July 1911, pp. 709–712.

8. T'ien-chin gazetteer (1870) 8.10.

9. Ibid. 8.9–10.

those who did not own private plots. Most of these "charitable burying grounds" (*i-chung*) were under ten *mou* in size (although some were as large as a hundred or more) and were located on land unsuitable for other uses. Orderly family interments were difficult to maintain in these "chaotic burial hills."

In general, the rituals performed for those Chinese who were not adults, not married, not parents, or without kin were essentially truncated versions of the full-fledged funeral rituals, explicitly adjusted for individuals who were in some sense not complete. These "variations" were in fact formal and purposeful differentiations in ritual.

It was not only the family status of an individual that could affect the degree to which he was buried according to the standard funeral-ritual procedure, but also his resources. Indeed, the variations most frequently noted in my sources were those resulting from different levels of expenditure. It is clear from the detail provided by Chinese and Western observers that a wide range of options was available.

At the most general level, the quality of the objects employed during the funeral (and often provided by specialty stores) could—and was expected to—vary with cost. The deathbed could be a wooden-plank door removed from its hinges or a brightly painted rented bed. The shroud itself could be a thin cotton sheet or a piece of fine silk with sutras printed on it in Sanskrit. A fine cedar coffin had thick planks, was heavily lacquered, and could weigh up to five hundred pounds. The spirit-world objects made of paper glued on straw or bamboo splints varied in volume and quality depending on the money expended. The most lavish procedure was to order big, brightly colored, well-made objects in large numbers."It is an easy matter to make a dead person a millionaire in the next world."

Resources governed the amount of feasting provided, the number of guests, and the quality and quantity of the food at a funeral. One could hire a great many musicians, monks, or pallbearers, or only a few. Ordinary or special masses could be chanted once, at intervals, or for the full forty-nine days. Entertainment on the evening of the funeral seems to have ranged from nothing at all to blind storytellers, acrobats, and professional opera performers.

The size of the procession out of the community in particular was a reflection of the expenditures of the bereaved family. An ordinary family could have a simple procession that included relatives, the family, and the coffin; for the very poor, a putrifying body on a door, covered with a mat, carried by the son and two pallbearers; for the rich, a huge entourage several miles long, including dozens of monks and priests, several bands, plaques and colorful spirit-world objects carried by hired men, and newly garbed professional mourners.

Differential resources made the ceremony simpler or more complex.

Burial in less than seven days was a clear sign of poverty. Even families of moderate means who had an available site waited until at least the seventh day before transporting the coffin to the grave. The rich, on the other hand, had many acquaintances to notify and flaunted their resources by waiting past the first or third seven, even until the full forty-nine days had elapsed and an auspicious moment had arrived, not fearing the expense and inconvenience of a long period when visitors had to be entertained and the coffin kept in the home.

In short, from beginning to end, it was very easy for an observer with a fair knowledge of costs to tell just how much money had been spent on a funeral. In fact, an observer was *supposed* to be able to tell. Because a parent's funeral was seen as an expression of the son's filial devotion, he was expected to spare no expense. "The stingy are mocked"; "Those who exhaust their resources are happy." After all, the funeral created concrete benefits for the deceased: greater comfort in the next world, through the foods and objects offered, and salvation from hell, through the good auspices of the religious professionals engaged to pray for the soul. This association between filial devotion and funeral expenses created a deeply embedded encouragement of extravagance that was undeterred by protests from Ch'ing and Republican governments alike, protests that decried the unnecessary social pressure and waste of resources.

The lavishness of a funeral did more, of course, than reflect the sentiments of a child for a parent; it reflected the aspirations of a family for higher social status. It was expected that a funeral would demonstrate the limits of a family's resources, and because funerals were therefore occasions to display one's credit and financial reserves, "families in mourning competed to be new and extravagant and had no thought for those who spent on a grand scale and thus went into debt."[10] Among elite families of a locality, such ritual display was probably only one manifestation of multifaceted competition for status. There is some evidence, moreover, that from the perspective of the entire community, an expensive funeral was considered a social obligation of the rich, a time when resources were redistributed and the community could benefit from the public display and entertainment. The Kao-ch'eng county gazetteer notes that "whenever a rich person loses a parent, the country people regard it as a lucky chance to eat, a blessed thing."

The overall effect of wealth on variation in funeral ritual was direct and public. The rites almost seem designed to highlight different levels of expenditure. Funerals did, thus, vary with social status and wealth and thus offered many possibilities for defining publicly one's status with regard to both condolence-offering friends and relatives and the public more gener-

10. Fang-shan gazetteer.

ally. (Evelyn Rawski illustrates in chapter 10 in this volume the further variation introduced in imperial funeral ritual.) Because people felt these variations to be significant, virtually all of my sources note them; they too were purposeful differentiations, not deviations from a norm.

There were both religious and ethnic minorities in north China, and the variations in funeral rituals that we see among them reveal both the strong influence of the normative ideal and an acknowledgment of legitimate grounds for differences. Although bannermen (including Manchus, Mongols, and Han Chinese) had initially constituted a powerful minority group in the early Ch'ing, legal, ethnic, and cultural differences had steadily disappeared over time. By the turn of the twentieth century, differences in funeral ritual were not very great. The clothing worn by corpses and mourners at a bannerman funeral was distinctive, as was the use of a flagpole rather than a paper pennant at the front gate, and the occasional display (by the rich) of hunting animals in funeral processions.

In the funeral customs of the less sinicized Mongols, the influence of Central Asian culture is clearer. They relied, as did other Central Asian peoples, on shamans for many matters dealing with the dead, but called in priests of Tibetan Lamaist Buddhism to chant sutras as a person died, and to pray, ideally for forty-nine days, for a speedy and improved rebirth for the deceased. The bodies of Mongols were sometimes buried, following Chinese practice, but they were also sometimes cremated or even (among tribes beyond the wall) left exposed to the elements in a deserted spot.[11]

The Muslims of north China shared more customs with their non-Muslim neighbors than did Muslims of the northwest or Central Asia. Nonetheless, the chief mourner went to wail not at the earth-god shrine but in the mosque; the body of the deceased was wrapped naked in a white cloth, carried to the grave in a special box with a sliding bottom provided by the mosque, and buried facing Mecca without a coffin; the local *a-hung* (akhund or mullah) came and read from Islamic scriptures at the time of the interment; the grave was square, not round, in shape.[12] Sinicized Muslims adopted such practices as dressing the corpse in burial clothing, using a coffin, not inviting a mullah, and making subsequent offerings to an ancestral tablet. "But there are those," the Ts'ang gazetteer notes, "who have been using wooden tablets for a dozen generations, but their grave mounds are still square."[13]

We can see another example of the way in which a different set of religious beliefs professed by individuals set in the larger web of Chinese culture

11. See Ts'ang gazetteer 12.48–49, and Ivan A. Lopatin, *The Cult of the Dead Among the Natives of the Amur Basin* (Paris: Mouton, 1960) (data collected in 1913–18), chap. 4.

12. Muslim practices are described in the gazetteers of Hsiang-ho, Ts'ang, and Luan; also Takeda Masao, *Man-Han li-su*, pp. 336–338.

13. Ts'ang gazetteer 10.2. There is a photograph of a Muslim grave opposite p. 309 in Sidney D. Gamble, *How Chinese Families Live in Peiping* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1933).

affected practices surrounding the dead if we look at the funeral practices of White Lotus sectarians. Although they may initially have been more radical,[14] because their sectarian religion drew heavily on mainstream Chinese popular culture, White Lotus sects did not differ in their funeral practices even as much as the Muslims. Their religious community supplemented the family, and pupils provided the expenses or the land for the burial of their teachers or fellow believers. De Groot describes how members of a Lung-hua sect in Amoy in the 1880s dressed the body of a deceased fellow believer in special clothing, encoffined the corpse, chanted sutras over it, and escorted it to the grave.[15]

Because they saw themselves as being among the elect children of the Eternal Mother (the chief deity of their religion), sectarians viewed with optimism the passage of the soul through the underworld. They assumed that they would go immediately to the paradise described in their scriptures without enduring the trials of hell or another incarnation. To identify themselves readily in the otherworld, believers therefore acquired (from their teachers) paper "passports" (*lu-yin*) on which their names would be written; these would be burned at death and the ashes placed on the body. These passports were, one believer said, "like a map to take you on the right road so that you could reach the good place"; anyone who had a passport, said another, "would be met and led through hell by a god and would not have to suffer hell's bitterness."[16]

Some sectarians developed into religious professionals themselves, chanting scriptures for a variety of occasions (including funerals), as monks and Taoist priests did. Said one eighteenth-century Hung-yang sect member, "Whenever there was a funeral for a poor person who did not have the resources to invite a monk or a priest, they asked [us] to chant sutras and escort [the coffin to the grave]."[17] Believers recited their own scriptures as

14. Richard Shek, citing the work of Sawada Mizuho, notes several late Ming claims that followers of Lo sects refused to perform the usual funeral ritual or make offerings to ancestors ("Religion and Society in Late Ming: Sectarianism and Popular Thought in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century China," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1980, pp. 228–229). I have not seen similar charges or evidence of such practices in subsequent centuries.

15. J. J. M. de Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China* (Amsterdam: Johannes Müller, 1903–4), pp. 231–241.

16. For the two quotations: Kung-chung-tang 宮中檔 [Palace memorial archive] (National Palace Museum, Taiwan) no. 48013, Ch'ien-lung (hereafter CL) 49/5/4, and no. 24036, CL 34/1/22 (this case did not come from north China). More extensive citations may be found in the conference version of this article. See also Naquin, "The Transmission of White Lotus Sectarianism in Late Imperial China," in Johnson et al., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*.

17. Kung-chung-tang, secret society category (Ming-Ch'ing Archives, Peking) 490.1, CL 34/2/12. Most of my evidence of professional chanting comes from Hung-yang sects of the Peking area circa 1800. See sources cited in Naquin, "Transmission."

well as orthodox ones, sometimes played musical instruments and wore "Taoist" robes, and relied on their piety to make their performances of penances efficacious.

In this religion there was a tendency to treat the graves of past teachers, and particularly the late Ming patriarchs of the religion, as places of pilgrimage. Not only were these graves maintained over many generations by families of believers who resided nearby, but they received regular visits from sect members. These graves had, variously, stone stele in front, pagodas nearby, and images or tablets in a temple or a hall.[18] As the line between teacher, ancestor, and deity was rather blurred in a number of these cases, it is not surprising that grave sites generated temple complexes, government disapproval notwithstanding.

Variations in funeral ritual according to family status, class, and religion were deliberate variations encouraged by the society to mark what people saw as significant social differences. They were, in Freedman's terms, "religious similarities expressed as though they were religious differences."[19] The variations in ritual that occurred across time and geographic distances may have been of a quite different order.

Because funeral rituals expressed core values and were derived from religious traditions of enduring relevance, most Chinese appear to have assumed that these rites should not vary widely from place to place nor should they change over time. The sources I have consulted unfortunately make it difficult to see much regional or temporal variation within the parts of north China in the late Ch'ing and Republican period on which this article concentrates. The Chinese preference for describing the ideal ritual, together with the limited number of sources consulted here and their relatively shallow time depth, give the strong (but false) impression that funeral rituals were similar from county to county and unchanging from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Comparisons with other parts of China are, fortunately, much easier and, together with the model set forth by James Watson in chapter 1, may help highlight what was regionally specific about the rites here described.

Although studies of funeral ritual in parts of China besides the north are not abundant, there are more than enough to make possible some general comparisons with other regions. The classic works are the observations of Justus Doolittle on Foochow (1865), Henri Doré on the lower Yangtze (1911), and of course the voluminous work of J. J. M. de Groot on Amoy

18. The best known of these graves in north China were those of Patriarch Lo in Mi-yun county, Patriarch P'u-ming in Wan-ch'üan, Patriarch Mi (a woman) in Kao-ch'eng, the Ching-k'ung Patriarch in the Peking suburbs, and the Wang family ancestral hall in Luan-chou—all in Chihli province.

19. Freedman, "On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion," p. 38.

(1892–1910).[20] These can be supplemented, with careful attention to temporal change, by the fieldwork of Arthur Wolf, Emily Martin (Ahern), and others, in Taiwan, and of Maurice Freedman, James Watson, and others, in Hong Kong.

At one level, the similarities between funeral rituals in all of these areas are striking, especially if a non-Chinese model is kept in mind. As the chapters in this volume indicate, a set of Chinese ideas about funeral ritual is certainly identifiable. Although different in many minor ways, components of the ritual sequence described by Doré (for Kiangsu and Anhwei) and Walshe (for Chekiang) replicate those I have set forth. The pattern for Fukien (Amoy and Foochow, and recent Taiwan) diverges a bit more. There, the "report to the temple" was absent, and a rite involving "buying water" with which to wash the corpse was present (both are also present in Chekiang); the specific procedures for the same actions (e.g., dressing the corpse, putting it in the coffin) are more markedly different; and the layout of the grave is quite dissimilar. Data from Hong Kong (all recent) are divergent in similar ways, but more dramatically so, and the preference in southeast China for a two- or three-stage burial process presents the most striking contrast with northern customs. (Delayed burial in north China, like secondary burial in the south, however, meant that only a comparatively small number of people would actually have formal graves.) By separating funeral rites from rites of disposal, James Watson, in chapter 1 of this volume, accommodates this diversity in burial practice to the existence of a set of standard rites. All of his nine core procedures are in fact present in north China, although bathing the corpse is not reported consistently and, like the "buying of water" (never mentioned in my sources), may not have been the essential feature of "dressing the corpse."[21]

Consideration of these sorts of variations, while enriching our knowledge of north China funerals, does not allow us much insight into why and how these differences occurred, how the ritual actually came to be standardized, and what sources of control existed. To answer these questions, another sort of approach is needed.

RITUAL SPECIALISTS

As we have seen, funeral rituals dealt with the soul and the body of the deceased, on the one hand, and with the mourners themselves, the bereaved

20. Justus Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese* (New York: Harper, 1865), pp. 168–235; Henri Doré, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, trans. M. Kennelly, vol. 1 (Shanghai, 1911), pp. 41–87; J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China* (Leiden: Brill, 1892–1910), vol. 1; W. Gilbert Walshe, "Some Chinese Funeral Customs," *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 35 (1903–4):26–64.

21. Much more attention is given in my sources to clothing the corpse than to washing it.

family and friends of the deceased, on the other. In the course of the ritual, a number of different specialists were called in to deal with these different interwoven concerns. It is my hypothesis that these ritual specialists and the manuals on which they relied were an important key to uniformity in death rites. A look at the professionals whose expertise was crucial to the performance of these different components of the ritual will, I believe, help explain how variation in ritual practice was, to different degrees, controlled.

At the simplest level, a bereaved family simply needed extra manpower to manage both the funeral and ongoing chores, and most people turned to friends and relatives for assistance. This help was given informally and formally. The 1934 Pa county gazetteer noted that sometimes neighbors would help out with manual labor; sometimes they would organize themselves into teams under a leader: "No one demands compensation, it is just an expression of mutual aid." Sometimes a family assured themselves of aid by joining a Marriage and Funeral Association (*hung-pai hui*, *lao-jen hui*). These small-scale savings organizations not only created a fund to which families contributed and from which they borrowed, but provided a group whose members would also come to give a hand during the funeral.

For ritual matters generally, most people surely drew for expertise, although my sources do not mention it, on the experience of older men and women in the community, people who had seen many funerals in their time and knew how things were supposed to be done. (See E. Johnson in chapter 6 in this volume for illustrations of this.)[22]

For some of the more demanding or dangerous tasks, unskilled labor could be hired (some landlords could demand that tenants provide these and other services).[23] In north China, bereaved families employed pallbearers (*kang-fu*) and gravediggers (*t'u-kung*), but apparently not the corpse handlers common in the south. Often contracted through the shops that rented funeral equipment, these men did the heavy work of preparing the grave, loading the coffin onto the frame of the catafalque, and carrying it to the graveyard.[24]

People could also rely on those men who ran the specialty shops that

22. Such knowledge was acquired throughout a lifetime. In the 1920s, Westerners picnicking in a graveyard near Peking saw a group of children who were "playing at funerals, burying crickets who died with the morning glories, and pretending to repeat Buddhist 'sutras' over the graves" (Juliet Bredon, *Peking*, 2d ed., Shanghai: Kelley and Walsh [1922], p. 252).

23. E.g., *Agrarian China*, Institute of Pacific Relations, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), pp. 16, 19, describing Wei county in Shantung and Fo-p'ing in Hopei.

24. Pallbearer organizations apparently frequently established monopolies that allowed them to charge very high rates (in T'ung, for example, the city was divided into quarters, each of which had one firm). Government measures to break these monopolies, set ceilings on rates, and provide services for the poor met with only sporadic success. See "An Account of the Establishment of a Charity Bier-Carrier Bureau" in the 1879 T'ung gazetteer. There were similar problems with both musicians and pallbearers in Tientsin (T'ien-chin gazetteer, 1739).

catered to funerals. In cities and towns, many of the objects used in funerals were rented or bought from these shops: the deathbed itself, shrouds and pillows, coffins, spirit-world items, banners and pennants, mat awnings, tables and chairs, ceremonial mourning outfits, spirit-money and food for offerings, the catafalque, grave markers. Caterers and pallbearers could also be provided for a fee. The managers of the various shops that handled such goods and services (who probably inherited their businesses from their fathers) must have known how to answer their clients' questions: what the ceremonial layout should be, which mourning outfit was appropriate for which relationship, what offerings were appropriate for which ritual, and so forth. They had no acknowledged standing as experts, and their answers may not have accorded with orthodox practices, but for many families they may have been as authoritative. In the countryside, such services were probably decreasingly available as one moved down the central place hierarchy. It would be interesting to know if regional specialization in such goods and services made for some degree of uniformity in ritual practice or equipment.

The most all-purpose expert at a funeral in north China was the yin-yang master (*yin-yang hsien-sheng* or *yin-yang shih*). His services were immediately engaged when there was a death in the family. He decided on an auspicious moment for the encoffining, procession, and burial. He also determined (by birthdates) who outside the immediate family was too vulnerable or astrologically unsuitable to be allowed near the corpse, wrote charms to "stabilize malevolent forces," oversaw the placement of paper streamers at the gate, cut out the spirit-pennant, supervised the encoffining, helped with the rite of breaking the bowl, and chanted spells every time the corpse was moved. He used charms to purify the places in the house where the coffin had been and to protect those who had been in close contact with it; he determined the time when the final remnants of the spirit would vacate the home; and he came on that day to see that the departure was without incident. In addition to harmonizing the events of the funeral with temporal rhythms, the same diviner oriented the location of the corpse in space. The placement of the body on the deathbed and of the coffin in the hall, and particularly the siting of the grave and the arrangement of the coffin within it—all were his responsibility. (Only a few of my sources referred to the services of a geomancer as distinct from a diviner.)[25]

The diviners' sphere obviously involved many rites that dealt with the body and the lingering powers of the deceased. Chinese believed that when someone died, his *hun*, which I am translating "soul," traveled first to the underworld to be judged and then was released for rebirth (in a form appropriate to its merits) or paradise. Although some connections were maintained between the *hun* in its various incarnations, they were few and

25. Terming him a *feng-shui hsien-sheng*, *feng-chien hsien-sheng*, or *hsing-chia* 形家.

tenuous. Other aspects of the deceased survived independent of this soul; these I have translated "spirit"; the technical term (not used in my sources) seems to be *p'o*, but compounds of the term *ling* were used here.[26] Unlike the soul, which departed speedily, this transitional spirit was closely attached to its once-living body and would ultimately find its home in the grave and in the ancestral tablet. And unlike the soul, which was only the temporary and passive recipient of the deceased's rewards and punishments, the spirit remembered its family and had considerable long-lasting potential for actively harming or helping human beings, especially if it became detached and was left to wander, homeless and hungry. Failure to settle this potentially malevolent spirit of the deceased in a satisfactory grave and identifiable ancestral tablet could lead to illness, infertility, and even death. For this reason, correct procedures were very important. These powers of the corpse and the spirit were the concerns of the yin-yang master.

Information about yin-yang masters and diviners in this period is not easy to come by. They were unlicensed during the Ch'ing and thus not controlled (or documented) by the bureaucracy, and few sources describe them. In the Republican period, at least in Peking, they were required to have permits from the police (and given the task of determining cause of death).[27] Although these men were usually literate and dependent on manuals that may have been of considerable antiquity, their social status appears to have been low, quite in contrast to the southern geomancer, who was said to be "a kind of a gentleman" in Cantonese society.[28] H. Y. Lowe's fictitious Mr. Chang, the *yin-yang-sheng*, had a small office with an auspicious (and somewhat pretentious) name, and relied on a "dog-eared almanac, almost worn out from constant handling."[29]

These men had considerable experience with funerals, and for their work they turned to various calendrical and astrological charts, wrote charms and pronounced spells (orally transmitted or copied from books of diagrams and formulae), and used a geomancer's compass and perhaps manual to interpret configurations at the grave site. Generally, they were very diverse in their training and expertise and relied on oral traditions that were rarely written down.[30]

26. Nathan Sivin has suggested the terms *yang* soul and *yin* soul to describe these two entities, and "transitional soul" for *ling* (personal communication, 1985).

27. H. Y. Lowe, *The Adventures of Wu*, 2:90; the Nan-ho gazetteer lists the names of eight diviners in the county (6.30).

28. *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays by Maurice Freedman* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), p. 322.

29. Lowe, *The Adventures of Wu*, 2:89–90. For almanacs, see de Groot, *The Religious System*, 2:99.

30. Apparently because these rituals drew principally on folk tradition, compilers of local histories noted them infrequently and with condescension. For example, one (Wan county) account that is unusually specific says, apropos of the encoffining, that "there are all kinds of taboos (*pi-chi*) observed; there is no point in describing them." This bias of the sources on which I have so overwhelmingly relied has constricted my access to the minor variations in ritual that are the stuff of fieldwork. Takeda Masao, *Man-Han li-su*, is probably the single best source because of his lack of prejudice and relative wealth of such detail.

There seems to have been no systematic training for such men besides apprenticeship, no set canon of their books, and no fixed set of responsibilities. Geomantic tasks were the more clearly defined and had pretensions to being a kind of science. There were theoretically two major schools of geomancy and an informal canon of texts a millennium old; geomancers apparently drew on these in an unsystematic way.[31] An imperially issued almanac was printed every year, and a yin-yang master could rely on it, and on many other manuals of charms and formulae, more ordinary almanacs, and a variety of orally transmitted methods. He may have learned from several teachers and probably created his own eclectic system by choosing from a large pool of diverse practices.

Under these circumstances, we should not be surprised by the variety of rites and procedures exhibited in aspects of the funeral dealing with the spirit and the corpse and the confusing and contradictory accounts of what seem to be regionally specific variants on bits of the ritual sequence. For example, the breaking of a bowl by the chief mourner under the direction of a diviner just before the coffin was moved from the house was described and explained in these north China gazetteers in many different ways. Sometimes it was preceded by the snapping of a mulberry branch provided by the diviner; sometimes it was followed by the breaking of a second bowl; sometimes the bowl was smashed up against a brick. Sometimes these actions were explained as "putting an end to formal mourning," sometimes as signifying that, alas, "one can no longer make offerings to one's parents"; sometimes the bowl was filled with wood chips, sometimes with paper money. Some said that the deceased had to use the bowl to drink all the water he had wasted in his lifetime, and therefore the bowl was broken or a hole knocked in it by the chief mourner to make this task easier; others said that the hole was to keep the deceased from drinking all of the "drugging-the-soul soup" fed to him in hell to make him forget this incarnation.[32]

These actions and explanations may have drawn on a common repertory of belief, but they nevertheless show considerable diversity and probably also were influenced by local oral traditions almost out of the reach of the historian. This sphere of folk belief, although often decried by Confucian-

31. See de Groot, *The Religious System*, 3:994–1008, and Stephan Feuchtwang, *An Anthropological Analysis of Chinese Geomancy* (Vientiane: Vithagna, 1974), especially pp. 17–18 and Part 4. De Groot saw (in Amoy) "popular expositions" of geomantic theory "on sale in every bookstore, mostly of considerable bulk, and illustrated with woodcuts" (p. 1009).

32. See accounts from Shu-lu; Ting; Kao-i; Han-tan; Lowe, *The Adventures of Wu*, 2:122; Gamble, *North China Villages*, p. 260, and *Ting Hsien*, pp. 389–390; Takeda Masao, *Man-Han li-su*, p. 276. The terms used to refer to this ritual are equally varied.

trained elites, had never been systematized by them. Informally transmitted ideas about the power of a dead body and a lost spirit were certainly to be found everywhere in China, and probably can be studied today, but for earlier periods we know very little about either regional diversity or changes over time. We do know, however, that out of fear of the consequences, most people wanted professional help in dealing with these problems. Because the dangers associated with the corpse were considerable, and because the relevant professionals were unencumbered by a set of orthodox procedures, improvisation and variety in practice are certainly to be expected.

To say that the aspects of funeral rites handled by the yin-yang masters were unsystematic is not to say that there was no underlying order. As outsiders to the culture, we can see how similar ideas were the underpinnings of many of these rituals, even though these principles were nowhere written down and explicitly stated as such, and even though we still do not understand how they came to be held in common: the continuity and easy communication between the world of the living and that of the dead, for example, or the power of *yang* objects to offset the *yin* of the corpse.[33] Perhaps a study of the implicit beliefs expressed in these kinds of ritual can further illuminate this body of orally transmitted shared assumptions.

Nevertheless, a number of the most dramatic differences between the regions of China were, in fact, associated with the corpse and the grave. In the Canton delta (where the contrast with north China seems most dramatic), extremely different ideas about the corpse seem to exist. There, burial of the body in a coffin was followed by a later unearthing, scraping of the bones, temporary storage of the bones in an urn, and later reburial of the urn in a geomantically suitable setting. J. L. Watson and others have noted that this custom is related to ideas about the power of bones and the dangers of the flesh—ideas that inform the strong aversion seen in Cantonese society to those who handle corpses.[34] Another striking difference between these regions is that in the north the preferred form of burial for an individual was with his family, whereas in the Canton area family and lineage graves were dispersed and each person was sited separately. Although ideas about the corpse may be related to deep-seated beliefs (and Malayo-Polynesian culture?), these different burial patterns may be more directly connected with social structure. It seems possible, as Freedman has suggested, that the Cantonese burial pattern reflects the commonplace competition inside lineages;[35] stress within the tightly knit lineages of this region may be being

33. J. Watson also discusses these common assumptions in chapter 1 of this volume.

34. See Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones: The Management of Death Pollution in Cantonese Society," in Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, eds., *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 155–186.

35. Freedman, *The Study of Chinese Society*, p. 318.

displaced into competition over the *feng-shui* of individual graves. In the north, by contrast, burial in groups may have been an easier act of family unity for kin groups that, although they rarely had joint endeavors, competed primarily with other kin groups.

Ethnic and religious minorities were also noticeably different in their burial practices. Indeed, because they were detachable parts of the ritual sequence and managed by diverse specialists, the rituals for handling the corpse and grave may have been most responsive to local conditions. Certainly, differences in folklore might generate special clusters of interrelated taboos. A thorough study of the ideas about and measures taken toward the corpse for any historical period may, however, be very difficult. Most written sources, as we have noted, ignore this aspect of funeral ritual, and the historian will never have data of the sort gathered through interactions with informants by an anthropologist.

The rituals concerned with the salvation of the soul (*hun*) were orchestrated by other professionals who promoted a much greater degree of ritual consistency than did the yin-yang masters. These specialists were monks and priests with accumulated spiritual merit and authority on such matters who were hired to relieve the soul's sufferings and guide it through hell. The most elaborate versions of "doing the sevens" (*tso fo-shih*, "doing Buddhist things," is the Confucian term) involved building a platform in the ceremonial area on which noisy and colorful rituals were staged.

There Buddhist monks in dark robes (and sometimes nuns) set up scroll paintings of Buddhas, burned petitions to the bodhisattva Ti-tsang, and chanted sutras and penances in order to transfer merit to the soul of the deceased. Taoist priests (*tao-shih*), in distinctive robes (showed off by frequent changes), hung paintings of the Three Pure Ones and read aloud the communiqués and petitions that would secure good treatment in the underworld.[36] In the Peking area, Mongol lamas would also be invited. According to one informant, they put on the most dramatic show: displaying "hair-raising" tanka scrolls of Tibetan gods and demons, wearing bright yellow robes, and chanting in very low voices to the accompaniment of impressive drums and trumpets.[37]

The progression of the soul toward salvation (*ch'ao-tu*) was reflected in the pieces of a set ritual sequence (each with its own texts) performed by these professionals: feeding other hungry spirits (*fang-yen-k'ou*), breaking out of hell (*p'o-yü*), seeing the lantern (*kuan-teng*), and crossing the bridge

36. Doré, *Researches*, has examples (illustrations and translations) of petitions read and burned by Taoist priests (1:70–71, 74, 92–93). See also Kristofer M. Schipper, "The Written Memorial in Taoist Ceremonies," in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. A. P. Wolf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 309–324.

37. Lowe, *The Adventures of Wu*, 2:112–113.

to rebirth (*tu-ch'iao*). If the deceased was a woman, special rituals were added to release her from the pool of blood in hell (*hsueh-hu* or *hsueh-p'en*). All of these rituals could involve an actual performance by the monks or priests, and sometimes the mourners themselves, in which these efforts on behalf of the soul in its journey in the otherworld were acted out. The use of music, gestures, and sometimes elaborate props could create quite dramatic effects. On the evening before the removal of the coffin, opera troupes, acrobats, or storytellers were sometimes also invited to perform, ostensibly to tell a pious story with an appropriate moral message. The tale of Mu-lien, who through his piety saved his mother from the torments of hell, could be enjoyed in the knowledge that it was also uplifting and suitable for the occasion. Monks, priests, and musicians were often hired for the funeral procession as well, although their presence here (as well as at the encoffining) may have been generally prophylactic rather than specific to the soul's progress.

Although the scale of the ritual varied widely with the money expended and depended somewhat on the age of the deceased, everyone wanted the soul looked after by a professional if possible. As we have seen, minorities substituted a mullah or a shaman or a lama or a sect member for the more normal Buddhist or Taoist priest in accordance with their different ideas about the fate of the soul after death. Not everyone was able to afford such a show or lengthy performances, however, and some chose instead a few rounds of sutra chanting. "As for ordinary people, some use monks and not priests, some use priests and not monks."[38] If these professionals were not available nearby, people turned to *huo-chü* (living-in-the-world) Taoists, lay Buddhists, or sectarians. The poor might be unable to hire any clergy at all.[39] Musicians who specialized in funerals could be brought in cheaply to supplement or even substitute for some of the clerics.

The ordinary person already had, after all, considerable familiarity with the basic ideas about life, death, and reincarnation presented in these rituals. Over the centuries, a broadly diffused infrastructure had been created, which popularized simple Buddhist doctrine and presented understandable visions of heaven and hell. Standardization in belief was promoted by temples throughout the nation—to Tung-yueh (god of the eastern peak), to the kings of hell (especially Yen-lo wang), and to Ti-tsang (the bodhisattva Ksitigarbha who had the power to intervene in hell)—and was supplemented by a well-developed set of visual images of the process of judgment, the

38. Fang-shan gazetteer.

39. One hired laborer's mother told her son in 1735 that for his wife's funeral he should just "buy a coffin, put her in it, chant two *chüan* of sutras, and bury her" (T'i-pen 題本 [Routine memorial archive, Punishments category], Ming-Ch'ing Archives, Peking), Yung-cheng 13/3/8.

torments of hell, and the route to paradise, which were expressed in temple carvings and wall paintings, scrolls hung at funerals, and popular religious book illustrations.[40] The story of Mu-lien's descent into hell to save his mother, transmitted as it was in storytellers' tales and a variety of plays, appears to have been a very important carrier of basic ideas about salvation through Buddhist ritual.[41]

Cheap editions of popular Buddhist sutras (e.g., the *Amitabha Sutra* or the *Diamond Sutra*) were increasingly available in this period so that even the uninitiated could chant something themselves if need be. Doré implies that the general public could even bypass the clergy and go to a specialty shop and purchase the petitions and passports used by Buddhists and Taoists;[42] sectarians also made and sold (very cheaply) passports that could expedite the soul's progress.

Certain rituals relating to the soul were actually managed by the mourners themselves. They burned special paper currency and objects to be used in the spirit world, went to the office of the local earth god to report the death, released the soul from the god's custody by "calling it home," packed the coffin with goods to be used in the next world, and saw off the soul after the encoffining.

Although we do not know their numbers, Buddhist monks and Taoist priests were found throughout the empire (there were fewer nuns and lamas), and funeral rituals were a mainstay of their livelihood. These specialists turned to a large body of written literature and traditional rituals handed down during their professional training. Maintenance of uniformity in ritual depended greatly on these people and these texts. Those monks who lived in large, well-endowed monasteries had libraries and also a community of individuals who were repositories of these traditions. Old editions, rare scriptures, and careful training gave them claims to greater efficacy in their efforts on the soul's behalf. Similarly, Taoists received initiation into esoteric traditions with their own texts and manuals that gave the practitioner access to special deities and to powerful charms and ritual motions unknown to others.[43] Both the Taoist and the Buddhist canons

40. Wolfram Eberhard, *Guilt and Sin in Traditional China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 24–55, describes these courts of hell.

41. Eberhard lists a number of these Mu-lien operas; see *Guilt and Sin*, pp. 25, 59.

42. Doré, *Researches*, 1:69–70. He illustrates a variety of special petitions for abnormal deaths (suicides, murder victims, etc.).

43. In "Vernacular and Classical Ritual in Taiwan" (*Journal of Asian Studies* 45, no. 1 [1985]: 21–57), Kristofer Schipper illuminates this murky area with his analysis of the complementary relationship between two kinds of Taoist practitioners: the *tao-shih* 道士 whose rites were based on texts in the classical language, and the less prestigious *fa-shih* 法師 who used orally transmitted ritual texts in the vernacular. Only the former are referred to in my sources.

had been fixed in standard editions and reprinted in the Ch'ing. Among elite Buddhists and Taoists, standardization of ritual (through common books and similar training) across time and space was likely to be greatest and surely accounts for the general similarity in salvational funeral rites throughout China. Not everyone was well trained (see chapter 5 in this volume), however, and control of quality depended both on education and on an unwillingness to modify rituals to conform to local practices.

Because the state had long weakened these Buddhist and Taoist establishments, deprived them of the ability to police themselves, and encouraged decentralization in most religious matters, there was no single church and few mechanisms for internal control. Competition between monks and priests of different schools and between professionals and amateurs, combined with this institutional weakness, was in turn reflected in the fact that the basic stages of the funeral mass were performed differently at different times and places. Moreover, because the average person did not have access to the best professionals, the rituals most commonly employed were presumably less orthodox and less standardized.

Regional variation in this track of the ritual reflected this diffused nature of institutionalized Buddhism and Taoism and the uneven distribution of monasteries, temples, and clergy in China. Despite the fixed canons and desultory attempts at licensing by the state, regional and local traditions had probably developed around certain teachers and particularly around temples. Certainly, some monasteries concentrated on the lucrative business of performing elaborate rites for the dead and came to be well known for these.

Because religious instruction was not systematically standardized, ideas about the soul were often fuzzy or contradictory: how many hells were there? how did they differ? what were the landmarks on the road to the underworld? who could intercede most effectively for the deceased? Aspects of the funeral ritual relating to uncertain areas of articulated belief showed much variety, were explained in different ways, and were poorly integrated into the rituals performed on the seven sevens—for example, the exact role of the earth god, the process of calling back the soul, or the specifics of what went into the coffin. This sphere of concern was thus characterized by latitude and tolerance of variety within a context of several loosely institutionalized orthodoxies and competing orders of religious professionals.

A third kind of expert brought in at north China funerals in addition to the diviners and geomancers, the monks and priests, was of a rather different type: invited, not hired, this man's expertise was his classical education. Funeral rituals were, after all, about the living as well as the dead. Funerals were intended to give formal expression not only to the feelings of grief and loss that a death generated but also to the ensuing rearrangement of relationships. We can see these concerns reflected in many strands of the rites: the ritualized wailing and stylized behavior expected of mourners; the elaborate system of mourning clothing that paralleled degrees of kinship; the fixed methods for notifying the community of the death; the rituals for presenting and receiving condolences; the offerings to the deceased; and the procedure for creating an ancestral tablet. Each had its fixed form and prescribed actions but was not within the purview of the professionals so far discussed.

It is with these aspects of the funeral that classical Confucianism had, in fact, long been explicitly concerned. Funerals were the quintessential expressions of *hsiao*, "filial piety," "reverence toward parents," a value that by late imperial times was imbedded at the core of the orthodoxy accepted by most Chinese. Many of these rituals had names of considerable longevity, were based on ancient precedents quite complicated in their most sophisticated forms, and had been perpetuated by the classically educated elite for many centuries. These rites reflected a deep concern with the proper handling of familial and social relations, and with establishing and maintaining unbroken but hierarchical connections among generations living and dead in the patriline. Because many strands of the funeral rituals drew on this classical Confucian orthodoxy, it is not surprising that people turned to the texts and experts of this tradition for correct explication and procedure.

The ultimate authority for funeral rituals was the Confucian Classics. Confucius himself had established the importance of ritual in general and funerals in particular. The *Li chi* (Treatises on ceremonial usages), *I li* (Rites and ceremonial usages), and *Hsiao ching* (Classic of filial piety) were somewhat later works that had become repositories of model ritual procedures. For centuries, scholars had studied these texts in order to understand and emulate these classical models. Fine editions of these works were available to the elite in Ch'ing times (and more widely in the twentieth century), but their difficulty as texts restricted their readership to the philologically trained. Ritual compendia were also officially printed by the Ch'ing court as guides to imperial ritual, and as Evelyn Rawski shows in chapter 10, at imperial funerals the president of the Board of Rites served as master of ceremonies, and Hanlin scholars, as consultants. Thus scholar-officials, with their access to the classical past, performed the most authentic and elaborate of these rites.

For the person of more ordinary education there was, fortunately, a more accessible reference work, the *Chia li* (Rituals for family life) attributed to the great Sung philosopher Chu Hsi. Although surviving editions of this work seem rather scholarly, the book appears to have circulated fairly widely. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century local histories refer frequently

to it, noting the reliance placed on it by educated people.[44] A great many other ritual manuals, many of them illustrated, borrowed the prestige of Chu Hsi's name and the "Rituals for Family Life" title. This more popular *Chia li* genre included simple drawings of mourning clothing and ritual paraphernalia, diagrams of positions and movements, and the texts of many of the written forms necessary for high-status funerals (testimonial banners, announcements, invocations, epitaphs, etc.).[45] Ch'ing literati made concerted efforts to disseminate these works in order to check "Buddhist" influence and rectify what they perceived as vulgar popular customs. The shorter *Classic of Filial Piety* was sometimes distributed at funerals,[46] and it may have been even more widely available. It provided formulaic descriptions of the "filial son lost in grief," which may have inspired behavior (and were sometimes substituted for observation in gazetteer accounts). Although a detailed study of the texts and illustrations of these ritual books is clearly necessary before we can ascertain how much consistency there was between editions for different kinds of reading audiences, it seems fairly clear that books of this sort were basic reference manuals for the elite and were promoted as such.

Equally significant, it was not just the most highly educated who were called upon to dictate portions of the funeral ritual. It appears to have been widely accepted that for matters relating to these aspects of ritual, even a smattering of a classical education produced a specialist. Justus Doolittle (drawing on experiences in Foochow) said of the educated men who made money serving as "professors of ceremony" for the "common people" during funerals: "They . . . are necessarily literary men, of respectable connections, of polite demeanor, able to assume, when occasion demands, a grave and dignified appearance; self-possessed and authoritative, else they could not discharge to the satisfaction of their patrons the function of their calling."[47] During the Ch'ing, the academy and examination system drew in

44. De Groot had obviously seen several editions of this work, which he consulted for his exhaustive study of funeral ritual (*The Religious System*, 1:238; 2:832). Gazetteers called it the *Wen-kung* (文公 or 溫公, another reference to Chu Hsi) *Chia li*. Leon Wieger says of this work: "It is used by the masters of ceremonies in the great families" (p. 504). In 1889 C. de Harlez published a French translation under the title *Kia-li: Livre des rites domestiques chinois de Tchou-Hi, traduit pour la première fois, avec commentaires* (Paris: Ernest Leroux). Patricia Ebrey is currently translating this text; see her 1984 paper for the Conference on Neo-Confucian Education, "Education Through Ritual: Efforts to Formulate Family Rituals During the Sung Period," where she also discusses the question of Chu Hsi's authorship.

45. See, for example, the *Chia li yi-chieh* 家禮儀節 [The formalities of family life] of the fifteenth-century scholar Ch'iu Chün 邱濬, or the *Chu-tzu chia li* 朱子家禮 [Master Chu's rituals for family life], attributed to Ch'iu.

46. For example, see the Chi-tse (1766), Yung-nien (1877), and Jen (1915) county gazetteers.

47. Doolittle, *Social Life*, 1:251–252.

the wealthy from all over the empire and trained them in a classical education and a refined style of behavior. Though many of these men never had careers beyond their native place, they still felt a part of this national elite. Procedures laid out in texts such as the "Rituals for Family Life" provided these men with a source of consistency and continuity. Reliance on this kind of text assured the elite a near monopoly on what, by their own definition (and apparently shared widely by others) was the most high-status, refined, and elegant funeral. These experts disdained other ritual specialists, prided themselves on their amateur status, and were never hired for money.

The prestige of these "Confucian" aspects of funeral ritual made them attractive even to the uneducated. Ordinary people could, of course, simply rely on the orally transmitted expertise of members of the family and community, for in their simplest form the rituals mentioned here (the kowtow, procedures for making offerings, receiving guests, etc.) were commonly used in daily life, and basic "Confucian" ideas about family and hierarchy had long since become part of popular culture. The partially literate could turn also to the sections on funeral rituals contained in popular almanacs, books that often defined the grades of mourning, described mourning attire and the ritual itself, and provided simple texts for the written parts of the ceremony. Such almanacs were said to be widely available in the twentieth century and may have been so earlier.[48]

Nevertheless, the high status associated with elaborate rites and their written components enhanced the desirability of guidance from a member of the elite. To obtain these services, people were encouraged to establish patronage relations with prominent individuals in their communities. Respected and experienced friends of the family were asked to serve as masters of ceremony during the funeral. Someone else was invited to the ceremony of making offerings to the spirit of the soil at graveside and thanked later with a feast. The prestigious ritual of filling in the ancestral tablet called for, ideally, the brief participation of someone of the scholar class. Conveyed to the funeral in a hired sedan chair and welcomed with obsequious fanfare by the host family, this "inscriber of the tablet" thus established his superior position and enhanced the prestige of the rites.[49]

The imperial educational system had provided a nationwide network of "masters of ceremonies" with ritual experience and expertise and access to classical texts, to maintain consistency. Men trained in the classical style of behavior represented the forces of uniformity for this part of the ritual. Among the elite, the formalities orchestrating social and familial relations at

48. See de Groot, *The Religious System*, 1:99–100. Martin Palmer's English version of a modern almanac gives the general flavor but does not contain specific instructions for funerals; see *T'ung-shu: The Ancient Chinese Almanac* (Boston: Shambala, 1986).

49. Wieger's description (pp. 561–563) of the "filling in the tablet" ceremony illustrates clearly the unequal relationship.

funerals were thus relatively standardized nationwide during the imperial period, but became progressively variant as one moved down the social scale.

The three kinds of professionals on whom this discussion has concentrated had specific and different visions of and methods for communicating with the spirit world. Over the centuries, Confucians had tried to stress social relations in this world and discourage both "Buddhist ceremonies" and "vulgar superstitions." (At some point in the past, the orthodox elite appears to have appropriated the rites connected with the transfer of the spirit to the ancestral tablet, making them standardized, more respectable, and in a sense neutralized; the ambiguous position of the geomancer in south China may be part of a similar shift.) These scholars, monks, priests, mullahs, sectarians, geomancers, and diviners promoted different visions of the otherworld that, while perhaps grounded in common assumptions, were never reconciled into a single system. (See M. Cohen in chapter 8 in this volume.) Some practitioners had large but unsystematized canons, while others relied on diffuse textual and oral traditions. These groups competed with one another directly and indirectly as each tried to monopolize different sections of the funeral ritual, and over the centuries their relative positions and areas of expertise have surely shifted. They were probably all agreed, however, that the advice of experts was essential to successful ritual performance.

CONCLUSION

My intention in this essay has been to sort out the significant variations in funeral rituals in north China in recent centuries, locate predictable differentiation, and examine where and how variations were controlled. I have concentrated on the crucial role of the ritual specialists brought in to deal with interwoven concerns about the deceased and those who mourn him, and noted a general correlation between the training of the ritual specialists and the standardization of particular rituals. But many questions remain unanswered.

These specialists were engaged in part because they controlled special modes of communication with the otherworld of gods, ghosts, and ancestors through offerings, prayers, charms, and divination. The descriptions of funeral ritual used for this essay, however, make no mention of what Michel Strickmann has called China's "ecstatic tradition" of possession and mediumship.[50] These practices, which probably were used to communicate

50. Michel Strickmann, "India in the Chinese Looking Glass," in D. E. Klimburg-Salter, ed., *The Silk Route and the Diamond Path* (Los Angeles: UCLA Art Council, 1982), pp. 53–63.

with the otherworld in cases of suicides and other unnatural deaths, seem to have been perpetuated by shamans of all sorts, whose training and methods—and relationships with other professionals—we know about largely through recent south China fieldwork. How different was the situation in north China?

Although each of these specialists prescribed rituals according to sets of underlying ideas about the relationship between the living and the dead, their guidance appears to have been sought out of a concern with performance. As chapter 1 of this volume argues, scrupulousness about correct procedure appears to have outweighed interest in the meaning of those procedures. How might a focus on performance rather than belief have affected the resistance of Chinese ritual to change? Although lay participants were concerned about ritual irregularities, the fact that procedure was separated from belief and put in the hands of specialists removed it from the layman's domain and surely encouraged professional conservatism. The preoccupation of the traditional Chinese elite with ritual seems less surprising if one appreciates (as they did) the importance of a fixed canon not only in creating and disseminating important portions of shared Chinese culture but in slowing the forces of diversity and change.

The changes in funeral ritual in the twentieth century seem clearly related to the changed status of ritual specialists as well as to the vigor with which a new orthodoxy was institutionalized. The legitimacy of the classically trained elite was undermined by the spread of education in this century and was increasingly challenged as new ideas circulated about class, women, and family hierarchy. Rationalist criticisms of popular religion, long a part of elite orthodoxy, were reinforced by missionaries and then by Chinese intellectuals exposed to Western ideas. These criticisms provided a rationale for serious damage to the formal structures of the Buddhist and Taoist establishments, and ordinary people may have been more affected by a lack of traditional practitioners than by attacks on their belief system. Since 1949, as Martin Whyte shows in chapter 12 in this volume, a new orthodoxy has been imposed in urban areas (and accepted?). In the countryside, where old traditions survive but few of the old professionals who had been the mainstays of standardization remain, do we find increased variety, reliance on amateurs, or confusion and anxiety about death and its consequences? It would be most interesting to make a comparison of funerals with weddings, another ritual for which issues of standardization are relevant but the sources of ritual expertise quite different. Who were the specialists? Do we find similar patterns of change?

This essay has also raised the question of regional variation in Chinese culture. I have tried to provide a framework for understanding the ways in which funeral ritual in the north was both similar to and different from rites elsewhere in China, a contrast that other essays in this volume will

highlight. Although I have had to rely on written sources rather than on fieldwork observations, I believe that local histories can and should be used to expand temporally and geographically our knowledge of popular Chinese practices. Further work is needed in surveying the geographic distribution of those elements that, based on current knowledge, appear to have been both structurally different and diffused on a broad scale (contrasting grave shapes; secondary reburial of bones; the rites of reporting to the temple, buying water, calling back the soul, and sending winter clothes). With such information, we could begin to see patterns and conceptualize better the other factors with which these rituals were associated.

My larger goal has been an examination of variation and standardization of popular culture generally. In this regard, certain key components of Chinese culture seem to merit further study: not only the ritual specialists and their training, and the written literature that was a source for ideas and procedures, but also (the most difficult problem for the historian) the oral traditions on which people also relied. Studying ritual may be a fruitful way for the historian interested in issues of popular culture to probe the interactions between different sources of authority and understand their relationship to one another. It may also be a way to analyze the development of a common culture over the centuries. This endeavor may convince us that, as Freedman proposed, "the religious ideas and practices of the Chinese are not a congeries of haphazardly assembled elements." But, if at some levels "a Chinese religion exists," at others there were significant differences. The unity that existed may have been created in large measure by pressure toward standardization from above, but it may have survived only through its ability to accommodate diversity. Identifying areas of consensus and divergence and seeing how the tensions between them were handled may begin to give us a real understanding of Chinese popular culture.

APPENDIX

My data base has been drawn from the "funerals" (*sang-li*) and "offerings" (*chi*) sections of seventy local histories from Chihli (Hopei) province. The names of these counties and departments, with the date of the gazetteer edition I used, are listed below. The dates of these accounts range from 1739 to 1950, but nearly 90 percent come from the period 1870–1945. This basic material has been supplemented with one Japanese and eight English accounts (six from Chihli, two from Shantung, and one from Manchuria). Although colorful descriptions in English are sometimes quoted in this essay, it was the much more comprehensive gazetteer accounts that were the foundation of this study.

Chihli/Hopei gazetteers consulted: An-tz'u (1936) 1.18–19; Ch'eng-an (1931) 10.15–17; Chi 薊 (1831) 2.30, (1944) 3.58; Chi-tse (1766) 8.2–3; Chiao-an (1926) 1.62; Ching-hsing (1934) 10.14–19; Ch'ing-ho (1883) 1.41–44; Ch'ing-yuan (1934) 3.38; Ch'ing-yun (1855) 3.9–10; Cho (1936) 1.10; Fang-shan (1928) 5.17–18; Feng-jun (1891) 3.64–65; Han-tan (1939) 6.5; Hsiang-ho (1936) 5.6; Hsin-ch'eng (1935) 20.4–5; Hsin-ho (1939) 549, 556; Hsin-le (1950) 4.23; Hsing-t'ai (1877) 1.56; Hsiung (1905) 5.1, (1929) 7.2–4; I (1747) 10.2, 10.4, 10.5; Jen (1915) 1.46; Kao-ch'eng (1933) 1.20–21, (1943) 1.6–7; Kao-i (1933) 5.3–4; Kao-yang (1931) 1.22; Kuang-ch'ang (1875) 11.6; Kuang-p'ing (1939) 6.2; Kuang-tsung (1933) 4.2; Lai-shui (1895) 1.25–26; Le-t'ing (1877) 2.14, 2.15; Li (1876) 3.15; Liang-hsiang (1924) 1.9; Lu-lung (1931) 10.3–4; Luan (1898) 8.21–24; Man-ch'eng (1931) 8.5; Nan-ho (1749) 5.16; Nan-p'i (1932) 3.3; Nei-ch'iu (1832) 3.56; Ning-chin (1929) 1.46; Pa (1934) 4.13, 4.46–47; Pao-ti (1745) 7.3–4; P'ing-ku (1934) 3.7; Shu-lu (1937) 8.27; Shun-i (1933) 12.5; Ta-ming (1934) 22.1; T'ang (1878) 2.54–55; T'ien-chin (1739) 13.3, (1870) 8.9–12; Ting (1944) 16.4–5; Ting-hsing (1880) 13.2–3; Tsan-huang (1876) 3.1; Ts'ang (1933) 12.7–10; T'ung (1879) 9.3, (1941) 9.2–3; Tung-an (1935) 8.3; Tung-ming (1933) 16.3; Tz'u (1941) 7.4; Wan (1934) 8.3–4; Wang-tu (1934) 10.4–5; Wen-an (1922) 7.2–4; Wu-ch'iang (1831) 1.11; Wu-ch'iao (1875) 1.12–13; Wu-i (1872) 1.17; Yuan-ch'eng (1872) 1.63; Yung-ch'ing (1779) 11.10; Yung-nien (1877) 7.3.

FOREIGN ACCOUNTS

M. L. C. Bogan. *Manchu Customs and Superstitions*. Peking: China Booksellers, 1928. Pp. 42–45, 67–97. [Mostly about Chinese customs]

Jean Dickinson. *Observations of Social Life of a North China Village*. Peking: Yenching University, 1924. Pp. 29–31. [Chihli: Wu-ch'ing county]

Sidney D. Gamble. *North China Villages: Social, Political, and Economic Activities Before 1933*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963. [Peking area, ca. 1930]

Sidney D. Gamble. *Ting Hsien: A North China Rural Community*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954. Pp. 148, 252–262. [Chihli: Ting county, 1926–1933]

H. Y. Lowe. *The Adventures of Wu: The Life Cycle of a Peking Man*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983; original edition, Peking, 1940–41.

Ida Pruitt. *A Daughter of Han: The Autobiography of a Chinese Working Woman*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945. Passim. [Shantung: P'eng-lai]

Takeda Masao 武田昌雄. *Man-Han li-su* 滿漢禮俗 [Manchu and Chinese customary rituals]. Dairen, 1935. Pp. 201–302. [Peking and Manchuria]

L. Wieger. *Moral Tenets and Customs in China*. Trans. L. Davrout. Ho-kien-fu: Catholic Mission Press, 1913. Pp. 524–583. [Chihli generally]

Martin C. Yang. *A Chinese Village: Taitou, Shantung Province*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1945. Pp. 86–90. [Shantung, Ch'ing-tao county]

FOUR

Death, Food, and Fertility

Stuart E. Thompson

Food comes "between" the relations of men in time and, as a third term between existing dualities, potentially has the power to unite or to separate.—N. J. Girardot, Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism *(1983)*

An ancient Chinese practice is, by the way, curious. They used to bury the dead in the same position as the foetus assumes in the womb.—N. B. Dennys, The Folk-lore of China, and Its Affinities with That of the Aryan and Semitic Races *(1876)*

Food is intrinsic to most Chinese ritual activity. In this essay I focus on the semantics of food in the context of Chinese death ritual, in which the role of food is importantly integral—and, like the ritual itself, is multifaceted and polysemic. Food prestations have been a perennial and indispensable feature of Chinese death ritual for at least seven millennia.[1] Since food, in one guise or another, is rarely extraneous to the core aspects of funerary ritual, an examination of the range of food prestations and food symbolism can help make sense of Chinese death rites. The role of food in these rituals is neither uncomplicated nor without conundrums; nonetheless, by focusing on the semantic significance of food it is possible to distill the often labyrinthine complexity of Chinese death-related ritual into a concentrate that facilitates interpretation.

My data base for this analysis is derived mainly from funerals that I witnessed in my fieldwork village and in several surrounding villages situated

Fieldwork on which this essay is based was conducted from March 1981 till August 1982. I gratefully acknowledge my debt to the Department of Education for Northern Ireland and the University of London Central Research Fund for funding my research and to Professor Wen Cheng-i and members of the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, for their help and hospitality while I was in Taiwan. I wish to thank the conference organizers, Evelyn Rawski and James L. Watson for inviting me, and for their encouragement. Finally it is my pleasant task to thank the conference participants for their pertinent comments on the initial draft of this chapter, in particular the essay's shrewd discussants: Emily Martin, Jonathan Parry, and David Keightley. The flaws that remain do so despite their suggestions.

1. See K. C. Chang, "Ancient China," in K. C. Chang, ed., *Food in Chinese Culture: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 23–52; and David Keightley, "Dead But Not Gone: Cultural Implications of Mortuary Practice in Neolithic and Early Bronze Age China, ca. 8000 to 1000 B.C.," paper presented at the conference on Ritual and the Social Significance of Death in Chinese Society, Oracle, Arizona, January 1985.

near the coast of Yun-lin hsien, on Taiwan's western flank. In all I observed part or most of sixteen funerals.[2] Irrespective of village or the particular contingent of Taoist practitioners conducting the ritual, the funerals shared a similar basic structure. The main factor of variation stemmed from the particular circumstances of death. Those who die a "bad death"—for instance, at a comparatively young age, or away from home, or in an accident—will receive much simpler ceremonies, which are in essence shortened and incomplete versions of the ideal-typical mortuary rites. Though several of the funerals I attended were of the truncated variety, for reasons of space I limit the present analysis by assuming and describing the role of food in a full "orthodox" funeral, a composite picture amalgamating data from all the funerals I witnessed.

The communities whose funerals I describe have in common the fact that their inhabitants are Hokkien-speakers whose predecessors crossed from Fukien mostly in the eighteenth century. Land has been of poor quality in the area, and only in the 1960s, with the drilling of underground tube-wells, has rice displaced sweet potatoes and peanuts as the predominant crop. Many villagers work in Taiwan's cities; even those still resident often earn more in off-farm enterprises; aquaculture has become important in the 1980s. There is no evidence of lineages having developed anywhere in the hinterland—no ancestral halls, no genealogies, no land corporately owned by any agnatic group more extensive than sharing by brothers. The absence of lineage groups, though, does not free the individual villager from the felt obligation to ensure the continuation of his own patriline. To maintain the line intra-village, uxorilocal and (till the 1940s) "little daughter-in-law" marriages have not been infrequent.[3]

I have made a deliberate effort to include the food-motif aspects of funerary ritual as described by other anthropologists (particularly of Taiwan),[4] and by earlier writers, such as the Reverend Justus Doolittle and J. J. M. de Groot (both of whom wrote on death ritual in Fukien, the ancestral homeland of my informants).[5] De Groot describes funeral rites for "the well-to-do classes and families of fashionable standing" of Amoy at the tail end of the nineteenth century.[6] My own ethnographic data is derived from rural

2. Fourteen of the funerals were Taoist, the other two Buddhist. The latter are a rarity in the area, with a frequency of under 5 percent.

3. For a very full analysis of marriage patterns in Taiwan, see Arthur P. Wolf and Chieh-shan Huang, *Marriage and Adoption in China, 1845–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980).

4. Especially, but not exclusively, the work of Emily Martin Ahern, who has written incisively and broadly on this subject.

5. Justus Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese . . . with Special But Not Exclusive Reference to Fuhchau* (New York: Harper, 1865); J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China* 6 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1892–1910).

6. De Groot, *The Religious System*, 1:2.

communities whose ancestors left Fukien far from well-to-do, and more than two hundred years ago. And yet, despite the distance in time and social space, it is striking just how many constancies or similarities emerge. Perhaps even more remarkable are the numerous similarities between my own data and the information about Chinese funerals that Susan Naquin has, in chapter 3 in this volume, aggregated for north China. In some respects the thanatopraxis of the Cantonese as described by James Watson is more discrepant,[7] though I will indicate later in this chapter key underlying uniformities.

Ritual involves three prevalent facets in each of which food is immanent. First, ritual aims to transform. In the case of mortuary ritual the main problem is transforming the discontinuity of biological death into a social continuity, of transforming the corpse into an ancestor. Food, as will be shown, plays a crucial part in this process. Second, ritual involves exchanges between the living and the dead, on more or less reciprocal bases. The prestation of foodstuffs to the dead is vital in both senses of the word. Third, ritual is concerned with identity. To be Chinese is to perform Chinese ritual and vice versa; to be Chinese is also to eat Chinese-style food with Chinese-style implements. There is an important concomitance between the two notions. When Arthur Smith wrote that "the essential part of the ceremony is the eating, without which nothing in China can make the slightest progress,"[8] one suspects that it was tongue-in-cheek, but, as they say, "many a true word is spoken in jest."

There seem to be several significant, underlying conceptions about the role of food in Chinese death ritual. Thus, there is a prevalent notion that beings in the otherworld require nourishment from those in this world for their well-being. Ancestors depend on food prestations from their descendants, which gives the descendants a leverage over the dead. However, as Emily Martin (Ahern) has noted, "the living hope to inspire a . . . reciprocal response from the ancestors, to obtain through them the good life as they perceive it: wealth, rice harvests, and offspring."[9] In the broad sense of the word, the descendants hope for *fertility* from their dead. A common aspect of Chinese death ritual is the frequent appearance of symbols of fertility, very often symbolized in the form of foodstuffs.[10] Both living and dead depend on, but can also gain from, each other. There exists a reciprocal

7. James L. Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones: The Management of Death Pollution in Cantonese Society," in Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, eds., *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 155–186; and chapter 5 in this volume.

8. Arthur H. Smith, *Village Life in China* (New York: Revell, 1899), p. 143.

9. Emily Martin Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973), p. 91.

10. I deal with the issue of food and fertility in more detail below.

relationship with food as the primary mediating factor. Linked to this reciprocity is the ubiquity of abstinence on the part of mourners to mark the death of a senior agnate, with abstaining from various luxury foods often highlighted. On the death of the emperor the whole court abstained from eating flesh or strong-smelling vegetables, and from drinking wine (see Evelyn Rawski in chapter 10 in this volume). The logic seems to be that the more the mourners fast, the more the dead can feast. De Groot considers that "fasting was at the outset abstaining from food with a view to being able to sacrifice so much the more to the dead."[11] I would suggest that submerged there is a notion (*pace* Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry) of "fertility" and the vision of life as a "limited food" [*sic*].[12]

Another common element with respect to the place of food in funerary ritual (though not specific to funerary ritual) are the processes of differentiation, identification, and stratification implicit or explicit in the forms of food offering. Juniors always make offerings to seniors, never the inverse. There is a kinship coding in food presentations, with those differentially related to the deceased, whether agnatically or affinally, offering different categories of foodstuff. The circle of those expected to make offerings widens and narrows as the rites are performed; these are circles of inclusion and of exclusion. The elaborateness or simplicity, the frequency or infrequency of food offerings (there are several junctures even in the ritual for someone who has died a good death when prestations are not mandatory) indicate to the wider community the mourners' social ranking or social aspirations. The feast or feasts that are provided for the living, just as at wedding feasts, are occasions for maintaining, constructing, or reconstructing social networks (see Susan Naquin's discussion in chapter 3 in this volume). Minimally, it seems, there must be a male chief mourner (ideal-typically a son) and a daughter (or niece or other substitute) to make offerings to the recently deceased. Elizabeth Johnson in chapter 6 notes that the Hakka in the New Territories still adopt daughters to participate in funerals. It is common for food to be used in some way or other to establish an identity between the deceased and the chief mourner (irrespective of the sex of the deceased). For example, the wine offered by a succession of relatives as a libation immediately prior to the removal of the corpse is often "received by a live substitute for the subject of respect if he or she has continued the line of descent and reproduced a household."[13] Another widespread practice is for the chief mourner (though not necessarily him alone) to eat foodstuff

11. De Groot, *The Religious System*, 2:656.

12. See pp. 7–9 of their "Introduction" to Bloch and Parry, eds., *Death and Regeneration*, on "fertility" and the vision of life as a "limited good."

13. Stephan Feuchtwang, "Religion and Society in Northern Taiwan" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1974), p. 372.

metaphorically associated with or cosubstantial with the deceased or some aspect of the deceased—a theme that I will elaborate on below.

Another standard feature of Chinese thanatopraxis is that, whereas spirit-money, paper houses, paper representations of clothes, a set of real new clothes, and other items are all transmitted to the deceased in the otherworld by burning, food is never burned for the dead. It may not, I suggest, be coincidental that food offerings, like the corpse, should not be burnt (see Martin King Whyte in chapter 12 in this volume for attitudes to cremation).

The above represent core Chinese notions about the role of food in funeral ritual. It is also possible to discern an elementary set of food prestations prevalent in Chinese death rites, a uniformity underpinning the heterogeneity of ritual expressions also observable. The chronometric and sequential structure of these common elements is, to an extent, flexible. The sequence is subject to variation at local levels, and the duration between these key elements is often longer in conformity with the status of the deceased—the wealthy tend to have longer funeral rituals, and to include more of the nonmandatory rites, such as marking the forty-nine days after death with special offerings and perhaps a feast every seventh day.

The following seem to constitute the core food prestations.

(1) Foods are presented immediately upon death and at the time of encoffining. The actual foods given vary, though rice seems common. Some foodstuffs, especially those put in the coffin, are thought to protect the deceased on his "journey": rice or cakes to feed to wild dogs is a recurrent theme. Other food-related items can be used to symbolize the separation of the deceased from the living, his or her expulsion—the breaking of rice bowls is one instance. As a prelude to the expulsion, and to ensure that the deceased does not return malcontented, the deceased's "property" may be symbolically apportioned to his or her heirs, a property division again usually represented by the sharing out of food between deceased and descendants.

(2) After encoffining, food offerings are presented twice a day, or at each mealtime, by the daughter-in-law for the deceased. These offerings continue till the day of burial, at least. Interestingly, offerings are made twice a day even for a dead emperor (as reported by Rawski in chapter 10).

(3) On the day before, or the actual day of, burial, a comparatively bounteous farewell feast is laid out for the deceased, thought of as food in preparation for his or her transformation into an ancestor (eschatologically depicted as a journey). Offerings are made by a wide range of agnatic relatives, but the offerings from affines are particularly stressed. Meat dishes, and particularly pigs' heads, are often regarded as the primary offerings.

(4) Directly associated with the bounteous farewell feast, neighbors and friends bring offerings to satiate the hungry ghosts who would otherwise thieve the food offerings earmarked for the deceased. The Taoist or Buddhist ritual specialists mystically increase the food available for the ghosts to ensure sufficiency, so that they will no longer be hungry. This rite seems to be of Buddhist origin but is also performed at funerals where Taoist ritual specialists orchestrate the proceedings. The rite is known as *p'u-tu*[14] or *fang-yen-k'ou* (feeding the flaming mouths), and is modeled on similar community rituals performed in the seventh lunar month when the gates of the underworld are opened to release all the hungry and suffering souls.

(5) As the last rite before the encoffined corpse is carried out of the bounds of the community a series of threefold presentations of wine is poured as a libation for the deceased. This seems to be a very standard feature for all, including the emperor, irrespective of social status or locality.

(6) Offerings are carried out to the grave and presented after interment. On return of the funeral procession further food offerings are presented to accompany the installation of the temporary ancestral tablet in the household altar room or ancestral hall.

(7) The funeral banquet held for the guests is, as I have indicated above, of great social significance; but, for reasons of space, it is beyond the scope of this essay.

(8) Offerings made to the deceased after the funeral are subject to a great degree of differential elaboration, closely correlatable with the importance or unimportance of lineage groupings. At one extreme are the Cantonese villagers that Rubie Watson describes in chapter 9, who have grave rites to commemorate ancestors who died centuries before. At the other (minimal) extreme, food offerings may be presented to mark the installation of the permanent ancestral tablet (often, though not always, a hundred days after demise); food offerings for the first three years after death at the grave on the occasion of the annual Tomb-sweeping Festival (*ch'ing-ming chieh*); and further offerings given in the altar room to mark the death (and often birth) anniversary of the deceased, eventually to be worshipped as one of the undifferentiated collectivity of domestic ancestors to whom foodstuffs are offered en masse on specific calendrical dates without regard to the individual biographies of the ancestors thereby subsumed.

14. For a description of the community *p'u-tu* ritual, see Duane Pang, "The *P'u-Tu* Ritual," in Michael Saso and David W. Chappell, eds., *Buddhist and Taoist Studies I* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1977), pp. 95–122.

Together the above eight demarcations of food prestations constitute a minimal core structure underlying ritual performances for those who died deaths classifiable as good. Data available on the actual foodstuffs offered on each occasion are much scantier, and so generalizations are necessarily more speculative. With one or two notable exceptions,[15] anthropologists and raconteurs alike have been content to vaguely sketch the kind of foods presented, failing to detect the semantic significance entailed in the choice of one sort of offering instead of another. Nevertheless, it is my contention that there is a fundamental and prevalent aspect to Chinese death rituals (certainly for the south of China) associated with the prestation of *rice*, on the one hand, and *pork*, on the other. These two key foodstuffs appear to be ubiquitous, almost canonical and fetishized foods in the context of death rites. The major thrust of this chapter will be an attempt to expound upon and justify the assertion that through the unparceling of the semantic implications of rice and pork prestations crucial ritual concerns are exposed. I proceed by endeavoring to decipher the underlying code of food offerings.

FOOD OFFERINGS AS CODE

The kind of food given to particular categories of the dead is not an arbitrary product of free choice. Constraints apply, marking one kind of food prestation as appropriate, another as inappropriate. If we regard the range of food prestations as symbolic elements in a semantic field, then certain consistencies, certain patterns, can be deciphered. Mary Douglas has written that "if food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed."[16] In the Chinese context deciphering the code of food prestations serves to divulge the nature of the social relationship between giver and receiver, irrespective of whether the latter is dead or alive. By the type of food offered rank and status can be upheld—or emulated—and the proximity or distance in the social relationship expressed. Not unexpectedly, the kind of offering given varies according to which of the separate categories of the dead—gods, ghosts, or ancestors—is the recipient.

The most prominent and pronounced structural dichotomy in the food exchanges between living and dead is the distinction between food for the gods and food for ancestors. Food offered to the gods is referred to as *sheng-li* and consists of a platter or plate of meat offerings, with a small glass of wine for each meat item. Food fed to ancestors is called *ts'ai-fan* and consists of rice (*fan*) with a minimum five *ts'ai*, which are side-dishes of vegetable or meat or both. As far as can be ascertained from the writings

15. Ahern and J. Watson are two anthropologists who should be excepted.

16. Mary Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal," in Clifford Geertz, ed., *Myth, Symbol and Culture* (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 61.

of other anthropologists, the distinction between *sheng-li* and *ts'ai-fan* is general for Chinese communities in Taiwan at least.[17]

In the *ts'ai-fan* offered to ancestors "all foods must be cooked." A pot of cooked rice with a serving spatula in it is an omnipresent item. The *ts'ai* provided are as if for immediate consumption, and five sets of chopsticks and five rice bowls are stacked or laid out in front of the ancestral tablets. *Sheng-li* (platter of meats) may be offered if the donors are feeling extravagant, but it is an optional extra, not an essential. The pot of cooked rice is a marked and invariable element in this kind of offering. It must be put, not in the midst of the *ts'ai* offerings, but to the side (in the context a more prominent position), because, as one villager told me, "it is the main offering, and the *ts'ai* are just accompaniments (*pien-li*)."[18] Rice, then, is the essential component of the *ts'ai-fan* offerings.

Gods, contrarily, are not offered *ts'ai-fan*, nor are they offered rice. They are always presented with *sheng-li*. *Sheng-li* vary greatly in terms of elaboration, but, like *ts'ai-fan*, they have one invariable, essential component, namely pig meat (*chu-jou*).[19] Usually *sheng-li* consist of either "three meats" (*san sheng*) or "five meats" (*wu sheng*). Whatever the scale of elaboration, the pork element (which can range from a whole pig to a lump of fat pork) is the key component. "It is like the head of the household, the most important." "Pork *is* the *sheng-li*, the other things are just side offerings (*pien-li*)." "If there's no pork in the 'three' or 'five meats' offerings then it's not really good enough." On one occasion, when I listed the elements of *sheng-li* as "chicken, pork, fish," one elderly woman interrupted to say that I should have listed pork first "because it is the most important item." Because the pig meat is the most important part, it is put in the position of prominence—in this case the center.[20] The lavishness or otherwise of an offering to the gods can readily be gauged by the nature of the pork offering alone.

At the root of the structural opposition between *ts'ai-fan* and *sheng-li*, then, lies a further structural opposition between rice and pork. But this duality, in its turn, can be seen as an analogue of the *fan*/*ts'ai* distinction so pervasive in Chinese cooking and eating. Pork, as I have argued elsewhere,[21]

17. See, for instance, C. Stevan Harrell, "When a Ghost Becomes a God," and Arthur P. Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors," both in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974).

18. I discovered the importance of the positioning of the rice when a neighbor whom I was "assisting" corrected my misplacement of the rice pot.

19. Pork is *the* Chinese meat, and the term "meat" (*jou*) implies "pig meat" unless otherwise specified.

20. On a few occasions I have seen the pork item initially placed to the side, but on each occasion someone made a switch so that the pork item was in the center.

21. Stuart E. Thompson, "Eating and Not Eating the Dead: A Taiwanese Case," paper presented at the London Intercollegiate Seminar Series, December 1982.

epitomizes *ts'ai*. The rice/(pork) meat distinction apparently has a pedigree stretching over two millennia, for K. C. Chang has written of ancient China that "(c)learly grain and cooked meat (main ingredient of dishes) were contrasting items in the Chinese regime of eating."[22] I here suggest, and demonstrate later in the chapter, that the significance of the rice/pork duality straddles much more than the sphere of ethnohoptology alone.

Several anthropologists of Taiwanese society have noted that the degree to which the form and content of an offering approximates a meal, fully prepared and ready for the eating, reflects the closeness of the social relationship between the offerer and the supernatural being.[23] Ahern makes the point succinctly when she states that "supernatural beings are offered food that is less transformed, and therefore less like human food, according to their difference from the humans making the offering."[24] As a measure of the social distance between the living and the beneficiaries of their food prestation this formulation of concomitance is applicable also in my fieldwork area. At the one extreme not only are the offerings to T'ien Kung (the Heaven God) raw and uncut, but a tuft of hair is left on the back and tail of both the pig and the goat, and the tail feathers are left on the whole fowl, the untransformed nature of the offerings indicating the immense social gulf between the Heaven God and his devotees—as between the emperor and peasants in imperial China. There is a series of gradations to the other extreme, the offerings in the compound altar room to family ancestors, where chopsticks and rice bowls are provided, and for which offerings are placed on the table before the ancestral tablets, hot and ready for consumption, just as for a (somewhat-better-than-ordinary) family meal. This indicates the familiarity between ancestors and their living descendants.

A full exposition of coding in food prestations is beyond the compass of this essay, but a third dimension along which food offerings differ is of relevance to the analysis of mortuary rituals. Food prestations differ with respect to their elaborateness or cost. Offerings for the Heaven God are, naturally, the most elaborate and costliest. Food prestations for ghosts at first sight seem to overlap with those for ancestors. They are usually given rice and five *ts'ai*. But the rice they are offered is usually (though not invariably) uncooked, whereas for ancestors it is always cooked. No eating implements are provided for ghosts. The five *ts'ai* are typically simple, cheap offerings—an item or two of fruit, a few biscuits, unelaborate cooked

22. K. C. Chang, "Ancient China," p. 42.

23. See Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, pp. 166–170; J. L. McCreery, "The Symbolism of Popular Taoist Magic," Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1973; Feuchtwang, "Religion and Society," pp. 281–282; and Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts," pp. 177–178.

24. Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, p. 167.

dishes—nothing fancy. Ghosts are rarely offered *sheng-li* (the effect on them of drinking wine was sometimes given as the reason), and even on those few special occasions when they are offered *sheng-li* the meats look distinctly scrawny in comparison with offerings for high-placed gods. Food prestations for ghosts fall somewhat ambiguously between the offerings made for gods and those given to ancestors. But the lack of elaborateness of food given to ghosts (and the manner in which it is presented) mark ghost offerings off as different.[25]

For the purposes of the present analysis of the role of food in mortuary rites, the key variables are the *ts'ai-fan* (rice) / *sheng-li* (pork) duality; the elaborateness of offerings; and the degree to which offerings approximate a meal ready for consumption.

FOOD IN THE RITUAL SEQUENCE

Chinese ceremonials of death are premised on the assumption that the deceased continues, in some form, to exist. An individual's biological death is merely a chapter-ending in that individual's more extensive biography. This notion, of course, is widespread and by no means specific to the Chinese syndrome of beliefs and thanatopraxis. The deceased has needs during and after the mortuary rituals, which the living endeavor to satiate in important part by offering food; and the need to offer food to the deceased is proof through ritual practice that the deceased does indeed continue to exist. The one postulate implies and reinforces the other in a tautological bind.

The finality of individual biological death is refuted. But more than that, death is represented as resulting in regeneration. On the one hand, the deceased undergoes a symbolic rebirth as ancestor; on the other hand, from his or her biological death fertility may be symbolically recouped. As Robert Hertz recognized as early as 1907,[26] at death there is a liminal phase during which an unwanted, often dangerous, aspect of the deceased is expelled or expunged, and another aspect of the deceased, credited with the power of yielding fertility, is extracted and continues, in some way, to exist. Maurice Bloch, building on this idea, has claimed that "funerals are a matter of recovering a generative power, this being done by canalising away the polluting side of death."[27] As we shall see in the analysis of the Chinese ritual

25. The divisions are by no means watertight, for otherworld inhabitants are not always unambiguously gods, ghosts, or ancestors. See, for instance, Harrell, "When a Ghost Becomes a God."

26. Robert Hertz, "A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death," in *Death and the Right Hand*, trans. R. and C. Needham (London: Cohen and West, 1960).

27. Maurice Bloch, "Death, Women and Power," in Bloch and Parry, eds., *Death and Regeneration*, p. 229.

sequence, this bivocality of retention or continuity, on the one hand, and separation or expulsion, on the other, is reiterated in several guises, including the guise of food prestations. To borrow Stephan Feuchtwang's apposite rendering, Taiwanese death rituals "constitute processes simultaneously of cutting threads and of tying threads of continuity."[28] Food, "as a third term between existing dualities, potentially has the power to unite or to separate," as Girardot suggests,[29] or in Feuchtwang's terminology, to tie and to cut.

Ideally a person should die after being laid out in the domestic altar room, in the presence of his or her children.[30] In this way physical death will occur in the presence both of ancestors (in the form of ancestral tablets kept in the altar room) and of descendants. No tears should be shed till a rice bowl has been smashed.[31] I was told (though never witnessed) that the rice bowl should be thumped down upon a dog's head, causing the bowl to shatter, and the dog (understandably) to rush off howling, which acts as a signal that wailing may begin. The breaking of the rice bowl is clearly a rite of separation.

Soon after death certain food items are prepared. A whole chicken, rice, and an egg seem to be standard items, with other elements being less fixed. In my fieldwork area the whole chicken is cooked and brought out either just before or just after encoffining. It is chopped crosswise, the segment with the head being reserved for the deceased, the remainder of the chicken being shared out among the family members for them to eat. I was told that eating the chicken ensures security and prosperity. But there are other reverberations.

In southern Taiwan the Hokkien word for chicken (*ke*) puns with, and is said to stand for, *ke*, the word for family (*chia* in Mandarin). Perhaps more significant, at weddings a long length of bamboo, with roots intact at one end and with branches and leaves still at the other, is attached to the roof of the vehicle taking the bride and groom from the bride's home to the groom's home. The root of the bamboo is referred to as the *t'ou* (the head), and the branches and leaves are the *wei*, literally the "tails," but with the implicit meaning of offspring or descendants. It is as though the groom's descent line

28. Feuchtwang, "Religion and Society," p. 375.

29. N. J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), p. 31.

30. The birth of a child or the acquisition of a bridge are similarly "endorsed" in the family altar room.

31. For other instances of bowl-breaking, see Yü Kwang-hung 余光弘, "Lu-tao ti sang-tsang yi-shih" 綠島的喪葬儀式 [Funeral rites of Lutau Island, Taiwan], *Min-tsu hsueh yen-chiu so chi-k'an* 民族學研究所集刊 49 (1980): 154; Henry Doré, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, trans. M. Kennelly (Shanghai: T'usewei, 1914), 1:54; and Susan Naquin's discussion in chapter 3 in this volume.

is carried on the roof of the nuptial taxi. By contrast, the switch of bamboo that serves as a soul-flag (*ming-ching*) to direct the soul (*san-hun ch'i-p'o*) has its roots deliberately sliced off, for it represents the separation of the deceased from his or her descendants—the "head" is cut off. In addition, at the end-of-year feast (*wei-ya*) which an employer holds for his employees it is said that if the chicken head points in your direction, that is an indication that you are due to be fired. The imagery of the severed chicken head is, therefore, succinct, but clearly represents the separation of the deceased from his or her descendants.[32]

The whole symbolism associated with the exchange of rice in funerals is a theme I will scrutinize more fully below. Here I want to mention that just after encoffining, rice is placed on the coffin lid. In the funerals I witnessed a cloth wrap (sometimes red in color) of uncooked rice is placed on top of the coffin.[33] On Lu-tao island Yü Kwang-hung reports that sticky rice mixed with brown sugar is placed on top of the coffin.[34] De Groot mentions that a large bowl of cooked rice is set on the lid of the coffin.[35] It is said, in each case, that the living members of the family will derive benefit from later consuming the rice.

In some communities rice is put into the hand of the deceased. Henry Doré says the reason is that the deceased "may appease therewith the hungry dogs of the village, which he must cross on his way to the nether world," and that the rice is therefore called *ta-kou fan*, literally "hit-dog rice."[36] Several of these elements—rice in the hand; chicken head severed; beating of a dog—are combined, with different emphasis, in Ahern's fascinating ethnographic rendition of encoffining in Ch'i-nan (northern Taiwan), which merits lengthy citation. Just prior to encoffining, the hand of the corpse is placed in a rice measure (*tou*) "filled with . . . grains, coins, and nails, the symbols of plenty and offspring." Ahern was told that "it is to let the dead willingly give away the property to the heirs."

> Simultaneously . . . someone prepares a small bowl of cooked rice and cooked chicken parts—the head, the feet, and the wings . . . the rice and the chicken head [dumped] on the ground . . . a dog [is directed] to the food. As soon as the dog has taken the chicken head in his mouth, he is beaten with a long, whip-like plant until he dashes away in a frenzy. It was explained . . . that the dog represents the dead man, the chicken head the property of the family *first* held by the deceased ([*t'ou*] means both head and first), the wings and feet of the chicken the property held later by the descendants, and the bowl of rice one meal out of the usual three consumed in a day. . . . "The dog, which stands for the dead man, is beaten so that he will run away and not return. He has enjoyed his share of the property, so he should not come back and bother the living."[37]

32. At one of the Buddhist funerals a "vegetarian" chicken was divided.

33. Feuchtwang also mentions that a sack of rice is placed on the coffin ("Religion and Society," p. 337).

34. Yü Kwang-hung, "Lu-tao," p. 155. In Yun-lin a similar basin of rice is put on the nuptial bed at wedding time.

35. De Groot, *The Religious System*, 1:98.

36. Doré, *Researches*, 1:48.

The resemblances are striking. The theme of separation from or expulsion of the deceased is obvious and is similarly depicted by the division of a chicken. The issue of property division as represented by the sharing out of food is dealt with in detail later in this chapter.

Aside from chicken and rice the other standard food item evident at this stage in the ritual proceedings is the boiled egg. In my fieldwork village an egg and a stone are placed in the hands of the encoffined deceased if he or she is survived by a spouse. The explanation behind this custom is neatly summarized in the words of one villager addressing a corpse: "If you want to marry your husband again you must wait until the duck egg is hatched and until the stone is disintegrated." The use of the boiled egg, then, is another ritual instance of keeping the deceased separate from the living.[38]

Correlated with this expression of separation is the belief expressed by several of my informants that the corpse is potentially dangerous, liable to be triggered into a zombie-like reanimation. I was often told that if a cat (or, unlikely as it may seem, a dog) were to jump over the coffin, then the deceased would sit up and seize the nearest person in an unrelenting grip. De Groot mentions a remarkably similar belief.[39] It is this volatile, unpredictable aspect of the deceased which is ritually discarded.

Another ritual act often performed at this juncture is the putting of food in the mouth of the deceased, or using chopsticks to proffer items of food which are touched to the lips of the deceased.[40] There is an ambivalence evident in such action. On the one hand, this type of feeding can be seen as a gesture of continuity; on the other, it is a farewell gesture performed just before the body is lifted to the coffin, and therefore also interpretable as a rite of separation: it simultaneously unites and separates. It may also be seen as a gesture to placate the threatening aspect of the deceased—in the same way that apportioning the chicken head and bowl of rice to the deceased can

37. Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, pp. 197–198.

38. Feuchtwang mentions the same sort of custom and reaches the same conclusion, p. 33. The same message is apparent, in more dramatic fashion, in the "cutting" ritual that occurs in some places just before encoffining. See Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, p. 171–172.

39. De Groot, *The Religious System* (1:43), writes that "if Pussy were not secured, it might occur to her to leap or walk over the death-bed, and so cause the corpse to rise up at once . . . a horrible death in a ferocious embrace would be the inevitable consequence."

40. See Doolittle, *Social Life*, pp. 129–130, for a particularly elaborate example; also Doré, *Researches*, 1:48; Feuchtwang, "Religion and Society," p. 339; and Yü Kwang-hung, "Lu-tao," p. 155.

be viewed as an effort to conciliate the deceased. I did not hear of such a custom at firsthand, but this ritual act of feeding the deceased is strikingly similar to the procedure I observed just before a bride leaves her natal home to go to her husband's home. Then an elderly woman picks up pieces of spare-rib pork to offer the tearful bride as she stands facing out of the altar room. The bride's next act is to depart.

It is unusual for villagers to be able to offer any precise formulation of what happens to the soul after death.[41] But the overall gist is that the soul is in limbo, homeless, wandering, in need of comforting and sustenance, unable to differentiate night from day. As Doolittle wrote in 1865, "All beyond death is regarded as dark by the Chinese. The dead are believed to be unable to see how or where to walk."[42] In various ways the living endeavor to direct, succor and nourish this aspect of the soul. One method I encountered was to put dog's hair and rooster's feathers into the coffin. One informant explained, "It's like you don't want to think of the person being dead and not knowing anything anymore, so you put in the feathers because in the morning the cock crows and so the soul will know it is time to get up, and dogs bark in the evening, so the person will be reminded that it is night time."

Offerings of food (and other items, including a lit candle for location) placed on a little table at the foot of the coffin also serve to structure, to give form to, the soul's existence in this liminal stage. Every morning and evening the daughter-in-law leaves out a bowl of cooked rice and a bowl of *ts'ai*. One pair of chopsticks, positioned vertically, is planted in the food. The food may afterwards be consumed by family members when they have their meal. The ambivalence of the deceased is marked by the fact that he or she can share the family food, but eats separately. The offerings laid at the base of the coffin are intended for a solitary individual, not yet part of the ancestral community in the otherworld. Descendants, at this stage, do not seem to pander to the known tastes of the deceased when alive, which they will do when the status of ancestor is attained. Further, the vertical placement of the chopsticks is unique to mortuary ritual and sets the offering apart from meals shared by the living or offered to established ancestors. The ritual offering constitutes an equivocal package implying fuzzied disaggregation pending redefinition. The mourning family's situation vis-à-vis the wider community is, during this period, analogous to the deceased's situation vis-à-vis the family: ambivalently still *part of* but also *apart from* the wider social segment.

41. See Myron Cohen, chapter 8 in this volume, for a discussion of the Chinese concept of soul; also, C. Stevan Harrell, "The Concept of Soul in Chinese Folk Religion," *Journal of Asian Studies* 38 (1979): 519–528.

42. Doolittle, *Social Life*, p. 126.

Whatever the interval between death and burial, daily offerings of (at least) a morning and an evening repast are made till the funeral rites and burial. Gilbert Walshe has described how a table and a chair were made available for the deceased, and that "regular meals are served to the deceased on this day—tea about 5:00 A.M., breakfast at eight or nine, tiffin at noon, and tea at night, and each time a meal is served the server is expected to wail and cry."[43] In the south of Taiwan the daughter-in-law is also responsible for providing a washbasin and towel for the soul to "have a wash" in the mornings. Nowadays, a plastic mug and a tube of toothpaste are often provided too. Since during the liminal phase the soul is ghost-like in that it is of no fixed abode, such provisions are required to make things easier.[44] The offerings all indicate the ritualized expression of concern for the deceased in this transitionary, betwixt-and-between phase; the offerings also indicate that the deceased is represented as akin to a ghost, rather than approximating an ancestor.

In the full mortuary ritual a whole complex cluster of ritual activity and performances commence on the day prior to burial of the corpse. I refer to these rites as funerary rites. Funerary rites continue through the night to conclude, usually in the morning of the second day, with the burial of the corpse and a feast for the living on return of the funeral cortege. These elaborate rites mark the culmination, but not the end, of the various stages of ritually expressed redefinition and reattribution. The daily food offerings mentioned above are made without public fanfare by the descendants—usually the daughter-in-law. With the commencement of the important preburial rites the arena is broadened.

By the time the funerary rites are under way a paper shrine for the soul of the deceased will be made and placed in or just outside the altar room. Food offerings for the deceased are placed at the front of this *fan-t'ing* (literally "rice-hall" or "meal-hall"). For the funerary rites in the *fan-t'ing* there will be a paper effigy representing the deceased, together with effigies for those specified ancestors who have been invited back to accompany and guide the newly deceased; the parents of the deceased are usually included. On the eve of burial food offerings are laid out in front of the *fan-t'ing* for them by the descendants. The food prestation is much as it would be on an ancestor's death anniversary: a pot of cooked rice, five bowls of *ts'ai*, a "three-meat"

43. W. Gilbert Walshe, *"Ways That Are Dark": Some Chapters on Chinese Etiquette and Social Procedure* (Shanghai, n.d.), p. 237. Also Doolittle, *Social Life*, p. 135; de Groot, *The Religious System*, 1:115, and Rawski, chapter 10 in this volume, where a similar practice for the emperor is indicated.

44. For northern Taiwan, Arthur Wolf has reported that the provision of a washbasin and towel is a characteristic feature of offerings made to ghosts—which is not the case in my fieldwork area. Wolf's informants say that gods and ancestors "don't need these things because they have homes of their own." See Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts," p. 178.

sheng-li, with three cups for rice wine. Bowls and sets of chopsticks are stacked out, there being one bowl and one pair of chopsticks for each effigy, *including* that of the deceased. For the first time the deceased is not fed in isolation. Being fed jointly with the returned ancestors marks a significant step toward the conferment of full ancestral status.

These offerings, however, are overshadowed by the plentiful and ostentatious offerings which, in the course of the afternoon, are laid out on round tables in the compound courtyard. Left out on display overnight, these offerings are removed only when the coffin is brought out from the altar room prior to its final transference to the burial site. Each table laden with food has a *sheng-li* as the key offering. On tables nearest the coffin a severed pig's head (boiled) with a pig's tail tucked under it, is prominently the central item of the *sheng-li*. Whereas at all other times the number of items for a *sheng-li* offering is always either three or five, on this occasion only "*four* meats" are often (not invariably) presented. The word for "four" (*si*) puns with the word for "death" (*si*) in Hokkien as well as Mandarin Chinese. Taro often constitutes one of the "four meats," for dead people are said to like taro. I was told further that "red turtle cakes" (*hung-kuei*) and *tsung-tzu* (dumplings made by wrapping glutinous rice with pork bits in bamboo leaves) ought also to be provided. Other offerings often include a four-plate offering of various fruits; packets of biscuits, unopened; crates of Taiwanese beer or Seven-Up equivalent, unopened; cans of food and drinks (asparagus juice is a common choice); and sometimes even packets of monosodium glutamate.

This farewell feast, with its alteration in the type and nature of food offered to the deceased, marks a crucial stage in the deceased's transition from ghost to ancestor. The change from daily offerings to the elaborate farewell feast has several dimensions. The elaborateness of the latter, together with the fact that the food offerings are whole and not readied for immediate consumption (meats are cooked but uncut; packets of biscuits, cans, bottles of drinks are all unopened) implies greater distance between the deceased and the donors. *Sheng-li*, especially that of a pig's head and tail, is an honorific offering, an offering of respect, such as is made to gods. Instead of ordinary offerings of a type similar to what ghosts receive, the new *ancestral* spirit, which the returned ancestors are about to take into their fold, so to speak, is feted with extraordinary *sheng-li*. The transformation from ghost to ancestor is both marked and accomplished by the switch in food prestations. There is a shift from *ts'ai-fan* to *sheng-li*, which is also a shift from rice to pork.[45] Concomitantly, those said to be chiefly responsible for providing the offerings switch from agnates to affines.

45. See Doolittle's description of a ceremony held to mark the time when the family ceases to offer rice, *Social Life*, p. 35.

In some cases it is the wife-giving affines who are expected to bring the best offerings. Thus, Ahern found in Ch'i-nan that "the wife-givers try to validate their high status by providing generous gifts that show their wealth and resources," while Feuchtwang states that "the offerings of matrilateral kin are always the most lavish."[46] In other instances, as in the funerals I observed, it is the married-out daughters of the deceased (or, in other words, wife-taking affines) who are expected to provide the most substantial offerings.[47] Whichever type of affines provide the more prominent offerings, it does certainly seem to be the case that offerings from the deceased's agnates alone would be insufficient to achieve the desired transformation from ghost to ancestor. The assistance of affines is required. Ahern has invoked Victor Turner's well-known opposition between "structure" and "communitas" to suggest why wife-giving affines play a key part in effecting changes in the family into which their daughter has married. "In Chinese society," she writes, "patrilineal kin are on the side of relations associated with communitas,"[48] with its connotations of ritual power injecting change into the structural arrangements of a patrilineal family. The logic of such an argument has merit, but it would seem, too, that wife-taking affines, similarly "jurally weak" and lying outside the grid of structural relationships, might also be expected to have the ritual power to alter ties among primary kin.

Concurrent with the offering of the farewell feast, late in the afternoon on the day preceding the burial, food offerings are put out for the hungry ghosts. These offerings are the responsibility of the wider community, of neighbors and friends of the mourners. The prestations for the ghosts are provided outside on the street, the intention being to prevent the ghosts from entering and pilfering the offerings designated for the deceased. It is as though the wider community is erecting a protective cordon around the mourning family. The offerings are nothing elaborate and are usually brought in baskets by women or children. A big turnout is status-enhancing for the mourners and indicative of their "pulling power" within the community. The feeding of the ghosts is a ritual expression of the reactivation of

46. Emily Martin Ahern, "Affines and the Rituals of Kinship," in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, p. 290; and Feuchtwang, "Religion and Society," p. 371.

47. De Groot states that pigs' heads are given by sons and by married-out daughters (*The Religious System*, 1:143); Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones," p. 175, reports that married daughters present a raw pig's head and tail at each parent's funeral; Elizabeth Johnson in chapter 6 in this volume mentions that married-out daughters present pigs' heads; relatedly, Norma Diamond, *K'un Shen: A Taiwan Village* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969), p. 46, writes that "the burden of funeral costs are borne by the household of the deceased and the married-out daughters."

48. Ahern, "Affines," p. 307.

the family's ties with its wider social network, and a prelude to its eventual reintegration into the community after the burial.

On the morning of the burial the coffin is carried out from the altar room, amidst a cacophony of loud music and wailing, and is positioned in the courtyard. The elaborate farewell offerings are cleared away. Further along the courtyard, nearer the street, a table has been set up on which are various symbols of the deceased. At the base of the table is a metal washbasin in which is a bunch of scallions (*chiu-ts'ai*) tied into a cylinder shape with white string. Kinsmen and kinswomen of the deceased, in full mourning attire, kneel in succession before the washbasin and, with the help of a master of ceremonies, using both hands, circle a glass of rice wine above the basin, and then pour the contents over the bunch of scallions. This each mourner does three times. In my fieldwork village this rite is called *ching-chiu*, "toasting (the deceased) with wine," though I will refer to the rite as "libation." There can be elaborate differentiation expressed either in the order in which libations are made[49] or by the number of libations each category of mourner makes.[50] Affines may or may not perform the libation.[51] In the funerals I witnessed the wife-giving affines did not take part in the libation ceremony. Nor is there any differentiation in terms of the number of cups of wine offered: all kinsmen and kinswomen who pour wine over the scallions do so three times only, though the sequence of pouring demonstrates proximity to the deceased.

The libation's close juxtaposition with the removal of the corpse—which occurs shortly after the libations have been completed—gives weight to interpretations which see the rite as another cutting off of the deceased from the living. My informants say that the meaning of the libation rite is to "pay respects to" (*chi*) the dead. In the context of a rite I saw performed when someone had accidently killed a cat by hitting it with his motorbike, a spirit-medium "spat-sprayed" a mixture of rice, salt, and water (purificatory agents) "to *chi* the cat's soul." To *chi* in this situation was explained as ensuring that the cat's soul would not return to haunt and harm the culprit. In similar vein, when a pig is about to be slaughtered as an offering for T'ien Kung (the Heaven God) a small measure of rice wine is poured into the pig's mouth "to *chi* the pig's soul," explained by villagers as ensuring that the pig's soul will not come back to seek retribution. So the libation, by the same logic, represents an attempt to get rid of the dreaded aspects of the deceased associated with the corpse and ensure their non-return.

49. See de Groot, *The Religious System*, 1:149.

50. See Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones," p. 177. He also mentions (p. 167) that the Cantonese use their left hands only, not both hands, as I witnessed.

51. Ahern, "Affines," p. 298, gives an example where wife-giving affines are particularly prominent.

One of Ahern's informants told her that to pour wine over the scallion bunch ("the sprout") is to "apply the maxim 'when you weed, get out the roots.' One man said 'It means you must get rid of the dead entirely, not let him become a hungry ghost or come back to do bad things to the descendants.'"[52] This use of wine to exorcise is remarkably parallel to the intent of *chi*-ing the cat and pig. Further, though I never heard the maxim "when you weed, get out the roots," in all but two cases the roots had been "got out," for the bunch of scallions had had its roots sliced off—in the two exceptions the roots remained, but the top of the scallions had been cut off. If we now recall that "roots" can be termed *t'ou* ("head"), which in turn can refer to the deceased, as contrasted with the surviving descendants (*wei*, "tails"), then the symbolic logic of what Ahern's informant said becomes patent. The libation rite is another expression of separating the deceased from the living.

The choice of *chiu-ts'ai* (scallions) does not seem merely incidental or fortuitous. *Chiu-ts'ai* is a perennial vegetable which grows spontaneously every year so long as its *roots* have soil to grow in. Given such botanical properties, it is not surprising that in some wedding rituals "a stalk of [*chiu-ts'ai*] given to daughters to plant in their gardens after the wedding means a long lasting marriage."[53] If planting scallions represents a long-lasting relationship, then for a relationship to be curtailed the roots of the plant certainly need to be "got out."[54] There is, then, an appropriateness in the choice of scallions for the libation rite.

The eviction of the corpse from the environs of its former habitat does not terminate the offering of food to the deceased. At the grave a "three-meat" *sheng-li*—a slab of pork, a whole chicken, and either fish, prawns, or taro—with three small cups for rice wine is a typical offering for the small image of T'u-ti-kung (the "earth god") to thank him for allowing the grave to be built in his precinct. After interment and the *tien-chu* (dotting the tablet) rite, grains, nails, and coins are distributed to the descendants from a *tou* (rice-bucket). Then the *sheng-li* is moved over so as to be offered to the deceased, together with a *ts'ai-fan* offering—a bowl of cooked rice, in which are planted two vertical chopsticks, and five bowls of *ts'ai*. With the exception of the inferior quality of the *ts'ai* dishes, and the vertical placing of the chopsticks, the grave offering approximates the standard sort of offering for

52. Ibid., p. 298.

53. Ahern, "The Problem of Efficacy: Strong and Weak Illocutionary Acts," *Man* 14 (1979): 13. *Chiu* puns with the "mystical" number nine in both Hokkien and Mandarin, and also with the word meaning "a long time."

54. I am struck by the similarity in the writing of *chiu* and *fei* ("shroud"), a term which Yü Ying-shih discusses in "O Soul, Come Back: A Study of the Changing Conceptions of the Soul and Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47 (1987): 363–395.

an ancestor. "Red turtle cakes" and *tsung-tzu* dumplings, together with small cakes, are often offered too.

The offerings are rebasketed for transfer back to the family altar room, where the dotted, temporary ancestral tablet of the deceased is installed. While the guests are seated around tables in the courtyard partaking of the funeral banquet, the family mourners eat the same as the guests,[55] but in the comparative seclusion of the altar room. This ambivalence signifies that the mourners are nearing reincorporation into the community, but that that reincorporation is not yet complete. When the temporary ancestral tablet is replaced with a permanent one (*ho-lu*)—usually after one hundred days—then, concomitantly, the mourning family is essentially freed from the polluting effects of death and fully reintegrated into the community.[56] Till that time, in my fieldwork village, a bowl of rice with a pair of chopsticks stuck vertically in it, together with a single bowl of *ts'ai*, is offered for the benefit of the dead person on the first and the fifteenth day of each lunar month. Not till the *ho-lu* rite is performed is the deceased reincorporated into the family as a fully-fledged ancestor no longer in need of such ghost-like offerings.

Maurice Freedman has noted that "dead ancestors rely for their perennity on the ritual memory of their descendants."[57] On the west coast of Yun-lin the ritual memory of the living (as expressed in food prestations) for ancestors *as individuals* is relatively short-lived and does not often outlast the time when no living family member actually knew the ancestor when he or she was alive. Offerings associated with the tablet cult are presented in the domestic altar room, and the type of food prestation is much the same, whether the focus is on a recent individual ancestor on his or her birth- or deathday anniversary, or on the collectivity of earlier unnamed ancestors on fixed calendrical occasions. *Ts'ai-fan* is the standard item, and *sheng-li* is often, though not always, provided. As Arthur Wolf has suggested, "offerings to ancestors are meals, in both form and intent."[58] Several villagers told me, "If you know the sort of thing the ancestor liked eating, then you will serve that."

The offering of food at the grave operates on a much shorter time scale and is associated primarily with the *ch'ing-ming chieh* (tombsweeping) ritual. Families present food for the first three years following the death—in the first year on a date before the festival, in the second year on the date of the festival itself, and in the third year on a date a few days after the festival.

55. A restriction on descendants' eating pork is lifted at this time.

56. Some minor markers of pollution still remain.

57. Maurice Freedman, *The Study of Chinese Society: Selected Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), p. 296.

58. Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts," p. 177.

Subsequently, if a son or grandson marries or if a male descendant is born during the year, then food should be presented at the grave on the following *ch'ing-ming chieh*. Otherwise it is sufficient at the tombsweeping time to tidy the grave, burn spirit-money, and leave colored papers on the grave—there is no need to provide food offerings.

For Ch'i-nan, Ahern found a marked contrast between the type of food offered at the grave and the food presented before the ancestral tablet. As opposed to the food offered in meal-ready form for the tablet cult, she found that grave foods "though potentially edible, are not soaked, seasoned or cooked; most of them are dry and unpalatable . . . consisting basically of twelve small bowls of foodstuffs."[59] Ahern hypothesizes that the starkness of the contrast between the two types of offerings is indicative of a difference in the conception of the deceased as familiar, indeed a member of the family, in tablet guise, but in grave guise an unpredictable stranger, impersonal, dangerous, and distant.

In the area of Taiwan with which I am familiar the sort of food offered at the grave is not so radically different from that offered in the domestic altar room. A pot of cooked rice complete with spatula, together with five *ts'ai*, often ready as if for consumption, are provided; sometimes, despite awkwardness of carriage, even soup dishes are taken out to the grave. *Sheng-li* are also provided—though first offered to T'u-ti-kung. There are some differences though.

First, the advent of the offerings is often the occasion for women in the family to wail for the deceased, whereas offerings presented before the tablets mark an occasion that is more convivial and familiar. Second, no bowls or chopsticks are provided for the deceased to use. Third, in addition to the *ts'ai-fan* and *sheng-li* offerings, some platefuls or bags of shelled foods—eggs, prawns, clams—are provided, all cooked, but with the shells still intact. These the family members eat at the grave itself, scattering the shells over the grave mound.[60] However, even with these differences, if we allow that the type of food offered is a measure of the social distance between giver and receiver, with readiness for consumption the gauge, then the deceased as grave resident is not as distant, unknown, and potentially threatening as in Ahern's village. I would suggest that the difference may be attributable to the importance of lineage structure in Ch'i-nan and its absence in coastal Yun-lin. The more there are groups with clearly demarcated and circumscribed membership, such as a patrilineage, the greater the ambivalence and potential threat felt toward whatever lies on the other side of the boundary.

59. Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, p. 167.

60. Among others, Yü Kwang-hung, "Lu-tao," p. 156, also describes the scattering of eggshells on the grave mound.

OF RICE AND MEN

In the death rites the transformation of the deceased from a wandering, unknowing ghost to a ritually manufactured ancestor is echoed and in part achieved by the switch from ordinary, daily ghost-type offerings to the honorific and elaborate, untransformed pork offerings, congruent with the deceased's conversion in status to that of (near-)ancestor. Further, through analysis of food prestations, the recurrent symbolic representations of separation and expulsion, on the one hand, and retention and continuity, on the other, are manifest. It is evident that much of what is considered polluting and in need of expulsion is embodied by the corpse, though in time the bones will be extracted for retention. But what of those aspects of the deceased that are ritually recouped as regenerative rather than degenerative? Is there any evidence for Bloch's "theme of the retention and re-use of life substance"?[61]

The ancestral tablet is a representation of the deceased as moral ancestor. The *tien-chu* (dotting the tablet) rite is a method of mystically channeling the *li-liang* (vigor) of the deceased onto his or her offspring, whether performed by literatus or Taoist priest. There are more concrete transfers. The nails, coins, and "five grains" (*wu ku*) distributed from the rice-bucket just after lowering the coffin into the grave are a further example of *fertility* (in the widest sense) emanating from death. The nails symbolize progeny, since the Hokkien word for nail puns with the word for adult male; the coins symbolize future wealth for the descendants; and the "five grains" symbolize fertility of crops. The fertility of the descent line tends to be most emphasized. In one extraordinarily unconcealed reference at one funeral I saw the son of the deceased pull a nail from the coffin with his teeth and deposit it into the rice-bucket. The nail was explicitly said to represent future male descendants.[62] Pulling a nail (representative of male descendants) out of a coffin with one's teeth is a remarkable ritual expression of death's being transformed into a source of fertility. Less dramatically, I was told that the taro offered to the deceased ensures that there will be sons and grandsons—taro, a symbol for fertility, is often sent with the bride during a wedding.

In this respect the semantics of rice and pork prestation are most intriguing. I deal first with rice. Rice is the core, the marked element of a meal; the *ts'ai* is an extra, a topping, there to make the rice tastier. Rice is also very much the key food substance shared by members of a family. The eating of rice together in a real sense demarcates the family unit and reinforces kinship bonds. As David Jordan has pointed out, "a family is the unit

61. Bloch, "Death, Women, and Power," p. 222.

62. Compare similar practice described by de Groot, *The Religious System*, 1:5; Doré, *Researches*, 1:49 (in which instance hair of the deceased is entwined around the nail); and Feuchtwang, "Religion and Society," p. 344.

attached to a rice pot."[63] The daily reiterated act of sharing rice sustains and nourishes the family both literally and metaphorically. Rice is ideally not exchanged between families, for it is "substance shared."[64] But, as we have seen, it is "substance shared" by dead family members (ancestors) as well as its living representatives.

Like males within the patriline, rice is not a substance for exchange. In the sense that rice is the product of the land worked by and inherited from ancestors, land which, ideally, should be inalienable to non-agnates, rice can be identified as stuff of the ancestors. And, as ancestral stuff, its retention within the family and descent line makes sense. Bones, as agnatic matter, are similarly retained, for they are exhumed and repotted for preservation. They are retained, not because they are durable (teeth are more durable, but are discarded at reburial), but because, unlike teeth, bones are ancestral stuff. One knowledgeable old man told me, "Only bones are regarded as important. Flesh rots away, but bones are part of your ancestors, so you can't throw them away."

Further, bones are explicitly associated by some villagers with semen. "Bones are connected directly to your ancestors through your father's semen," in the words of one informant. It would seem, therefore, that rice, bones, and semen are coassociable as aspects of ancestral substance, all aspects of a single unity. The coassociability of rice and bones is amply illustrated in a photograph taken by Gary Seaman,[65] in which a man is placing a bowl of rice on the ground where his uncle's grave is to be dug. The caption informs us that the bowl of rice symbolizes the uncle's bones. Rice and semen, to complete the interconnections between the three substances, can also be directly coassociated. In many parts of China there is a saying to the effect that seven bowls of rice need to be eaten in order to regenerate one drop of semen.[66] This correlates with the notion that "a man should regard his semen as his 'precious thing' and should guard it carefully against loss through ejaculation in sexual activity."[67] Anthony Yu tells me that the danger of semen release is ingrained [*sic*] into the popular consciousness, and that "a man is said to die a little" with each ejaculation.

At a funeral the transmission from deceased to heirs is often symbolized

63. David Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors: The Folk Religion of a Taiwanese Village* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), p. 118.

64. Here I make use of the distinction between food that is "substance shared" and food that is "substance given," which Ronald B. Inden and Ralph W. Nicholas develop in their book *Kinship in Bengali Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

65. Gary Seaman, "Ancestors, Geomancy, and Mediums in Taiwan," in William H. Newell, ed., *Ancestors* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), photograph facing p. 309.

66. Vincent Shui, personal communication.

67. Philip Rawson and Laszio Legeza, *Tao: The Chinese Philosophy of Time and Change* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 27.

in terms of apportioning rice. In coastal Yun-lin, if the deceased dies after the third meal on the day of death, then a special rite called "begging rice" (*t'ao-fan*) is performed. A *tou* (rice-bucket) measure of rice is divided, two parts (expressed as two meals) for the living, and one part (one meal) for the deceased.[68] In my estimation the contents of the *tou* on this and on other occasions represent not just the property but also the agnatic substance (of which property can be seen as a facet) that the deceased is in danger of hoarding to himself, and which, only through the intervention of ritual procedures, can be transmitted down the patriline to the descendants. I substantiate this claim below.

Also in the mortuary rites a *tou* measure of rice, wrapped in a cloth, is set on top of the coffin. This rice is to be eaten by male descendants of the deceased and their wives; eating this rice is said to ensure peace and plenty. The *tou* plays a very central role in funerary ritual.[69] We can learn a good deal about what death rituals express by unpacking the symbolism associated with it. The *tou* refers both to the traditional standard measure for rice (approximately one decaliter) and to a cylindrical wooden tub which can contain that amount. A *tou* containing the temporary ancestral tablet for the deceased is carried by the son or, preferably, the senior grandson of the deceased in the funeral procession to and from the grave. If the deceased dies without heirs, then whoever carries the *tou* thereby becomes posthumous heir.

If we examine what the *tou* contains in the course of the funerary ritual we can list the following: rice, which is put in a (red) cloth wrap on top of the coffin; the temporary ancestral tablet; the "five grains," coins, and nails, symbols of fertility; short sticks of bamboo, said to represent the sons and grandsons of the dead person. When the son pulled the progeny nail from the coffin with his teeth, he deposited it in the *tou* bucket. My reading is that the items contained in the *tou* are interchangeable, all being facets of agnatic stuff. Pushing the symbolic logic further, and given that the bag of rice on the coffin is an aspect of the deceased, then it follows that the descendants by consuming the rice, an agnatic substance, are metaphorically indulging in endonecrophagy. The substance of one generation is represented as the source of life and substance for the next generations.

The resonances reverberate still more strongly if we consider that the

68. This is notably similar to what Ahern describes above. See *Cult of the Dead*, pp. 197–198.

69. *Tou* is a very complex symbol and has many more layers of meanings than I am able to deal with in this chapter. The symbolization of *tou* is a topic worthy of an essay in its own right. Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, facing p. 131, provides a photograph of a young man carrying the *tou* and paper ancestral tablet of his father in the funeral procession to the grave. The same photograph forms the dust jacket of her book.

word *tou* "is used by some people in the binome [*chin-tou*] (golden *tou*) both for the urn into which the bones of the dead person are put for reburial and for the red bag into which traditionally women gave birth or, in slang, for female genitals themselves."[70] A *tou* in this broadened terminology can then be a container for semen, for rice, for an ancestral tablet, for reburied ancestral bones, and for a newborn baby—each of which can be construed as aspects of agnatic substance.

Semen, rice, bones, offspring, and ancestors are coassociated and are also elements in cycles of agnation spiraling through time. Semen (agnatic stuff) creates offspring (agnates) who are sustained through life by consuming rice (another agnatic substance). At death an agnate becomes an ancestor preserved as bones and ancestral tablet; but for descendants the death of an ascendant releases life-forces (fertility), of which semen is a facet, thereby closing one cycle and generating another. Agnatic substance is retained, at least metaphorically, within the descent line. Reproductive capacity is not squandered, for, by symbolically eating the deceased-as-rice, it is retained within the descent line. Rice epitomizes the pure, regenerative aspects of the deceased which have been ritually winnowed. It seems that in the mortuary ritual the ideal order being created is one of pure descent, of reproduction by descent alone; of agnatic substance retained from one generation to the next, without reference to inputs from outside. In the world of idealized ritual context the messy world of women, sexuality, affinity, flesh, and decomposition is repudiated. In the terms of Bloch and Parry, "The dominant ideological representation is created out of its contrary," for "the final triumph over death is also a triumph over the necessity for affines and over the world of sexual reproduction which they represent."[71]

But such a reading is biased. It stresses the role of rice, bones, and men while ignoring the significant aspects of death rites concerned with the role of pork, flesh, and women; relatedly, it emphasizes contents, the contained, while neglecting the significance of the container. Besides, it is an unwarranted step to assume that because agnatic fertility is retained within the descent line we are therefore necessarily dealing with a cycle of transfer which is self-sufficient and self-sustaining, requiring neither inputs nor activation from "outside." In the next section I redress the balance.

OF PORK AND WOMEN

Two aspects of the role of pork in death rituals merit particular attention. First, as I have already indicated, the gorging of the deceased on bounteous pork and other offerings seems to be a widespread way of marking the de-

70. Feuchtwang, "Religion and Society," p. 314.

71. Bloch and Parry, "Introduction," p. 21.

ceased's conversion from (near-)ghost to (near-)ancestor.[72] It seems that the crucial transformation of the deceased into benevolent ancestor cannot be achieved by the offering of rice alone, nor solely through prestations presented by agnates; the affinal presentation of pork, and lots of it, is needed to effect the transformation.

In direct juxtaposition to this gorging of the deceased on pork, there is (widespread in the west Yun-lin region, at least) a taboo on the eating of pork by the surviving agnatic descendants of the deceased and their wives. That is, those family members who will eat the *tou* of rice after the funeral are supposed not to eat pork from the time of death till the funeral banquet that follows the burial. Villagers say that it is filial not to eat pork on the death of an ascendant because "it would be like eating the dead person's flesh."[73] There is a direct equivalence made between pig flesh and the flesh of the deceased.

It is incumbent upon married-out daughters of the deceased to furnish a pig's head and tail for the farewell banquet.[74] Married-out nieces and granddaughters may also provide a pig's head and tail, especially in the absence of a married-out daughter, though supplying a pig's trotter would usually be considered acceptable.[75] Though mandatory for married-out daughters, it is said to be optional for sons to offer a pig's head and tail. Several informants even deny that they do give pigs' heads, despite the fact that empirically sons actually do so. "Sons can, but it's not a must." Further, sons should club together to provide a single head and tail between them (even if they have divided into separate households), whereas married-out daughters always provide one each. The prototypical offering of a pig's head and tail is very much that from the married-out daughter, so much so that it is sometimes referred to as "the daughter's head" (*nü-er t'ou*). Interestingly, even at the two Buddhist funerals which I attended each married-out daughter presented a mock pig's head and tail (fashioned from flour)—a measure of the deep-rootedness of the felt obligation.

72. See Doolittle, *Social Life*, pp. 135–141, for similar marking of the transition.

73. It may not be unconnected that Mu-lien, on his mission, in Orpheus-like fashion, to rescue his mother from Hell has his path blocked because he had eaten meat. The Taoist practitioners' enactment of the Mu-lien story comes strategically just before dawn, and the symbolic leading of the deceased across the bridge into the otherworld.

74. The similarities with the Miao-shan legend, in which Kuan-yin repays her filial debt and saves her father by plucking out her eyes and severing her arms to brew him a life-restoring potion, deserve investigation. See Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miao-shan* (London: Ithaca Press, 1978). The daughter, in presenting the pig's head and tail, has returned from the "death" of marriage (see E. Johnson, chapter 6 in this volume) to save her deceased father by offering flesh (in this case, pig's flesh). I'd like to thank the anonymous reviewer for bringing this and other items to my attention.

75. Some villagers say that a pig is reckoned to have five heads for the purposes of offerings—its actual head and the four trotters.

Though identified with the daughter, the pig's head and tail is actually a prestation from the family into which she married—wife-takers in relation to the deceased. The offerings are acknowledged by villagers as actually being from sons-in-law rather than daughters. Unmarried daughters do not give pigs' heads, since "they have no outside family." The head and tail are boiled before offering, and "those who provide the offering take it home to eat"—though if there is soon to be a "happy event" (*hsi-shih*) at the daughter's marital home, it will not be taken back, for the head and tail is considered somewhat "unclean" (*pu ch'ing-chieh*).[76]

How is the prestation of pigs' heads and tails to be interpreted? The head and tail are said to represent a whole pig, though, paradoxically, it would be inappropriate to offer a whole pig—a type of offering reserved for high-ranked deities. A *sheng-li* offering with a pig's head and tail as the centerpiece is an impressive and respectful prestation, and a few villagers explicitly drew a comparison with the honorific head and tail offered to gods on festival occasions. Given that the deceased is attaining, through the ritual process, the status of (near-)ancestor, an honorific offering makes sense.

A further informant-suggested interpretation relates to the prevalent Chinese notion of *pao*, reciprocity, or balanced exchange. "The pig's head is to *pai* (offer to) the deceased, to thank him and repay his kindness (*pao-ta*)." While rice is "substance shared" by members of a family, pork is very much "substance given," for it is prototypically the foodstuff for exchange and reciprocity between families—it is the primary banquet food.[77] In wedding exchanges, the key food is the pig sent by the groom's family to the bride's. A wife is transferred in one direction, a pig in the other. But the bride's family should return the head and tail of the pig "to show respect to the groom's side." Thus, at the funeral, the wife-takers seem to be reciprocating when they present a pig's head and tail. As James Watson has noted, "The pig's head and tail could be construed as the repayment owed to the deceased by affines,"[78] a balancing of exchanges between each wife-taking family and the deceased (as wife-giver).

In both Cantonese and Taiwanese instances the offering of pig's head and tail is correlated with the phrase *yu t'ou yu wei*, meaning literally "There's a head and a tail." In other contexts this phrase has the connotation of well-rounded completion, and so I concur with Watson that the head and tail may symbolize "a good beginning and a good end" for the deceased in the sense of his (or her) being transformed into a benevolent ancestor.[79]

76. In the Cantonese case that Watson describes, the daughters give only a single, raw pig's head and tail between them, every particle of which must be consumed by, and only by, the immediate descendants of the deceased. See Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones," pp. 175–178.

77. See note 64 above.

78. Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones," p. 176.

79. Ibid., p. 177.

However, I find discrepant Watson's further implication that, through the giving of the head and tail, the affines are paying off their final debt to the deceased, so that "affinity ends at death."[80] The thrust of Watson's argument is that the highly androcentric Cantonese are using the mortuary rites to create an ideal order of pure patrilineal descent, of reproduction by descent alone, an ideal order built on the repudiation of affinity and the role of women in reproduction. In west Yun-lin, though, a married daughter and her husband accompany the corpse to the grave, and the married daughter has important ritual tasks to perform at her deceased parents' postfunerary rites—including initial grave visits at *ch'ing-ming chieh,* and the exhumation and reburial of parents' bones. In the Taiwanese case the offering of pig's head and tail cannot be taken as signifying the ritual termination of affinity, for affinal relationships are continued, ritually and otherwise, during and after the funeral. Besides, sons too usually offer a pig's head and tail.

A more satisfactory interpretation is that the head and tail serves to emphasize family unity and continuity. When the deceased was (near-) ghost, the severing of the (chicken's) head and tail emphasized separation; at the farewell feast, now that the deceased has been ritually manufactured as (near-)ancestor, the (pig's) head and tail are together, and the accompanying chicken offered is intact. The expression *yu t'ou yu wei* indicates the togetherness of deceased ("head") and descendants ("tails"), and thereby the continuity of the descent line.

I was told that food presented to the deceased by his or her daughters, especially the pigs' heads, is regarded as *pu* for the dead parent. In Chinese folk dietetics, foods categorized as *pu* are said to have strengthening or restorative qualities. A woman after giving birth is fed *pu* foods to strengthen her *ch'i* ("vital energy"); similarly, a person suffering from "fright" (*shou-ching*) is often given pig's trotters to help restore weakened *ch'i.* Associatedly, it is reckoned that a part of one's body can be strengthened by eating the same part of an animal—thus, eating pig's liver strengthens the liver of the eater. When a person dies, his or her bones endure and, through secondary burial, are deliberately preserved, whereas flesh and blood are ephemeral and decompose on death. The putrescence of flesh is given cultural emphasis. The deceased only realizes that he or she has died when "T'u-ti-kung takes him to wash in a river and he sees that his fingernails have gone black." Death should entail the rotting away of the deceased's flesh; for it not to do so is arguably good for the deceased but bad for descendants.[81]

80. Ibid.

81. Tales are told of graves located in such a conjunction that the geomancy is too good, with the result that the flesh of the deceased does not dissolve at all, with bad consequences for the descendants.

The reader will remember the prohibition on descendants' eating pork flesh, and the equivalence villagers make between pig flesh and the flesh of the deceased. It seems that by furnishing the deceased with substantial amounts of pig flesh (I was told of one funeral where some forty pigs' heads and tails were presented) there is a ritualized effort to replace the flesh which the deceased is losing. The deceased is fed pig flesh to compensate for the loss of his or her own flesh. Apocryphal tales of supreme filial behavior in traditional times cite the practice of cutting flesh from one's own body so as to strengthen an aged and ailing parent.[82] The children of the deceased seem, symbolically, to be doing the same for their parent, substituting animal flesh for their own human flesh. Similarly, it is said to be very filial for descendants to refrain from eating pork prior to burial, the presumed logic being that to do so would be tantamount to depriving the deceased of urgently required reconstitutive flesh. The descendants abstain so there will be all the more for the deceased. "Eating pork is like eating the dead person's flesh," as my informants expressed it.

There is ritual endeavor to recloak the deceased's *yang* bones in *yin* flesh, constituting a symbolic reembodiment of the deceased. Benefits, in the form of fertility, should consequently accrue. The conjunction of ideas is reminiscent of the most common Chinese myth of creation, that of "the Chinese Adam," P'an Ku. As a cosmic, first man, P'an Ku was "hatched" from the primordial chaos through the interaction of *yin* and *yang.* He "then settled and exhibited the arrangement of the causes which produced him."[83] "When his task was completed, he died for the benefit of his creation, animating the whole universe."[84] "He gave birth in dying to the details of the existing material universe,"[85] for the parts of his giant body were transformed into the elements of the universe—his head became the mountains and so on. "He died that his works might live."[86] The term P'an means the shell of an egg; perhaps the eggshells which are widely reported as being strewn on top of the grave are not just an image of rebirth from death but an allusion to the P'an Ku myth specifically. Ideologically, myth and funerary ritual share the concept that the source of natural increase and productivity comes from the dead; death is required for the generation of fertility. The problem with male-type, agnatic fertility, as represented by *yang* bones or rice or semen, is that it is so pure as to be virtually sterile without interaction with female fertile stuff, as represented by *yin* flesh or pork or blood. There is a needed complementarity between the two, a balance of *yin* and *yang*

82. See de Groot, *The Religious System,* 4:386–387.

83. C. A. S. Williams, *Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motives* (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle, 1974) [orig. Kelly and Walsh, Shanghai, 1941)], p. 313.

84. V. R. Burkhardt, *Chinese Creeds and Customs,* vol. 3 (Hong Kong: South China Morning Post, 1958), p. 1.

85. Williams, *Outlines,* p. 314.

86. E. T. C. Werner, *Myths and Legends of China* (New York: Brentano's, 1922), p. 77.

and other dualities, a dialectical harmony—such as that which engendered P'an Ku.

From a one-sided androcentric viewpoint, pigs and women can be seen as having certain shared characteristics. Both are subject to transfer between families, unlike men, who remain in the bounds of the one family. Indeed, as was already mentioned, in weddings they are exchanged at virtually the same time. They both break out of, and break into, family units. Both are also transformers. The pig converts scrap foods into valuable meat and manure; a woman converts raw foods into meals and semen into children. Pigs are reared (women traditionally are responsible for their feeding) as a form of capital investment which, when money is required, can be sold in market or exchanged with others (often by way of a banquet). They are literally "piggy banks." Women are also reared to be given away to others. In one sense they are similarly "cashed in" (for bride-price), the difference being that they are expected to be goods on which one loses money. Pigs, furthermore, are characterized as depraved, gluttonous, dirty, and licentious creatures, representative of unbridled sexuality and uncontrolled fertility, all in marked contrast to pure, moral, agnatic fertility. Women's sexuality and fertility is also viewed with ambivalence, in powerful ways antithetical to agnatic fertility, but nonetheless essential for providing sons. Women's reproductive capacity is shrouded by notions of pollution, so that the "source of a woman's power [her ability to reproduce descendants] is obscured, if not rendered invisible by a layer of negative sentiment."[87] The sexuality and fertility of pigs and women is strikingly correspondent in two further ways: first, a woman who is always pregnant is referred to as a "mother pig";[88] second, a pig's stomach is said, rather churlishly, to be like a woman's womb, and I was told stories of human souls mistakenly entering pigs' wombs, and vice versa. In a rite called *huan-t'ai* ("changing the womb") a woman who has just given birth to a daughter is given pig's stomach to eat "so that she will have a son next time."

The role of pig flesh in wedding exchanges is also suggestive. Just prior to departing her natal home the bride, on the threshold, is offered pork spareribs. It is said, in maxim form, that she "can eat the flesh, but mustn't gnaw the bones." Several informants said, "It's to do with having sons"; others said it indicates that she will get fatter and prosper (which may be a way of saying the same thing as "having sons"). One key informant told me

87. Emily Martin Ahern, "The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women," in Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke, eds., *Women in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 214.

88. Wolfram Eberhard, "On Some Chinese Terms of Abuse," in *Moral and Social Values of the Chinese: Collected Essays* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials and Research Aids Center, Occasional Series, no. 6, 1971), p. 325.

that the pork flesh is *pu* (strengthening), and is to ensure that she will have *ku-ch'i*. "Pluck" or "courage" is the usual idiomatic translation of *ku-ch'i*, but the term literally is "bones" plus "vital energy." I suggest that the pork flesh is female fertile stuff, and that it is proffered to the bride to ensure the vitalization of her husband's bones, his male fertility. The further implication is that the pigs' heads offered to the deceased, and associated closely with the daughters of the deceased, are female fertile stuff needed to activate agnatic fertile stuff, thereby generating fertility for the deceased's agnatic descendants.

But, first, two other pork transfers at weddings: The length of bamboo over the nuptial taxi, symbolic of the groom's line of descent, has a small lump of pork (which should be just flesh, no bones) tied on before it leaves the bride's home, which ought only to be removed on arrival at the groom's home. There are auspicious connotations upon which my informants elaborated little. However, my interpretation of pork flesh as catalytic female fertility is sustained by what Ahern heard in north Taiwan. "'In the early days a woman wore an underskirt next to her skin on the day of her wedding. . . . Inside the fold was carried: the five grains, a piece of pork, and a pork heart. When she arrived at her husband's house, she allowed the skirt to drop unimpeded onto the floor. This was in order to insure the fast birth of sons.'"[89] In both places the bride brings her catalytic fertility with her in the form of pig flesh, in the one case attached to her underskirt, in the other attached to the bamboo length, symbol of the groom's line of descent.

At the time of the wedding the bride's natal family (wife-giving affines) are clearly responsible for the fertility of the marriage. Ahern, in a stimulating article,[90] has documented other ways in which wife-givers confer fertility on the couple—much of her data is duplicable for the Yun-lin area. At death the roles are reversed. The married-out daughter or, rather, the wife-taking affines now reciprocate by providing the pork-flesh needed to interact with and charge the deceased's bones so as to release fertility for the descendants. The deceased, irrespective of gender, combines male *and* female sexuality and fertility. Like P'an Ku, *yin* and *yang* elements complement each other: bones and flesh together. There is a duality, but not one that is dichotomized; rather, it is one of merging and interfeeding elements. Affines, like pigs and like women, stand apart from, outside, the grid of agnatic structures; and, like pigs and like women, affines have the power to transform, to effect transformations in ego's descent group. At the time of the wedding the deceased's family yielded female fertile stuff, in the form of daughter and of pork; in the mortuary rites the wife-taking affines recipro-

89. Ahern, "Problem of Efficacy," p. 13.

90. Ahern, "Affines and the Rituals of Kinship."

cate in kind, providing the catalytic female fertile stuff for the agnatic fertility of the deceased's line to be activated, for death to be transformed into regenerative potential.

TOMBS AS WOMBS

The idea that female fertile stuff is needed to activate the rather weak sexual potency of pure, white bones or semen or rice does not come unheralded from other spheres. Earlier I alluded to the Taoist-inspired notion that a man should not squander his semen, his "precious stuff," for his supplies are thought to be limited. However, a woman's reserves of red, creative sexual potency are reckoned to be inexhaustible. The result is that "the sexual act was to strengthen the man's vitality by making him absorb the woman's *yin* essence."[91] Sexual intercourse was identified as an opportunity for the male to recharge (rather than discharge) his *yang* essence by drawing on the woman's inexhaustible *yin* essence, in the words of Rawson and Legeza, "a kind of sexual 'vampirism.'"[92]

In similar fashion, the pure rice seed cannot sui generis regenerate. It must be planted in the earth, which is "the greatest repository of *yin* energies."[93] Patrik E. de Josselin de Jong, in discussing the "rice-cattle-death-rebirth complex" of South and Southeast Asian cultures, helps us pull the discussion back to the theme of death's engendering fertility. "Rice seeds . . . *are* really buried in the ground, as are dead bodies; and seeing that the buried seed-rice gives birth to a new crop the notion of . . . death bringing forth life is not surprising in an agricultural society that buries its dead."[94] In these respects *yin*, or female, energy is far from passive, neutral, and discountable; rather it is powerful, unlimited, encompassing, and transformative.

If we look carefully we can see that female elements play an important active role in mortuary ritual. Take the crucial rite of dotting the ancestral tablet. At first glance it appears an exclusively male activity; but the final act of vitalizing the ancestral tablet (and with it the transfer of "vigor" [*li-liang*] from deceased to descendants) is achieved by dotting with cock's blood—blood as a life-force, a red vitalizing agent, and a *yin*, or female, substance. In the same manner, a (very *yang*) god-image or even a Dragon Boat is vitalized with dabs of blood.

In Taoist literature red ochre and cinnabar can substitute for blood. David Keightley tells us not only that pigs' heads were buried with the dead

91. R. H. Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), p. 46.
92. Rawson and Legeza, *Tao*, p. 25.
93. Ibid., p. 26.
94. Patrik E. de Josselin de Jong, "An Interpretation of Agricultural Rites in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Asian Studies* 24 (1965): 283–291.

in China 3,000 years ago, but also that bones were reddened with ochre and cinnabar as far back as Neolithic times.[95] Some of my villagers were of the opinion that when bones are dug up for reburial it augurs best for the fortunes of descendants if they are dry and *with a red tinge*. Before the bone specialist places the exhumed bones in the ceramic pot, he carefully sorts the bones and reconstructs the skeleton. Larger bones are dabbed with red dye (blood substitute) and tied together with red string; smaller bone fragments may be wrapped in red paper to hold them together. The bones are then placed carefully in the *chin-tou* in a distinctly fetus-like position; they are thus enwombed.

When I asked the significance of the red dye I was told that it was linked with the well-known story (now in school textbooks) of the widow who goes in search of her husband who had died when working on the Great Wall. For convenience I use the version of the story that Ahern has recorded.[96] The widow is unable to locate her husband's bones, so she bites off her fingertip and lets the blood flow onto and down into the ground. "Whenever the blood hit one of her husband's bones, that bone came up and joined together with the others until the skeleton was complete." What the bone specialist was doing was imitative of this aspect of the story. But, at another level, the mingling of *yin* blood with *yang* bones has started to bring the corpse back to life. The widow is advised to carry the skeleton in her arms, and as her tears fall so the more the bones return to life. But T'u-ti-kung's spiteful wife advised her to carry the bones over her back instead, with the consequence that they fell apart, so the widow put them in a pot and buried them. Once again it is the female fertile stuff, blood, which has catalytic effects, vitalizing the male fertile stuff, bones. I rather suspect that carrying the skeleton in her arms is tantamount to carriage in the womb, the *yang* bones being encapsulated as a *yang* fetus, developing toward a return to life. With carriage on the back, the process of enwombment and nourishment (from the widow's tears) is ended, and the widow buries the bones in a substitute womb in the ground.

Terminologically, the ceramic pot in which the bones are placed in fetus-like position is a "golden womb." Birth and death are part of the same ongoing process. Entangled here are Taoist notions of palingenesis and *regressus ad uterum*. "(E)arly Taoism is primarily concerned with the initiatory symbolism of death as a necessary prelude to rebirth. . . . The Taoist must reverse the creation and fall of man and return to the condition of the Beginning: the condition of the closed serenity of the fetus in the womb, the condition of the dead ancestors."[97] The environment of the womb is trans-

95. Keightley, "Dead But Not Gone."
96. Ahern, *Cult of the Dead*, pp. 203–204.
97. Girardot, *Myth*, p. 84.

formative; the *tou* is not just a neutral, passive container for the more vital contents. Indeed the term *tou* has the double referent of container and contents. The *tou* can act as a crucible, as a transformative agent. To alter the sex of the child, it is the woman's womb, not the man's sperm, that is ritually changed. The woman is held responsible for the sex of the child; wife-beating occurs on both sides of the Taiwan Straits when a woman gives birth to a second-best girl.[98] The life-style of the mother's womb is held to heavily influence the future well-being and characteristics of the baby.[99] Again we may be dealing with a South and Southeast Asian phenomenon, for Josselin de Jong reckons that "the important element in the ritual treatment of the jar of [life-giving rice-] beer is not the beer, but the jar . . . symbolic of the underworld in South and Southeast Asian cultures."[100] The contents *and* the container are cojointly vital; it is not a matter of the one to the exclusion of the other. One of the aptnesses of the *tou* as a symbol is that it is simultaneously contents and container, it encompasses and subsumes the duality.

In the Yun-lin area the grave for first burial is as elaborate as that for secondary burial, and the geomantic siting of the first grave is an important consideration for the descendants. The grave mound resembles a pregnant womb in appearance, particularly from a side-on view. Looked on from a bird's-eye view, the configuration of the grave approximates a capital omega. The crucial element of architecture of the tomb is the tombstone, located in the vulva-like opening of the omega. The coffin in the mound swollen above the lie of the land has the foot-end at the tombstone. Villagers readily compare tombs with houses—for example, the multicolored papers put on top of the grave at *ch'ing-ming chieh* are said to be like roof-tiles.[101] Red papers are put on top of the tombstone, "the way we put red paper strips on our doors at New Year, or when there's a wedding." One metaphor, then, is of the tomb as house, with the tombstone as doorway.

But there also seems to be another, submerged metaphor, of the tomb as womb—not unexpected in light of the ceramic pot as a womb, too. In this case the tombstone becomes vulva, or doorway to and from the womb. Descendants gather in front of the tombstone ("wombstone"?), and that is where the tablet is dotted and where the *tou* with its contents signifying agnatic fertility is placed. Bamboo sticks, representing the sons and grandsons of the deceased, are stuck vertically in the grave mound close to the

98. See, for instance, Jeffrey Wasserstrom, "Resistance to the One-Child Family," *Modern China* 10 (1984): 345–374.

99. This syndrome of notions is called *t'ai-chiao*.

100. Josselin de Jong, "An Interpretation," p. 288.

101. De Groot mentions that the wealthy design the layout of their graves on the same basis as their houses; *The Religious System*, 3 : 1083.

tombstone. At the time of burial, the foot-end of the coffin has holes drilled in it, or may even be smashed open, to let out the *ch'i*; everyone is forewarned to stand clear.[102] After this some earth, presumably pervaded by the *ch'i*, is placed in the *tou*, and the symbols of fertility—coins, grains, and nails—are then distributed to the mourners. Once more, *yin* fertility in the form of *ch'i*-pervaded earth seems to be needed to trigger the *yang* fertile elements. Finally, on the metaphor of tomb as womb, one of the severest curses that can be put on a family is to smear blood of a black dog on an ancestor's tombstone. The ancestors will then create havoc for their descendants. Blood of black dogs is synonymous with menstrual blood, and since "a woman who is menstruating is not 'with child' . . . neither pregnant nor intensively lactating,"[103] the flow of fertility that should emanate from the tomb "doorway" is blocked and the tomb rendered barren—hence the effectiveness of the curse. Insofar as tombs are wombs, and wombs are tombs, the two are aspects of an encompassing synthesis which dissolves distinctions between life and death, degeneration and regeneration.

A third metaphor is equally suggestive. Tombs are like tortoises or turtles (the Chinese term *kuei* does not distinguish the two). De Groot tells us that in Fukien the shape of the grave mound "reminds us of the shape of a tortoise, whence it is popularly styled . . . 'grave tortoise' . . . [there are] many graves the tumulus of which . . . [are] entirely besmeared with plaster in light and dark colours imitating the lines of a tortoise shell."[104] The tortoise, like P'an Ku, whom the tortoise attended in the mythic creation of the world, combines the principles of *yin* and *yang*. It "symbolises the universe. Its dome-shaped back represents the vault of heaven, whilst its flat belly is the earth floating on the waters."[105] A supremely composite creature, the tortoise is said to have "a serpent's head, and a dragon's neck, the outside is bony and the inside is fleshy."[106] The status of a tortoise's head (a slang word for "penis") is wonderfully ambiguous. It is said not only, as above, to be *like a snake*, but to be a snake penetrating its body as a male organ. "One of the Chinese explanations of the Creation is that the world came into

102. The *ch'i* is said to be *tu*, or poisoning, which is why people should stand clear. Allergenic foods in folk dietetics are referred to, also, as *tu*. Somewhat paradoxically, perhaps, *pu* (strengthening) foods are often also classifiable as *tu*. For instance, my villagers say that sesame is the most *tu* and *pu* food.

103. Barbara Harrell, "Lactation and Menstruation in Cultural Perspective," *American Anthropologist* 83 (1981): 805.

104. De Groot, *The Religious System*, 3 : 1083. In north China the base for stone memorial tablets was often tortoise-shaped.

105. V. R. Burkhardt, *Chinese Creeds and Customs* (Hong Kong: The South China Morning Post, Ltd., 1953), 1 : 126.

106. Bernard E. Read, *Chinese Materia Medica: Turtle and Shellfish Drugs* (Taipei: Southern Materials Center, Inc. [Chinese Medicine Series], 1977 [orig. Peking, 1937]), p. 7, quoting Li Shih-chen.

existence through the union of a tortoise and a snake."[107] It is famous for "its faculty of transformation,"[108] including a capacity to switch sex. "Assuming female form . . . were-tortoises haunt rivers, and seduce lewd men,"[109] while in male form the tortoise is still very much associated with licentiousness. In addition, the tortoise is reputed to "conceive by thought alone,"[110] and "to lay eggs and hatch them by its thoughts."[111] So, on the one hand, the tortoise is ambivalently synoecious and bisexual, and, on the other, it can reproduce asexually.

There is not the space to unpack in much detail the constituents of the metaphorical identification of tombs with tortoises. Certainly the funeral prestation of "red turtle cakes" takes on a new and enhanced significance. So, too, since the tortoise is the king of shelly creatures in the Chinese categorization,[112] does the widely reported scattering of egg- and other shells over the carapace of the grave. Consider also that the turtle is famous for its longevity which it owes to "its 'embryo-breathing', that is to breathe underground in the same manner as the embryo breathes in its mother's womb,"[113] and the reverberations become even more intense. Once again tomb and womb, birth and death, are coidentified. The tortoise is a potent miscegenation of inextricated dualities and ambiguity, at the same time fertile, catalytic, and transformative. Fertility is engendered through the dissolution of distinctions, through the coalescent harmonization of *yin* and *yang*. In these aspects it seems to be an epiphany of "the obliterating unity of the *tao*."[114]

In this chapter I have sought to show that a crucial aspect of the significance of food in funerary ritual is concerned with the duality of rice and pork, the semantic ramifications of which help us interpret Chinese death rites. Though not always clearly recognizable, the duality is there in the mortuary and funerary rituals. The dualities can either be dichotomized or amalgamated.

Standard interpretations of Chinese death rituals stress the aspect of Confucian ritual hegemony, the superimposition by the state of standard ritual performances and structures. Deviation from the orthopractical forms could result in punishment. As far as the state was concerned, ritual forms had to conform, which is not to say that all ritual forms, let alone the meanings attributed to the ritual forms, conformed to the state interpretation. The emphasis in the patriarchal Confucian ideology was on social harmony and moral order, exemplified in the concept *li*, translatable variously as "ritual," "ceremony," or "etiquette." As Watson tells us, *li* is very much at issue during death rites, there being a supposition "that a moral order can be created by proper action," though we cannot a priori know the extent to which participants in the rituals share this state-foisted interpretation. In the hegemonic Confucian paradigm the great fear is "the spectre of disorder [*luan*],"[115] a state of affairs which, in the Confucian definition, prevails when social and moral distinctions are not "properly" maintained. In Confucianism dualities are separated out, thereby emphasizing the "proper" distinctions that ought to apply. And in that separation one part of the duality is given primacy over the other: *yang* over *yin*; *li* over *luan*; men over women; agnates over affines; rice over pork; formal behavior over "what conforms with one's nature"; purity over lewdness; structure over communitas; and so on. In convergent fashion James Watson has depicted the manner in which his lineage-dominated Cantonese villagers stressed one side of the duality while repudiating the other. In the highly structured social world of the single-lineage village the death rituals are interpreted as creating "a pure state of maleness—without sex, affinity, or the messy corrupting necessities of biological reproduction."[116]

However, even in the case of the particularly androcentric Cantonese, the other side of the duality seems to be there in the ritual, though denigrated, poorly recognized, or, perhaps, actively repudiated. We are told, for instance, that "in order to be effective . . . bones . . . cannot function without activating the flesh of sacrificial animals."[117] I would favor the interpretation that it is the flesh of the animal (the sacrificial pig) which activates the bones; at any rate, my point is that both sides of the duality (bones and flesh) are there, but the lineage-dominated Cantonese favor the hegemonic Confucian one-sided emphasis on bones when, logically, the emphasis could just as well be focused on the flesh or on the interaction between the two elements. In the Taoist ideology, on the other hand, where the importance of social order and hierarchy is absent, distinctions are happily blurred. In the Taoist way of thinking, "power" is more personalized and not associable or derivable from *social* order and the upholding of distinctions.

107. Burkhardt, *Chinese Creeds*, 2:50.
108. Williams, *Outlines*, p. 405, quoting Mayers.
109. Doré, *Researches*, 5:661.
110. Williams, *Outlines*, p. 405, quoting Mayers.
111. Read, *Chinese Materia Medica*, p. 7, quoting Li Shih-chen.
112. See ibid., pp. 1–2; Williams, *Outlines*, p. 403–405.
113. Van Gulik, *Sexual Life*, p. 9.
114. Werner, *Myths and Legends*, p. 91.

115. J. L. Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones," p. 180. Here I am using the terms "Confucian" and "Taoist" in a selective, shorthand fashion, as labels to designate two contrasting perspectives on rice/pork and other dualisms. Other labels might also be applied, for instance "male" and "female" ideologies, as discussed by Emily Martin in chapter 7.
116. J. L. Watson, chapter 5 this volume. Cf. Bloch and Parry's quote, at note 71 above.
117. J. L. Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones," p. 181.

Rather, the stress is on conforming with the way of nature, the *natural* order. The "emphasis is on complementary dualism . . . an equilibrium of opposites as the basic mode of creation, both cosmic and human."[118] Emphasis is on the complementary interaction of *both* elements of dualities: male *and* female; yin *and* yang; flesh *and* bones; rice *and* pork; and so on. *Luan* is seen, not as threatening, but as merely the other side of *li*, both facets of the encompassing meta-level order of the Tao. This Taoist interpretation is subversive of the dominant Confucian interpreting of the meaning that should be given to key ritual dualities. The true Taoist, like the tortoise, has forgotten the eight rules of politeness,[119] and is unable to conform to ceremony, that is, the *li* with which the hegemonic Confucian paradigm is so concerned. In the Taoist counter-ideology reference is to an order beyond the social order and moral harmony stressed in the Confucian emphasis on *li*. In the Confucian paradigm food has the power to separate rather than unite dualities; in the Taoist counter-interpretation food unites rather than separates dualities.[120]

118. Girardot, *Myth*, p. 183.
119. For the tortoise's inability to conform to *li*, see Burkhardt, *Chinese Creeds*, 2:50.
120. My final sentence refers back, palingenetically, to the Girardot epigraph.

FIVE

Funeral Specialists in Cantonese Society: Pollution, Performance, and Social Hierarchy

James L. Watson

Ah-bak [honorific uncle], who are those scruffy outsiders?

Not so loud! Don't speak to them and don't go near them. They are [voice in a whisper] ng jong lo. *They always come with the coffin. Such men are bad luck and their touch is very filthy.—Elder of the Man lineage to J. L. W. during a funeral in the village of San Tin, 1969.*

Such was my introduction to the subject of funeral specialists in Cantonese rural society. From the moment these men entered the village it was obvious that something extraordinary was happening. Doors and windows were clapped shut as they walked through the narrow lanes, mothers scrambled to remove children from their paths, no one spoke with them, and—most noticeably—heads were turned to avoid their glance. Although I had lived in the community for several months, I had as yet seen nothing even approaching this kind of behavior. "Those who come with the coffin" were treated like lepers—or worse. Later, when I began to probe more deeply into Cantonese mortuary ritual, it became apparent why these men were social pariahs: They earn their living by handling corpses, digging graves, and carrying coffins. Villagers believe that such people are permanently contaminated by constant exposure to the corrupting influences of death. Accordingly, any form of social exchange with them (physical, verbal, or visual) is to be avoided lest the pollution of death be transmitted to the unwary.

This chapter is divided into two major parts. The first, and longest, is primarily ethnographic in that it explores the social backgrounds and ritual roles of funeral specialists who were observed at work in two Cantonese villages. The second part attempts to draw some general conclusions about the nature of funerary ritual and its relation to notions of social order in Chinese society.

The ethnographic evidence suggests that, among the Cantonese, there is a hierarchy of specialists ranked according to relative exposure to the pollution of death. This hierarchy also reflects the standards of skill, training, and literacy required to carry out ritual tasks. Geomancers, whose work demands a high level of skill and literacy (combined with a total avoidance of

EIGHT

Souls and Salvation: Conflicting Themes in Chinese Popular Religion

Myron L. Cohen

Chinese popular religion during late traditional times provided several concurrent or alternative versions of the afterlife,[1] including the possibility of personal or individual salvation through rebirth into the Western Heaven of paradise. As far as the religious practices and beliefs most prevalent among the masses were concerned, the salvation thus depicted received its greatest emphasis during the funeral and postfuneral rituals, when the deceased's passage through the underworld and then reincarnation or hoped-for rebirth in the Western Heaven were facilitated and expedited by his or her kin and by the religious specialists they had employed. For certain Chinese, such as lay adherents of orthodox Pure Land Buddhism, and even more so for members of some of the imperially proscribed "heretical" sects falling within the White Lotus and other traditions, the Western Heaven or a similarly envisioned blissful paradise formed a core element within the total arrangement of religious beliefs. For the majority of the population, however, it would appear that this idea of salvation, albeit incorporated into rituals and beliefs concerning the afterlife, was in fact given little room for expression. A religious orientation toward salvation in Western Paradise both functionally and logically yielded pride of place among the masses to ancestor worship, the belief in three souls, the ideal and role of reincarnation, and more generally to a conceptualization of the structure and organization of the cosmos which tightly and interactively linked the living to the dead and to the gods. While internal consistency as such is not necessarily to be expected with respect to the totality of any popularly held body of

1. In addition to nineteenth-century sources, I use materials which describe continuities in traditional practices as observed on the China mainland during the first half of the twentieth century, and even more recently in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

religious beliefs and practices, the fact remains that because in the Chinese case belief in the Western Paradise was potentially subversive of other major elements in popular religion, there was an important tension and contradiction built into popular religious ideas concerning the afterlife. It was for the living, obviously, that the afterlife could assume different forms varying in their desirability, and in this chapter I focus on the social interpretation of death with particular reference to the emphasis or de-emphasis of salvation in different popular religious contexts.

It is well established that the beliefs and rituals surrounding death have as three of their major foci the supernatural domains of the gods and ghosts, the grave, and the ancestral tablet.[2] The dead are held to be present as supernatural entities in their graves and tablets; at the same time, they are undergoing judgment—if not worse—at the hands of the magistrates of hell and their demon assistants, and there can be alternative (not concurrent) outcomes to these underworld procedures: return to the earth as a "hungry ghost," ongoing punishment in hell, release from punishment but continued confinement in the underworld, reincarnation (in one of many possible forms and in one of several domains of existence), or entrance into the Western Paradise.[3]

Linked to these multiple and rather different coexisting contexts of the afterlife was the belief, reported by numerous Western observers with respect to widely separated areas of China, that a dead person had three "souls."[4] At the same time, literary and ethnographic materials indicate several alternative systems of classification, but it is noteworthy that all have

2. See, i.e., Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China* (London: Athlone, 1958), pp. 86–87; Arthur P. Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974); Emily Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973).

3. Freedman, *Lineage Organization.*

4. M. [Evariste-Regis] Huc, *The Chinese Empire: Forming a Sequel to the Work Entitled "Recollections of a Journey through Tartary and Thibet"* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855), 2:343, quoting from another missionary's description of Honan, is the earliest mention I have found; Justus Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper, 1865), 2:401–402, similarly reports on Foochow in the south; John L. Nevius, *China and the Chinese* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1869), p. 132, has remarks along the same lines which appear to be based upon what he saw in the city of Hangchow; for an observation with respect to Szechuan in western China there is James Hutson, "Chinese Life on the Tibetan Foothills," *New China Review* 1 (1919): 425; for Peking, see Anne Swann Goodrich, *The Peking Temple of the Eastern Peak* (Nagoya: Monumenta Serica, 1964), p. 208, and H. Y. Lowe, *The Adventures of Wu: The Life Cycle of a Peking Man* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983, combined reprint of vol. 1, Peking, 1940, and vol. 2, Peking, 1941), 2:126; and for modern Hong Kong, Cornelius Osgood, *The Chinese: A Study of a Hong Kong Community*, 3 vols. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975), 3:1145; also see Osgood, *The Chinese*, p. 1186, n. 100, for additional references.

in common the absence of an individuated soul. The fundamental *yin-yang* dualism gave rise to the distinction between the *p'o*—the earthly *yin* soul which went into the grave with the body of the dead, and the *hun*—the *yang* soul of the ancestral tablet. But both the texts and the ethnographies reveal a situation far more complex than that allowed for by a simple dichotomization. Although it is commonly reported that there are three *hun* and seven *p'o*,[5] other Chinese expositions of the subject describe different and various numbers of "souls." Again, although it is asserted that the *p'o* and the *hun* are represented as manifested in or equivalent to the *kuei*, or ghost, and the *shen*, or spirit/god, the Chinese terminology is less than fully consistent; for example, an *o-kuei*, or "hungry ghost"—surely as *yin* as can be—can alternatively be known as *ku-hun* (an "orphaned," "lonely," or "solitary" *hun*, one whose *yang* forces presumably have not been properly dissipated).[6] Nevertheless, the major ethnographic variations seem to be terminological; while in some areas it is said that the three souls with which the living continue to interact are all known as *hun*,[7] in other parts of China terms such as *p'o*, *kuei*, or *shen* can refer to the souls in the grave, the underworld, and the tablet.[8] Also, it is clear that some of these terms were used interchangeably or in different social contexts.[9]

Stevan Harrell has suggested that the apparent contradictions in the Chinese view of the afterlife can be resolved if what he calls the "analytic" perspective of Chinese literary commentary is replaced by the ethnographers' "action" perspective; the Chinese concept of the "soul," he notes, is fundamentally contextual—grave, tablet, and underworld are but three different areas of religious or ritual concern of the living for their ancestors. It therefore can be assumed that there is one "soul," for even if "there is more than one, . . . they are alike and can be treated in the same way at the same time, which makes them fundamentally one."[10] While I do agree with

5. J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China: Its Ancient Forms, Evolution, History and Present Aspect*, vols. 1 and 4 (Taipei: Ch'eng-wen, 1964 reprint of Leiden, 1898, 1901), 1:70; Stevan Harrell, "The Concept of Soul in Chinese Folk Religion," *Journal of Asian Studies* 38 (1979): 519–528; Jack Potter, "Wind, Water, Bones and Souls," in Laurence G. Thompson, ed., *The Chinese Way in Religion* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1973), p. 227. [Originally published in *Journal of Oriental Studies* (Hong Kong) 8 (1970): 139–153.]

6. My discussion of the various conceptions of the soul draws upon de Groot, *The Religious System*, vol. 4, which is entirely concerned with Chinese ideas on this subject; on p. 22 he remarks on the merging of *o-kuei* and *ku-hun*; see also Harrell, "The Concept of Soul," for a summary of the various Chinese interpretations.

7. See the Huc, Lowe, and Harrell works cited in notes 4 and 5 above.

8. Osgood, *The Chinese*, p. 1145; David K. Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: The Folk Religion of a Taiwanese Village* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 31–32.

9. See Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," pp. 172–173, on the variable usage of *shen* and *kuei*.

10. Harrell, "The Concept of Soul," p. 523.

Harrell's emphasis on the importance of context for an understanding of how the living define and interact with the dead, the weight of the ethnographic evidence does favor the Chinese belief in three souls, a possibility he too does not deny. In any event, his argument in fact serves to underscore the fundamental incompatibility of the differentiation of the soul with the salvationist ideal.

The Chinese view of salvation also needs to be considered in the context of traditional popular religious beliefs concerning the larger cosmos shared by the living, the dead, and the gods, and while for purposes of this essay it is not necessary for me to deal with this subject in any detail, I must provide enough of an outline so as to relate this cosmic arrangement to Chinese concepts of the afterlife. There was then, the underworld (*yin-chien*), the world of living human beings (*shih-chien* or *yang-chien*), and a higher world of the gods (*t'ien*, *t'ien-fu*, or *t'ien-chieh*).[11] While the Jade Emperor held court over the other (lower-ranking) gods in the highest of the supernatural domains, he also was held to be the ruler of the cosmos as a whole. If among the gods in the Jade Emperor's court there were those who at the same time were the tutelary deities of communities and groups among the living, other, lower deities—such as the various gods of localities (*t'u-ti*), administrative cities (*ch'eng-huang*), and kitchen hearths (*tsao-chün*)—resided on the earth among human beings. This supernatural government extended into the underworld, which included hell (*ti-yü*) and its ten famous yamens, presided over by Yen-lo wang. Here the dead would be judged—and sometimes horribly punished—as they would be transferred from one yamen to the next, each with its magistrate, secretary-attendants, and demoniacal-monstrous underlings.[12]

Although it has been shown how the gods in each of these domains resembled, with respect to appearance, behavior, and hierarchy, the officials of the imperial bureaucracy,[13] it is important for my present purposes to note that hitherto there has not been given due emphasis in the literature on how the projection of the traditional Chinese polity onto the supernatural involved important modifications with respect to organization. Within the supernatural bureaucracy there was an important distinction, as between

11. See, i.e., Tung Fang-yuan 董芳苑, *T'ai-wan min-chien tsung-chiao hsin-yang* 台灣民間宗教信仰 [Taiwanese folk religious beliefs] (Taipei: Ch'ang-ch'un wen-hua kung-ssu 長春文化公司, 1980), p. 130.

12. For descriptions of the ten yamens of hell, see, i.e., Henry Doré, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions*, trans. M. Kennelly, vols. 1, 6–7 (Taipei: Ch'eng-wen, 1966 reprint of Shanghai, 1913, 1920, 1922), 7: 250–302; Wolfram Eberhard, *Guilt and Sin in Traditional China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 24–59.

13. See Hampden C. DuBose, *Dragon, Image, and Demon* (New York: Armstrong, 1887), p. 358; C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), pp. 150–165; Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors."

"field administration," whereby god-officials in both the earthly domain (i.e., *ch'eng-huang* or *t'u-ti*) and the underworld each had a specific area of jurisdiction, and the "court" comprising the Jade Emperor and the other higher gods.[14] These gods could serve as the patron deities of many communities precisely because their areas of jurisdiction were not defined in terms of a hierarchy of field administration. Rather, as Feuchtwang has pointed out, popular religion (in contrast to the state cult) took as a community god one which at a particular place had demonstrated *ling*, or "supernatural power and its manifestations," on which basis there could be a "division of power" involving the establishment over a wider area of branch temples all dedicated to the same deity.[15] Thus the supernatural arrangements paralleled those among the living, insofar as court and bureaucracy were two major and separately organized components of the traditional imperial government. Yet an obvious and major difference was that popular religion provided both individuals and communities with far greater access to the gods of all ranks in both court and field administration than did the Chinese imperial state provide direct contact with living government officials.[16]

The supernatural court loomed far larger within the overall organization of the gods than did its earthly counterpart. At the same time, the organization of the gods along lines of formal field administration was most complete in the underworld realm, with its ten yamens and numerous clearly designated hells; in the earthly domain, the place and city gods were organized into hierarchies of territorial administration, but communities could also select their patron protectors from among a large variety of gods in the Jade Emperor's court. A court, with its complex interweaving of bureaucratic, personal, and indeed domestic relationships, served as a most appropriate locale for gods to whom appeal was made by individuals and communities on the basis of their personal efficacy. Thus it comes as no surprise how in one area of Taiwan

> the only figure whose position is universally agreed on is the Jade Emperor . . . , who is at the top. Below him is a group of gods who are higher than other gods, but whom one tries in vain to rank. Some Taiwanese place [Kuan-kung] just below the Jade Emperor himself. . . . In Hsikang the Twelve Plague Gods

14. On the Jade Emperor's court, see e.g., Henri Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, trans. Frank A. Kierman, Jr. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1981), pp. 88–92; on *ch'eng-huang* , see Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, pp. 156–158.

15. Stephan Feuchtwang, "School Temple and City God," in G. William Skinner, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), p. 590; also see Philip C. Baity, "The Ranking of the Gods in Chinese Folk Religion," *Asian Folklore Studies* 35 (1977): 75–84, on the subdivision of god images.

16. On this point, see Emily Martin Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 100–102.

> are immediately below the Jade Emperor. Some informants insert most of the Buddhist pantheon at this point, including and especially [Kuan-yin]. Others include the gods who preside over the dead.[17]

The reference to Kuan-yin in the preceding quotation underscores the point that while a strict extension of the administrative model onto the supernatural world would leave no room within cosmic organization for female deities, the situation is rather different with respect to the higher domain of the gods. Thus there is also the case of T'ien Hou (Ma-tsu), a most important goddess especially in southeastern China, who in many popular religious contexts plays the same role of community protector as do numerous gods: her case presents no anomaly, given her powerful position in the heavenly court.[18]

Popular religion recognized yet another supernatural domain, one not following the bureaucratic model, although linked to it. Thus Kuan-yin was believed to escort at least a few select and most fortunate souls from the underworld to the "Western Heaven" (*hsi-t'ien*), presided over by A-mi-t'o-fo (the Amitabha Buddha). This was indeed paradise (*chi-le-kuo*); here, under circumstances of total bliss, there would appear to have been none of the material and social involvements, concerns, and requirements that loomed so large not only for the living but also—most interestingly—for the dead. Representations of paradise were popularized by woodcuts such as those which "often pictured the sparkling waters of the sacred lake of the Pure Land, the surface of which is starred with lotus-flowers, each bearing in its calyx the spiritual body of those fortunate beings who by the grace of Amitabha or the guidance of [Kuan-yin] have attained the felicity of a rebirth in the Western Paradise."[19] A summary of the textual description of the paradise reads:

> Those who reach it will henceforth escape all subsequent births. There is no fear of becoming a hungry ghost . . . , or an animal by transmigration, for such modes of life are unknown there. It is composed of gold, silver, lapis-lazuli, beryl, ruby and cornelia. There are all kinds of beautiful flowers, which the inhabitants pluck, and offer to the thousands of Buddhas who visit them from other worlds. . . . Fountains bubble up from all sides. In the middle of the lake are lotus flowers, large as a chariot wheel, blue, yellow, red and white, each

17. Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors*, pp. 40–41.

18. On T'ien Hou, see James L. Watson, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou (Empress of Heaven) Along the South China Coast, 960–1960," in David Johnson, Andrew Nathan, and Evelyn Rawski, eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985); female deities as a class are discussed in P. Steven Sangren, "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and the 'Eternal Mother,'" *Signs* 9 (1983): 4–25; on the distinction between court deities and posted official gods, cf. Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," pp. 138–143.

19. Reginald Fleming Johnston, *Buddhist China* (London: John Murray, 1913), p. 103.

reflecting brilliant hues of its own colour and possessed of the most perfect and delightful fragrance.[20]

While it is to be expected that lay devotees of Pure Land Buddhism would have in their minds a relatively full picture of the Western Heaven, I have no evidence to show the extent to which in different areas of the country the textually derived descriptions of paradise, or even their pictographic representations, had entered into the imagery of popular religion in general. However, on the basis of funeral practices alone, there can be no doubt that the idea of the Western Heaven of paradise was expressed in popular Chinese religious practice. For example, the phrase *chieh-yin hsi-fang* ("to be guided to the West," usually by Kuan-yin) is very much in view during funerary rituals, often being inscribed on condolence messages, banners carried during the funeral procession, or on flags placed by the grave.[21] Again, incorporated into the image of hell was the possibility that at least a select few might be accorded entrance to the land of bliss shortly after death when, upon entering hell's first court, they are judged to merit immediate release and salvation; and it is also possible that yet other souls may be granted admittance to heaven after a period of time in the underworld.

But the fact remains that much of the content of Chinese popular religion as a whole would be unintelligible if it were based on the assumption that the "Western Paradise" was the immediate or final destination of a substantial proportion of the departed "souls." Indeed, it is significant that there was little if anything in the context of popular ritual and belief which would give those who knew the deceased even an indication that he or she had attained paradise; rather, what was important was that the departed had three souls, as separately manifested in the three different contexts of underworld, grave, and ancestral tablet. These framed much of the cult of the dead, and I deal with each in turn in order to further consider the role played either by salvation/paradise or by its denial.

Salvation as a concern certainly loomed largest with respect to ideas concerning the underworld. As was noted above, there is the possibility that the dead will "pass over" from the courts of hell to the Western Paradise. Yet the popular view held that such an outcome was quite unlikely. Hsu, for example, describes the relevant situation as follows: "Most West Towners are not very explicit about what will happen to their dead, but all banners of condolence from relatives and friends convey the sentiment that the dead is on his or her way to Western Heaven. In fact, however, most informants

20. Doré, *Researches*, 6:112.

21. See J. J. M. de Groot, "Buddhist Masses for the Dead at Amoy," in *Actes du Sixième Congrès International des Orientalistes, tenu en 1883 à Leide, Quatrième Partie, Section 4, de L'extrême-orient* (Leiden: E. J. Brill , 1885), p. 101; Doré, *Researches*, 1: fig. 59.

agree that the majority of the spirits of the dead will have to go through some unpleasant things in the lower world of the spirits."[22]

While the underworld, as was noted above, was the most highly bureaucratized of the supernatural domains, it should be added that it also was most similar to the world of the living. For beyond the courts of hell there was a larger underworld region where resided those souls who either deserved no punishment or had been ransomed by the offerings of their kin. Maspero, basing his remarks on observations of funeral rituals in Kiangsu, notes how, among other paper items, a house is burnt for the benefit of the deceased, who "must live in the infernal plains where, with other souls, it makes up cities and towns around the palaces of the Yama Kings," such that "each one continues his earthly life: some are field workers, others merchants, others receive more or less important positions as infernal officials."[23] A fuller picture of this underworld is provided by Ahern, with respect to modern Taiwan. Her account confirms how the detailed construction of this realm as an image of society on earth provided a religious basis, not only for the living to continue to remember their dead kin, but also for ongoing interaction with them.[24]

Thus, rather than focusing on the salvation of the dead, Chinese funeral and postfuneral ritual was concerned first with aiding the deceased's passage through the underworld's ten courts and then with providing him or her in that very same underworld with as comfortable a material life as possible, until such time as the "soul" would be reincarnated. Because these two goals accounted for much of the death ritual concerning the underworld, this ritual reflected the basic assumption of salvation's nonoccurrence. There were other rituals, carried out by Buddhist clergy, which were aimed at helping the deceased to "pass over" to the Western Paradise; while some were linked to the funeral itself, others were performed periodically (i.e., on a person's death anniversary), thus reinforcing the belief that the dead remained in the underworld. Another reflection of this belief was the custom whereby paper money and paper clothes for those who had died

22. Francis L. K. Hsu, *Under the Ancestors' Shadow: Kinship, Personality, and Social Mobility in Village China*, revised and expanded edition (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 158. A nineteenth-century Western observer remarked that "the four hundred millions of China believe practically that the departed roam at large in a realm where devils and demons rule, and where they are as entirely dependent on the gifts of their friends as are the captives in a Chinese prison"; see C. F. Gordon Cumming, *Wanderings in China* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood, 1888), p. 217; also Maurice Freedman, "Ancestor Worship: Two Facets of the Chinese Case," in G. William Skinner, ed., *The Study of Chinese Society: Essays by Maurice Freedman* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), p. 296.

23. Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, p. 186.

24. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead*, pp. 220–224; see also DuBose, *Dragon, Image, and Demon*, p. 358, where the underworld is characterized as "China ploughed under."

earlier were included in the offerings made during the funerals of recently deceased kin.[25]

The dead in the underworld were not completely cut off from the living. They could be visited directly through trance or spirit mediums, and it is commonly reported that such communications were prompted by the belief that illness or other troubles among the living were due to the improper treatment of the dead, especially by their closer surviving kin.[26] The unhappy souls may have been wronged while still alive, or may not have been receiving the sustenance that they continued to desire or need after death. In any event, it is clear that popular belief had it that the relationship between the living and the dead was one of interaction. Because the rituals and beliefs concerning the underworld could in some contexts express fear, but in others the solicitude, warmth, and loss felt with respect to the dead by their living relatives, there was highlighted the incompatibility of this ritual complex with the idea of attained salvation.

Ancestors, in the underworld, are ghosts; in the tablets, however, they are "spirits," or *shen*, worshipped on the basis of a reciprocal relationship which both projects and continues ties that among the living are between senior and junior family members and agnates. While there has been disagreement among anthropologists as to whether the ancestors in the tablet, like the souls in the underworld, are essentially benign or can under certain circumstances cause harm to their descendants,[27] there certainly is no doubt that these ancestors need, expect, and demand worship. As *shen*, the ancestors are close by, and because they are seen to have needs and desires similar to those of the living, they certainly are not thought to be enjoying a blissful existence in the Western Heaven. Indeed, if they were held to be in paradise, the cult of the ancestors as popularly practiced would be seriously undermined.

As with those in the underworld and the ancestral tablet, the soul in the coffin and then in the grave provided a focus for interaction between the living and the dead. The siting of the grave importantly involved geomancy (*feng-shui*), such that proper placement was held to be beneficial to the descendants of the deceased, whereas a bad location could bring harm, and there have been differences among anthropological observers regarding the extent to which the dead in their graves were merely the passive objects of sometimes competitive manipulation by the living for the latter's own gain, or in fact were able to actively express pleasure or dissatisfaction regarding

25. De Groot, "Buddhist Masses," p. 34; see also Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead*, p. 227, and Doolittle, *Social Life*, 1:193.

26. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead*, pp. 201–202; Jack Potter, "Cantonese Shamanism," in Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, pp. 207–232.

27. See the summary of this argument in Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," pp. 163–168.

the conditions of their interment.[28] For my present purposes, however, it is more important to note how there is general agreement that the dead had to be properly encoffined; because of practices such as reinterment in southeastern China and delayed burial in the north, there would be variations with respect to the point at which the soul would be settled. In any event, the effort by the living was to control this soul; its salvation was hardly a major concern. That the coffin/grave soul had to be fixed is demonstrated by the reported belief that prior to this the dead were most dangerous to the living.[29] Another interesting confirmation is provided by a description of how in Shantung the soul is placed in the grave even in the absence of the body. According to Johnston, "calling the soul back" involves the burial of an effigy of the deceased; also, as in standard ritual, the spirit of the dead person is entered into the ancestral tablet: "The soul, or rather the combination of souls, has been saved from homelessness, and will in future assume its proper position as an ancestral ghost both in the family graveyard and in the ancestral temple."[30]

Although Johnston does not refer in this context to the soul in the underworld, it is clear from the evidence which confirms the Chinese belief in three souls that through burial and subsequent rituals the Chinese both defined these souls and attended to them by carrying out the proper funeral and postfuneral rites regarding burial, the "dotting" of the ancestral tablet, and the escort of the third soul to the underworld; the Chinese belief, I suggest, was that not all the dead had three souls—only those who were properly buried. As for the rest, they were precisely the ghosts whose presence loomed so importantly, and sometimes so dangerously, in the world of the living.

My hypothesis that ghosts had only one soul might seem to conflict with Wolf's observation that because ghosts were in many ways equivalent to strangers, the spirit which for one person was a ghost could for another be an ancestor. However, Wolf notes that such ghosts are not dangerous,[31] and the same point is made by Harrell: "Most spirits who are ghosts to one person are ancestors to someone else, and as such are relatively neutral and unimportant in the lives of anyone but their own descendants."[32] Although one of the spirits taken to be a ghost by someone who was not a relative is

28. See Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead*, pp. 175–190, and Rubie Watson, chapter 9 in this volume.

29. See James L. Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones: The Management of Death Pollution in Cantonese Society," in Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, eds., *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

30. R. F. Johnston, *Lion and Dragon in Northern China* (London: John Murray, 1910), p. 282.

31. Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," p. 172.

32. Ibid, p. 193.

described by Wolf as that of "a woman on her way to her son's house to receive deathday offerings made in her honor,"[33] it might be stretching the internal and regional consistency of Chinese popular religious beliefs a bit too far to suggest that such relatively harmless ghosts were generally the "third souls" of cared-for dead which for one reason or another had temporarily returned from the underworld. Nevertheless, I do think that Chinese belief did make a basic distinction between the malevolent ghosts, who had "trapped, uncontrolled souls,"[34] and those spirits—comforted by the support of their descendants—who had three.

Rather than attempt to summarize the large literature on the connection between ghosts and bad death or bad burial I will here merely note some of the more commonly reported contexts whereby the lack of proper attention to the dead is linked both to the appearance of ghosts and to the absence of a full definition of the three souls. Those who in life had married virilocally, produced male offspring, bequeathed to them property of some economic significance, and died at a reasonably advanced age certainly were in the best position to receive proper ritual attention after death;[35] but even the dead thus situated could make their displeasure known if their descendants did not provide the expected worship. There were also persons whose deaths occurred under less than favorable circumstances but who nevertheless left kin behind; those who had died away from home, violently, prior to marriage, or without male descendants could return to torment or even cause harm to their living relatives. Thus the assignment of a male agnate to serve as the "adopted" heir of someone who died childless was common enough, while "ghost marriages" might comfort those male and female spirits who had died as children. Such procedures, it should be noted, often led, finally, to the proper placement of the souls of the unhappy dead in ancestral tablets or in the grave.[36]

Prominent among the ghosts without living kin to attend to their graves or tablets were the mass of the anonymous dead in the underworld. These were the beggar-ghosts; because they had long been forgotten by the living, they too were incomplete and required sustenance, and each year they were released from hell to roam about on the earth during the seventh lunar month, when there would be rituals of propitiation.[37] Spirits who remained

33. Ibid, p. 172.

34. Stephan Feuchtwang, "Domestic and Communal Worship in Taiwan," in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, p. 125.

35. Martin, in chapter 7 in this volume, notes that even under such circumstances women did not fare as well as men.

36. See, i.e., Johnston, *Lion and Dragon*, pp. 204–205.

37. Gordon Cumming, *Wanderings*, pp. 218–220; John Henry Grey, *China: A History of the Laws, Manners, and Customs of the People* (London: Macmillan, 1878), 1:261–263, are among the many accounts.

among the living for longer periods included those who at the time of their deaths had been socially isolated; they became the "hungry ghosts" without descendants to worship them, and without ancestral tablets for their souls. Also threatening the living were the fearsome and malicious *li-kuei*, who had died by drowning or through suicide, circumstances under which death not only was violent but often resulted in the loss of the body itself; for such demons, even access to hell was denied. Perhaps the most extreme contrast with the properly dead and their three souls is represented by terrifying creatures such as the zombie-like *chiang-shih*[38] or the *han-pa* drought-demon.[39] What caused these creatures to be among the most dangerous of monsters was the absence of any differentiation whatsoever between the corpse and its souls.

Those monsters who were denied entry to hell somehow had to be destroyed or at least avoided at all costs. The more approachable of these incomplete spirits received ritual attention through the *p'u-tu* or rites for universal salvation and other ceremonies, during which both the "feeding of the ghosts" and their hoped-for salvation in Western Paradise were given prominent emphasis. Yet the ghosts were hungry precisely because they did not have three souls; their need for both food and salvation highlighted the fundamental incompatibility of salvationist religion with one largely based on the continuing interaction of the living with the dead. Yet this incompatibility was itself given emphasis by popular religion, precisely because this religion recognized the idea of salvation—and perhaps even highlighted it as an ideal if not as a hope—at the same time that it was organized on the basis of its nonoccurrence.

In describing the hierarchy of gods in West Town, Hsu notes that his informants distinguish between the "'Higher World of Spirits,' and the 'Western World of Happiness,' also referred to as 'Supreme Heaven' and 'Western Heaven' respectively."[40] While the "Higher World of the Spirits," ruled by the Jade Emperor, "shows more signs of being an administrative machinery, the [Western Heaven] is more like paradise pure and simple."[41] Yet, of course, both in West Town and elsewhere in China it was from the "Higher World of the Spirits" that most gods of popular religion were drawn; these gods were objects of worship in their own right, and as was noted above, they were linked to the deities of earth and the underworld in a unitary bureaucratized framework.

The essentially human qualities of the gods have been remarked on often

38. On the *chiang-shih*, see J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religion of the Chinese* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), p. 76; Nevius, *China and the Chinese*, p. 166.

39. For *han-pa*, see Johnston, *Lion and Dragon*, pp. 295–297.

40. Hsu, *Under the Ancestors' Shadow*, p. 139.

41. Ibid., p. 141.

enough. In their behavior they are said to resemble and reflect the characteristics of government officials among the living and are therefore to be distinguished from ancestors, who are as living kinsmen.[42] Most of the gods of Chinese popular religion had originally been human beings, either reincarnated from the underworld to godhood or more directly transformed on the earth from *kuei* to *shen*. Although a god commonly was referred to as a *p'u-sa* (from *p'u-t'i-sa-t'o*), this appellation cannot be taken too literally. The gods of the popular pantheon were not bodhisattvas—their mission was not to lead mortals to salvation, but rather to protect and regulate society, of which they the gods were in fact a part.[43] On the other hand, although paradise provided the salvationist ideal, it contributed relatively little to the total content of popular religious practices.

Ideas concerning reincarnation generally tend to be mentioned en passant, at least in the anthropological analyses of Chinese popular religion. Nevertheless, reincarnation was important,[44] such that in the beliefs of late traditional popular religion there was either continuity with or at least resemblance to the attitudes of those early Chinese Buddhists who "felt obviously less fervent about *ending* the cycle of rebirths than they did about the idea of *rebirth itself*."[45] The procedure was the responsibility of the tenth (and last) yamen-court of hell, and an important goal of much religious ritual was to provide the dead with as favorable a rebirth as possible, a concern obviously reflecting a de-emphasis of Western Paradise.

Popular ideas concerning reincarnation differed in at least two important ways from those otherwise relating to gods, ghosts, and ancestors. First, reincarnation did not directly project onto the dead the current social relationships among the living; and because its outcome was uncertain, neither did it represent the continuation of those social relationships that had existed prior to a person's death; rather, as Freedman has pointed out, the dead underwent rebirth when they had ceased to be remembered by those who were still alive.[46] There was thus little or no tension between beliefs in reincarnation and the religiously important links between the living and the dead.

From the point of view of the individual, transmigration could have different results, which as far as popular religion is concerned seem largely to have involved bad rebirth as a demon in the underworld or as an animal; or

42. See Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*; Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors."

43. See, i.e., Baity, "The Ranking of the Gods," p. 75; Stevan Harrell, "When a Ghost Becomes a God," in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*; Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, p. 85.

44. Johnston, *Lion and Dragon*, pp. 403–404; DuBose, *Dragon, Image, and Demon*, p. 314; and others; the sources abound with at least references to the subject.

45. Wolfgang Bauer, *China and the Search for Happiness*, trans. Michael Shaw (New York: Seabury, 1976), p. 439, n.50, emphasis in original.

46. Freedman, "Ancestor Worship," p. 278.

rebirth as a human being, an eventuality which could be of varying desirability, depending on the social position assumed in the next life; finally, and most desirable, there could be rebirth as a god.[47] Because an important focus of funeral ritual was to secure for the deceased a good rebirth, there was provided within popular religious belief a positive alternative to the salvationistic ideal. That good rebirth might indeed take pride of place is noted by one observer:

> The Buddhists have a western heaven presided over by Amitabha. . . . There many become Buddhas and are free from sin, sorrow, and suffering. They may also escape transmigration. This appeals to some very devout Buddhists, but not to the Chinese people in general. They want to enjoy the present life or to accumulate merit so as to enjoy a happy and fortunate existence after rebirth. The Chinese . . . prefer life in this world.[48]

Like so much else in popular religion, it is to be expected that beliefs concerning reincarnation would show much variation, by region, class, and gender, or even between individuals.[49] Nevertheless, if these beliefs expressed uncertainty regarding the afterlife, they also had an important affirmative aspect: reincarnation was required for conception, which is the reunion of reincarnated *hun* with the physical *p'o*.[50] Because all living creatures, as well as many of the gods, were believed to have been reincarnated, rebirth was required for the maintenance of the cosmos itself.

Thus it is not surprising that various rites connected with "cosmic renewal" should in fact emphasize the incompatibility of this process with total salvation. For example, this can be seen in the ritual for "universal salvation" (*p'u-tu*), which can be performed independently by either Buddhist or Taoist priests, or by the latter as part of the larger *chiao* ritual, which achieves "cosmic renewal" by maintaining or restoring the proper balance between the forces of *yang* and *yin*.[51] It is true that at the conclusion of the *p'u-tu* some of the "souls" released from hell will be sent to heaven; however, the demon-controller "Ta-shih Yeh" "will first accompany those souls who must go back to the torments of hell," and while he "is leaving, the high priest pulls the silk curtain tightly closed in front of him so that the evil yin influences from those vengeful souls sent back

47. Maspero, *Taoism and Chinese Religion*, pp. 86–87; Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors*, pp. 35–36.

48. David Crockett Graham, *Folk Religion in Southwest China* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Press, 1961), p. 184.

49. Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors*, pp. 35–36.

50. Doré, *Researches*, 1:137; Lowe, *The Adventures of Wu*, 1:59–60; Marjorie Topley, "Cosmic Antagonisms: A Mother-Child Syndrome," in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*.

51. Feuchtwang, "Domestic and Communal Worship"; Kristofer M. Schipper, "The Written Memorial in Taoist Ceremonies," in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*.

to the torments of hell will not cause damage."[52] It is important to add that the dead continue to play a role in "cosmic renewal," not only in the context of community-sponsored ritual, but also during their own funeral ceremonies. This, in fact, is the point of James Watson's article dealing with Cantonese death rites. He notes how his informants believe that a spirit newly released by death is powerful, unpredictable, and disrupts "the natural order of the cosmos . . . and then gradually settles. There is thus a shift . . . to total dependence on the part of the spirit by the time final entombment takes place, years after death."[53] More generally, the funeral rites aim at restoring a proper relation between *yin* and *yang* forces through the absorption by the appropriate persons (as defined by social relationships) of death pollution. Although the deceased do finally enter "the realm of the ancestors,"[54] their true fate is best revealed by Watson's remark that "the world order and the social structure of the living have meaning only through the manipulation and preservation of the dead."[55]

Indeed, a major focus of anthropological scholarship has been to show that within the larger supernatural cosmos there also was the projection or representation of critical relationships among the living: gods, ghosts, and ancestors tell us about government, community, kinsmen, friends, and strangers. Popular religion was able to provide a "national" context, as it were, within which some of the most intimate local social concerns might find expression.[56] However, the cosmos of popular religion clearly comprised more than beliefs involving projections from the living to the dead, and included the operation of impersonal forces connected with geomancy or horoscopic prognostications. In the final analysis, there was in popular religion an orientation toward a total cosmic construction within which the positions of both the living and the dead were highlighted precisely because the social circumstances of the former were paralleled by those of the latter, and also, more important, because the arrangements for both were conceived as involved in a yet larger integrated system of relationships, one whose various parts were mutually interdependent.[57]

If salvation was not a major concern of popular religion, it was hardly

52. Duane Pang, "The *P'u-Tu* Ritual," in Michael Saso and David W. Chappell, eds., *Buddhist and Taoist Studies* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1977), 1:116–117.

53. James L. Watson, "Of Flesh and Bones," p. 180.

54. Ibid., p. 179.

55. Ibid., p. 157.

56. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, pp. 136–137.

57. See ibid.; the linking within one supernatural domain of such impersonal forces together with the representation of imperial administration and local community, kinship, family, and even individual concerns is one basis for arguing that there is what may be called a Chinese religious system. See Maurice Freedman, "On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion," in Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*.

given greater emphasis in the religious institutions and rituals sponsored by the state.[58] This suggests that consideration of the relationship between the state and popular religon may shed further light on those ideas regarding death and the afterlife which were dominant in the general population. The state itself defined as "heretical" the beliefs of certain sects that were salvation-oriented (see below); but the religious attitudes of the majority of the people were sufficiently conditioned by the state and its ideology to warrant my use of the term "popular orthodoxy."

In the first place, there are sociological grounds for linking the state's degree-holding elite and the majority of commoners within one orthodox sphere: insofar as degree-holders and others with elite status were members of local communities, they in fact were intimately involved in the religious life and temple affairs of towns and villages, and at the same time they at least symbolized the presence and operation of the imperial system.[59] Also, the state cult and the dominant form of popular religion can be placed together within the realm of orthodoxy on the basis of institutional links: for example, if a major component of the state cult was religion (or ritual) by the elite for the elite as centered especially in the Confucian temples (*wen-miao*), another important element was based in the temples of the city god, who saw to the passage of the dead to the underworld and was of major significance for the religious beliefs of the masses; again, community-based temples might have their chief deities honored or incorporated into the imperial pantheon. In addition, the state gave at least indirect support to belief in good rebirth as preferable to salvation; rebirth as a god could be facilitated for those winning the state's approval, such that a "remarkable personage, whether he be eminent for bravery, virtue, public charity, or any other notable characteristic, may be honoured after death by deification at the hands of the Imperial Court; whereby the State rewards a distinguished public servant or private benefactor."[60] Although such activities by the state and its bureaucratic and degree-holding elites were but aspects of their much larger direct manipulation and involvement with popular religion,[61] the projection of imperial government organization onto the supernatural world is of itself telling evidence of the state's direct and indirect impact on

58. For a discussion of the state cult, see Feuchtwang, "School Temple and City God" (n. 15 above).

59. On "gentry" control of local temples, see Kung-chuan Hsiao, *Rural China, Imperial Control in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960), pp. 234, 280; it is to be expected that lower degree-holders would be more directly and consistently involved in matters pertaining to popular religion than would literati of the highest ranks.

60. See Alfred C. Lyall, *Asiatic Studies: Religious and Social*, second series (London: John Murray, 1899), pp. 121ff; Feuchtwang, "School Temple and City God," pp. 606–607.

61. See, i.e., Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*; James L. Watson, "Standardizing the Gods" (n. 18 above), deals with the incorporation of T'ien Hou into the state pantheon.

common religious beliefs. As Wolf has suggested, if the gods were officials, the soul in the underworld was a "citizen of the empire."[62]

However, a consideration of ideas concerning salvation and the afterlife indicates some possibly even more fundamental elite-commoner linkages in late traditional China. If the "high Confucian" attitude toward the dead can be described as focusing on their impact on the living, both as their being exemplars and through rituals which stress that filiality cannot be interrupted by death, the dominant religion of the masses also insisted that the living continued to interact with the dead in the grave, the tablet, and also in the underworld, where they, the dead, affirmed the stability of society on earth by inhabiting a similarly structured supernatural realm. Furthermore, the idea of cosmic stability and continuity loomed large both in state Confucianism and in orthodox popular religion, and for the latter this was achieved by projecting state and society onto the supernatural, by seeing the masses of anonymous dead as essentially chaotic (*luan*) but nevertheless under the firm control of priests or supernatural officials, by believing that the familiar dead continued to reside in a more orderly and earth-like portion of the underworld, and finally by equating release from this underworld more with reincarnation or the assumption of godhood than with salvation. Obviously, there probably were vast differences of religious belief between an elite and high-ranking Confucian degree-holder at one extreme and an illiterate peasant at the other; however, between these two extremes, and within the orthodox religious sphere, it may not be easy to draw a sharp line between elite and commoner beliefs.[63]

That we can take as "popular orthodoxy" this religion of the masses—which incorporated ideas of paradise into its supernatural scheme of things but nevertheless was grounded on the nonoccurrence of salvation—receives further confirmation when it is briefly contrasted with some of the different or alternative popular religious traditions of the "sectarian" cults, where salvation indeed was the major focus.[64] The goal of many practices, such as

62. Wolf, "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors," p. 175; also see Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, pp. 50–51.

63. For example, de Groot's massive compendium of Chinese religious beliefs and practices was based, he says, on his observations of "well-to-do classes and families of fashionable standing"; see de Groot, *The Religious System*, 1:1–2; also see Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, pp. 276–277.

64. See Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion: Dissenting Sects in Late Traditional China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 156–157; Stevan Harrell and Elizabeth J. Perry, "Syncretic Sects in Chinese Society: An Introduction," *Modern China* 8 (1982): 288–289; Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). Insofar as themes from orthodox Buddhism influenced the sectarian groups, a distinction can be drawn between the Pure Land tradition with its emphasis on the Amitabha Buddha and salvation in Western Paradise, and that which

recitation of the name of the Amitabha Buddha or vegetarianism, was to insure immediate passage at death from earth to paradise: belief was in direct salvation unencumbered by the obligations or threats posed by continuing interaction with the living, by the underworld's bureaucracy, or by reincarnation. An example of such beliefs can be seen from the reaction of one member of a Peking vegetarian sect to his wife's death as a result of a fire in their home; although according to the ideas of the dominant popular religion she might very well be expected to reappear as a ghost, he described her death as follows: "She died gloriously! She's already in attendance by the side of the Eternal Mother (*lao-mu*)."[65] The linking of immediate salvation to an explicit rejection of popular orthodoxy's underworld seems evident in the case of the Lung-hua sect in Amoy, for whose members death is "a most joyful event"; unlike the funeral customs of believers in the dominant religion, among sect members there is no wailing, inscriptions on red paper are not covered with white, nor is paper money burnt.[66] In modern Taiwan, ritual differentiation from the practices of orthodox popular religion characterizes the "Seek the Way Association," a group viewed as peculiar if not fearful by nonmembers; likewise distinguishing the Association is its salvationistic aim: "The ultimate goal is to [*ch'iu tao*] (receive the way), at which point the soul attains direct permanent admittance to heaven; there is no further rebirth."[67]

While the description of popular beliefs and practices must be ethnographic, a concern of much of the literature on Chinese religion has been to relate the ordinary person's religious behavior to the textual traditions and to the ideas and rituals of those who were able to write such texts or at least to read them. Although obviously necessary for understanding the interconnections and contrasts between the elite and popular domains of religious orthodoxy in traditional China, consideration of the relationship between texts and beliefs is also important with respect to the "heterodox" sects; the trend—out of necessity—has been to rely largely on the sectarian literature,

focused on the Maitreya, or Future Buddha, who will descend to the human realm; during late imperial times, the orientation of certain sects was toward individual salvation in the Pure Land after death, while others held that the arrival on this earth of the Maitreya Buddha signaled both the imminent destruction of the universe and the salvation in a restructured world of all believers.

65. Li Shih-yü 李世瑜, *Hsien-tsai Hua-pei mi-mi tsung-chiao* 現在華北秘密宗教 [Secret religions in contemporary north China] (Chengtu, 1948), p. 136; the Eternal Mother, or Unbegotten Eternal Mother, is an important divinity in some sectarian traditions; see Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion*, pp. 9–10.

66. J. J. M. de Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China: A Page in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1903), 1:233.

67. Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics*, p. 70.

from which important syntheses have been made concerning "heterodox" beliefs.[68]

The contents of some of the sectarian documents do reveal striking contrasts with orthodoxy, and on the basis of their simpler literary style and the emphasis on congregationalism and sutra recitation, it seems clear that for many sects within the "heterodox" domain there was indeed a close connection between text and practice, while for others that were more loosely organized the focus was on meditational activities based upon strong teacher-disciple ties.[69] Maintaining themselves through a variety of special organizational means, these sects had rituals and beliefs which in comparison with those of the dominant popular religion were not nearly as "diffuse" nor as "institutionalized" within culture and society as a whole.[70] Thus the preservation of the sects could not be assured by the social and cultural representation and reproduction which maintained the dominant religious beliefs and practices; and neither was "heterodoxy"—at least with respect to its most "heterodox" elements[71]—directly reflective or projectionistic of society at large. Overmyer in fact suggests that a strong desire for permanent institutionalization in territory under their own control was one of the factors which could encourage sectarians to rebel, a factor which

68. See Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion*; Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion*; Marjorie Topley, "The Great Way of Former Heaven: A Group of Chinese Secret Religious Sects," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 26 (1963): 362–392; an additional textual source has been the official transcripts of the interrogation of captured sectarians, as in Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion*.

69. See Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion*. More recently, Naquin has underscored the important difference within the White Lotus tradition between "sutra-recitation sects," which were dependent upon texts and relatively formal organization, and the "meditational sects," which were more diffusely organized and had as their organizational focus the teacher-pupil tie; see her "The Transmission of White Lotus Sectarianism in Late Imperial China," in Johnson et al., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*.

70. See Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, p. 20, on "diffuse" and "institutionalized" religion.

71. For example, among elements in the White Lotus religion were beliefs such as in Maitreya messianism, which substituted the legitimacy of a divine Buddha-savior for the orthodox doctrine of a human emperor who was the Son of Heaven by dint of having received its Mandate; the Unbegotten Eternal Mother grieved for her children (humanity) who needed salvation, a pessimistic judgment as to the condition of the world, which rejected the state Confucian perspective that humans through proper behavior would be in accord with the natural order of the cosmos, which was moral and basically good; the end of a kalpa (era), which would bring universal destruction, likewise denied the state's emphasis on cosmic continuity and orthodox popular religion's focus on cosmic renewal; the view that acceptance of sectarian doctrine would lead to a person's salvation, either in Western Paradise or on earth as a survivor of a forthcoming universal destruction, resulted in a differentiation of believers from nonbelievers or of the saved from the doomed which could cut across the ties and social relationships of kinship and community emphasized by both popular and elite orthodoxy. For description and analysis of these and other White Lotus beliefs, see Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion*, pp. 7–54.

sometimes operated independently of the more obvious provocation presented by government efforts at suppression, or by severe economic pressures and dislocations.[72]

Nevertheless, Overmyer also points out that the sectarian tradition as such cannot be understood merely with reference to the uprisings that did involve some sects at certain times; although beliefs regarding the arrival of the Maitreya Buddha-messiah and the onset of a new "era" (kalpa) might set the stage for an uprising, sectarians were not necessarily rebellious; and when there was rebellion, the original group of sectarian believers might be joined by others for a variety of reasons not linked to religious concerns. Rebellion aside, sects were attractive because to some they offered a generally more satisfying religious life, including the hope for salvation.[73] But if concern with the sectarian salvationistic tradition as an enduring feature of Chinese life is an important complement to an earlier focus on sects as fomenters of rebellion, there is then the question of the social and religious relationships between sectarians and the rest of the population.

Having beliefs and practices which differentiated them from the population at large, the sects commonly recruited members "on an individual, rather than a community basis," and were especially attractive to "less rooted segments of the population,"[74] who for one reason or another were not fully involved in the "natural" network of social relationships based on family, kinship, and community and who therefore had to construct their own social arrangements. Precisely because orthodox popular religion reinforced the "naturalness" or, indeed, the inevitability of customary social patterns among the living by projecting them onto the supernatural as well, such popular religion might have diminished appeal to socially marginal groups such as Grand Canal boatmen[75] or the residents of all-female vegetarian homes.[76] Likewise, because orthodox popular religion stressed the fact that both the living and the dead continued, albeit in somewhat different ways, to be rooted in society, groups who had to create their own alternative social relationships need not have been constrained in their desire for salvation by the limits placed on such a goal by orthodoxy. The

72. See Daniel L. Overmyer, "Alternatives: Popular Religious Sects in Chinese Society," *Modern China* 7 (1981): 187; but for major sectarian rebellions, see Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion*, and her *Shantung Rebellion: The Wang Lun Uprising of 1774* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

73. See Overmyer, "Alternatives," pp. 155–169, where additional attractions offered by sectarianism are discussed.

74. Harrell and Perry, "Syncretic Sects," p. 299; Naquin, "Transmission of White Lotus Sectarianism," p. 257.

75. See David E. Kelley, "Temples and Tribute Fleets: The Luo Sect and Boatmen's Associations in the Eighteenth Century," *Modern China* 8 (1982): 337–360.

76. See Topley, "The Great Way of Former Heaven."

sectarian message of salvation was quite attractive in comparison with what orthodox popular religion had to offer, according to Overmyer: "At best, general popular religion provided ethical and religious means for a relatively easy passage through purgatory, followed by a good rebirth on earth, or, for a few, as a deity."[77] This observation, in a sense written from a sectarian point of view, echoes de Groot's earlier and very forceful expressions of sympathy, admiration, and favoritism toward these sects, and his view of their subordinate position in society largely as being the result of centuries of persecution by the imperial government and the Confucian elite.[78]

Many observers and analysts of orthodox popular religion would react, I suspect, with considerable skepticism to the suggestion that belief in the supernatural system in which the gods and the dead figured so importantly was purely a negative consequence resulting from government oppression of far more attractive salvation-oriented groups. There was, rather, an impressive interpenetration of elite and popular religious orthodoxy, and it is in this context that the ambiguous attitudes and beliefs regarding the afterlife can be considered. There can be no doubt that the belief in multiple souls was linked to the priority given social role over individual salvation; both Confucianism and orthodox popular religion firmly linked society to the cosmos, and both would appear to have stressed that full personal fulfillment was to be found through culturally defined proper living as a social being. However, a contrast between state Confucianism and popular orthodoxy would of course reveal the richly emotional and expressive quality of the latter, as well as the strong emphasis it placed on supernatural beings and forces. A most important contrast was with respect to the idea of salvation, which was indeed represented in the religion of the masses and yet had to be denied as a universal possibility precisely because it would otherwise undermine the larger structure of religious beliefs. At the same time, the very presence of the salvationistic ideal, even if in rudimentary form, serves as a reminder that even in the beliefs of the majority there was at least the germ of a critique of the state and the social-religious order that gave it support. This idea of salvation was a potential link between orthodox popular religion and sectarianism; although it hardly is to be expected that many or even most Chinese had any contact whatsoever with sectarians or their beliefs, the presence in the dominant popular religion of salvationistic elements presumably could facilitate acceptance of "heterodoxy" when circumstances introduced it.[79]

77. Overmyer, "Alternatives," p. 157.

78. See J. J. M. de Groot, *Sectarianism*; also his *The Religion of the Chinese.*

79. I am not suggesting that at the popular level these salvationistic beliefs provided the only framework for expressing rejection of the status quo. Popularly held ideas concerning imperial legitimacy—represented in the "secret society" tradition in terms such as Ming restorationism, for example—could be obviously subversive as far as the state was concerned.

In most contexts, however, the preservation of the idea of salvation pure and simple within the larger and indeed contradictory framework of mass religion most likely represented a continuing differentiation between personal considerations of one's own fate and the satisfactions provided by one's role in society, which might range from elementary and relatively predictable security to a degree of material comfort, power, and a heightened sense of self-esteem.[80] While I think it is safe to say that for many in China concerns regarding the afterlife loomed larger with advancing age, these had to remain intensely personal feelings and be given highly individualized religious expression, including efforts to accumulate merit for the next life.[81] Individuals could have recourse to temples in the community, to others that were nearby, or to more distant ones through participation in pilgrimages. The Buddhist church as such was largely kept outside of society; its clergy had no important connections with the great majority of temples and played only a relatively small role within popular religion as a whole, even though it in fact helped to maintain the idea and possibility of salvation. Yet, precisely because Western Paradise and a good rebirth on earth (or as a god) could be alternative desirable outcomes in terms of an individual's hopes concerning the afterlife, the potentially powerful social and political criticism or rejectionism implied by a focus on Western Paradise becomes all the more apparent. Thus official support of deification is in stark contrast to the heretical focus on paradise in the West or on the earth itself.

If, by and large, the Chinese state was hostile to salvationistic heterodoxy, it is perhaps a tribute to state power and influence that such beliefs also were subversive of the dominant form of popular religion. In this popular orthodoxy those who when alive were rooted members of families and communities continued after death to be remembered and to interact with and receive sustenance from the kin they had left behind; they each had three souls only because they were worshipped by their living kin as ancestors in the tablet and in the grave and supported by them in the underworld. It is ironic, therefore, that those considered in death to have three souls were those who when alive had attained social fulfillment according to the dominant cultural standards. And by these standards many of those attracted to

80. Although not dealt with in this essay, it is clear that such satisfactions in late traditional China would vary not only with respect to a person's social and economic standing but also by gender; women, even if they might have bound feet, were often observed to outnumber men in temples and in other religious contexts that involved seeking a better afterlife, and it is to be expected that this was tied to their markedly subordinate status in Chinese society. For the participation of women in religious activities, see e.g., Nevius, *China and the Chinese*, p. 103ff.; DuBose, *Dragon, Image, and Demon*, pp. 283ff.

81. This might include, for those able to afford them, various charitable acts; also vegetarianism and a variety of ritual procedures could be resorted to in an effort to accumulate merit for a better rebirth; see, for example, Doolittle, *Social Life*, 2:398–399.

sectarianism were not socially complete persons; for sectarians lacking community and kinship ties there might upon death be only one soul, and its involvement in the cosmos of the gods, ancestors, and ghosts was a prospect far less attractive than that offered by paradise. The rejectionistic attitude implied by this focus on salvation meant, for the state, that a sign of heterodoxy was when the three souls became one. And it is additional testimony to the triumph of state ideology and its deep penetration into the dominant popular religion that for believers in this popular orthodoxy the dead with only one soul were ghosts, some the most dangerous of all.

NINE

Remembering the Dead: Graves and Politics in Southeastern China

Rubie S. Watson

In his essay "A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death" Robert Hertz refers to death as a "sacrilege against the social order."[1] It is hardly surprising that, in the face of this "sacrilege," death rituals and grave rites become occasions for reaffirming ideas of regeneration and continuity. Death reminds us not only of our own mortality but also of the fragility of our social institutions and groups.

In this chapter I see mortuary rites as a series of actions that offer, as Bloch and Parry put it in their introduction to *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, not so much occasions for the assertion of already existing groups as opportunities for creating new groups.[2] In worshipping one's ancestors, in building tombs, and in participating in funerals individuals create, change, reaffirm, and deny social relations. The anthropologist Gilbert Lewis has argued that rituals are not simply intellectual puzzles. Rituals, he maintains, are also performed in order "to resolve, alter, or demonstrate a situation."[3]

Maurice Freedman expresses a commonly held view of Chinese ancestor worship: The worship of ancestors, he writes, "was essentially a means of group action in which the power and status structure of the community was given a ritual expression."[4] Ancestral ritual, according to this view, does

1. Robert Hertz, "A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death," in *Death and the Right Hand*, Robert Hertz (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1960 [1907]), p. 77.

2. Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, "Introduction," in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, ed. Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 6.

3. Gilbert Lewis, *Day of Shining Red: An Essay on Understanding Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 35.

4. Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China* (London: Athlone, 1958), p. 91.