

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On Occidentalism

When I started my M.A. at the National Taiwan University, it was very common, at least in the Department of Anthropology, to hear sentences like “because the author of this book is a Western anthropologist, thus he cannot fully understand the effective essence of Chinese culture.” A few semesters later, when I attended the class “Religion of Han People” I studied a lot of Western anthropologists who, in the words of my classmate, “were not able to catch the real essence of the Han people’s religion.” Helped by this kind of environment, I discovered for the first time in my life that Western people are indisputably Orientalists. And that I was undoubtedly one of them. This new enlightened condition (a Westerner who discovers that he is a Westerner) opened my eyes and caused me several problems. When I started to collect data for my fieldwork, one of the problems that I met concerned the meaning of the term “ritual” (*Yishi*, 儀式). I am persuaded that in Western views, terms such as ritual, rite, or ceremonies, are in some ways connected with Turner’s concept of *liminalitas*. The ritual is a process where the passage from individuals to collective and from collective to individuals are the crucial moments of the performance. This kind of process involves both temporal and social spheres of experience¹.

The idea of rites is thus linked with the concept of process, but – and this was my trouble – how could the Taiwanese people’s concept of rites be defined? The *Pudu* ceremonies (普渡) are certainly rites, but what of the practices performed every morning in front of the ancestors’ shrines? Are these considered by Taiwanese people as rites? Is it possible to define them as acts of worship? Similarly, every day quite a number of people put incense sticks outside of their main door, or in the kitchen, or burn paper

1. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Transaction Publishers, 1995).

money at least twice a month. Are these rituals? Are these felt as rites by Taiwanese people? Using my Western way of thinking and according to my own personal feeling, I would surely define them as rituals. But after my fieldwork, and – more importantly – after more than five years of living in Taipei, I started to remodel many of my definitions.

It all started when, during my fieldwork and full of ethnographic zeal, I prepared several clear, direct, and exhaustive questions for my Catholic informers. The first question was roughly formulated in this way: “Do you perform any rites in front of your ancestors’ shrine?” And the answer was invariable: “no, I don’t perform any particular rite.” But when I asked if they used incense sticks to pray for their ancestors the answer was: “yes, every morning I burn incense sticks in front of my ancestor’s shrine and I pray for them the rosary or other prayers.” Exactly the answer that I was waiting for to the first question!

Conscious that I am going to increase the number of pitiful anthropologists who studied the world of Han people without getting to the bottom of it, I nonetheless did my research in order to better understand the cultural contact between the Catholic religion (*tianzhujiao* 天主教) and the Taiwanese popular religion (*minjianzongjiao* 民間宗教). In order to fulfill this topic, I used as a case study the ancestors’ rites that symbolize one of the richest points of discussion between these two different cultural systems.

1.2 Otherness and Daily Life

There are several reasons that convinced me to address this topic. One of them could be summarized by the feeling of difference that I felt when I took part in a Sunday Mass in Taiwan for the first time. I was impressed by several rituals taking place during the liturgy, for instance, the burning of little sticks of incense as I saw doing in many temples (the mass was performed during the Chinese New Year), or by the bow made in front of the ancestors’ tables at the end of the Mass, or finally – might not be so shocking but still full of meaning – by the sharing the sign of peace, a unique rite inside the Mass liturgy. As is my custom, I reached out my hand to the man who sat next to me, but he bowed at me with a smiling face, leaving me astonished with my hand hanging in the air. These experiences stimulated several reflections upon the process of acculturation that the Catholic Church is still synthesizing in the Taiwanese contest.

Catholics in Taiwan live in a completely non-Catholic environment. Often only one member of the family is Catholic, while the rest still believe in practices of the Taiwan Popular religion². Most of the time, during the Chinese New Year (*chunjie* 春節) or during Tomb Sweeping Day (*qingmingjie* 清明節), Catholics join their parents and families in praying for their ances-

2. In my work, following the indication of Professor Philip Clart (2006), I will use the term Popular Religion instead of the term Folk Religion.

tors, and sometimes they go with them to the temple to burn incense and offer and food to the gods.

This topic gave me the opportunity to confront myself and my studies with people (the Taiwanese Catholics) who daily and naturally live inside two cultural systems; they are a type of bridge, a kind of free land where the encounter of two different symbolic systems takes shape. In the space created by this encounter, the ancestors' rites are the more evident symbol shared by these two cultures. In a certain sense, it is possible to say that I chose this topic, the ancestors' rites as performed inside the Catholic Church, not because of its particularity, but because of its normality. It is plain to all who work in the ethnological field that "Primitive Societies," as described by the works of last-century anthropologists, no longer exist. Nobody, and more importantly, no social group is an island. People and society are interconnected to each other. The emigration/immigration phenomena and the experience of globalization let people meet – and sometimes collide – in their daily life, with different cultures, with a sense of otherness, with "mestizo" (I am Italian, my wife is Korean, we live in Germany and we use Chinese to communicate). Otherness is, without doubt, our daily bread.

The particular situation of the Taiwanese Catholics gave me the opportunity to collect the experiences of people who naturally live inside two different – and in some cases conflicting – cultural systems. These cultural systems are created by centuries of history and have cohabited since the time of the arrival of Christianity in China. This encounter took on a different shape depending on the always-changing historical context in which it develops. Changes in the historical context bring changes in the characteristics which form this encounter. Within the framework of this encounter, the cult of ancestors occupied and still occupies one of the most important places.

1.3 On Ancestors

Ancestors are considered one of the most important points in Han (漢) culture. Traditionally, every family, every Chinese person must pray for his ancestors. This concept permeates the complex and deep Han culture, and it is very present in the everyday life of most Han people. In these pages, I will describe how Taiwanese Catholics honor their ancestors and how the rites that Taiwanese Catholic faithful perform at home or in the church, represent a link between the two cultural systems, the Han popular religion and the Catholic one. In many Taiwanese Catholic homes, it is quite common to find ancestors' altars in the living room, or at least, pictures representing familiar ancestors. During Chinese New Year, some Taiwanese Catholics burn incense and offer food and wine in front of their ancestor's tablets. Inside the churches, special ceremonies are performed in honor and

remembrance of the ancestors. These performances are considered to be the proper way of commemorating and honoring the dead.

Taiwanese Catholics, especially if newly converted, often wonder whether ancestors' veneration is compatible with the Catholic faith. It is a question with a history that has very deep roots, which dates back four centuries ago, to the beginnings of the time of Matteo Ricci (*Limadou* 利瑪竇)³.

In the course of history, these practices became the most controversial point inside the Chinese Catholic Church, raising a debate that protracted itself for centuries (See Chapter 3). Even today, although these rituals have been allowed by the ecclesiastical authorities, the dispute, in different ways, still continues. The cultural reverence for ancestors had a significant influence not only within the Catholic Church. Similarly, even though nowadays these practices are banned by most Protestant churches, these practices raised a long discussion inside the Christian Protestant Church⁴. Looking outside the Christian context, these practices and their cultural implications deeply influenced the religious symbols of the Buddhist tradition⁵.

Limiting the field to ethnographic research only, it is possible to see how the topic of ancestors has been widely discussed. Since Freedman⁶ and Francis Hsu⁷ anthropologists have continued to research and study the worship of ancestors among Han people. These studies have already described the phenomenon of ancestors' worship, and its relation with geomantic omens, lineage, kinship, family division, and so on. In Taiwan, research on this topic was performed by many distinguished anthropologists. I will only cite Ahern⁸, Wolf⁹, Feuchtwang¹⁰, Harrel¹¹, Li Yih-Yuan¹², Wang Song-hsing¹³. I have tried to examine this particular phenomenon – the encounter and co-

3. Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) was an Italian Jesuit priest and one of the founding figures of the Jesuit mission in China

4. James Thayer Addison, "Chinese Ancestor-Worship and Protestant Christianity," *The Journal of Religion* 5, no. 2 (1925): 140–149.

5. Stephen F. Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* (Princeton University Press, 1988); Chun-Fang Yu, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (Columbia University Press, 2001); Batairwa, "What Do You Do When Visiting a Temple," *Quaderni del Centro Studi Asiatico* 1, no. 1 (2006): 70–76.

6. Maurice Freedman, *Lineage organization in Southeastern China*, Monographs on social anthropology / London School of Economics, no. 18 (London: Athlone Press, 1958).

7. Francis Hsu, *Under the Ancestors' Shadow: Kinship, Personality, and Social Mobility in Village China* (Stanford University Press, 1967).

8. Emily M. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village* (Stanford University Press, 1973).

9. Wolf, "Gods, ghosts, and ancestors."

10. Stephan Feuchtwang, "Domestic and communal worship in Taiwan," in *Religion and ritual in Chinese society*, Arthur P. Wolf (Editor) (Stanford University Press., 1974), 105–129.

11. Stevan Harrell, "The ancestors at home: domestic worship in a land-poor Taiwanese village," in *Ancestors*, edited by William H. Newell (The Hague, 1976), 373–385.

12. Yih-yuan Li, "Chinese geomancy and ancestor worship: a further discussion," in *Ancestors*, edited by William H. Newell (De Gruyter Mouton, 1976), 329–338.

13. Sung-hsing Wang, "Ancestors proper and peripheral," in *Ancestors*, edited by William H. Newell (De Gruyter Mouton, 1976), 365–372.

habitation of two religions in Taiwan – as an encounter not only between two religions or between two cosmologies, but as an encounter between two cultures, between two complexes, and, in some ways antithetic cultural systems. It is my deep conviction that it is possible to approach and analyze the phenomenon of the ancestors' rites as performed by the Taiwanese Catholics, only by placing it within a larger contextual framework of history and culture. It is thus necessary to put the situation of the Catholic Church in Taiwan into a framework defined by the above-mentioned concepts: as a new symbolic system that merges into a preexisting one. To the old symbolic system are added – through the development of history – new symbols, which are translated and interpreted according to the cultural frames by which people orient and give meaning to their actions. This happens because, as stated by Geertz, symbols “are historically constructed, socially maintained, and individually applied”¹⁴. Each person, thus, uses the symbols that in a particular moment and situation will help her/him to solve the problems that emerge in everyday life.

From this point of view, it is possible to understand why, within the phenomenon of conversion, different tendencies are present: there are people who embrace the new faith and people who oppose it, among the faithful, there are very observant believers who attend constantly to the rites of the Church, while some others don't go to the Church and still participate in activities of the Taiwanese popular religion, such as temple festivals, and so on. This approach to understanding would be helpful because, among the Catholics, there are people who choose to keep their ancestors' related rituals, and people who decide to give up their ancestors' tablets.

1.4 Contact of Cultures

Geertz defines religion as a cultural system, “a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic”¹⁵. In his definition of religion, Geertz stressed the importance of religious symbols which according to him play a very important role in the everyday life of people, giving to everyone terms of judgment for the interpretation of life experiences, and for assigning moral, intellectual, and emotional value to these experiences. I totally agree with the extreme importance that Geertz assigned to the religious symbols, these symbols are powerful for they not only invoke deep moral sentiments concerning how the world should be but they also shape human

14. Clifford Geertz, “Time, Person and Conduct in Bali,” in *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 364.

15. Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90.

behavior and influence how human beings interpret reality. They provide a representation of the way things are and guide human activity. Religious symbol systems also formulate conceptions of general order in which they form a part of the worldview that shares unquestioned assumptions about the world and how it works. When co-religionists and devotees act together, they begin to accept the group's symbolic interpretations of the world as if they are real. People believe that they are participating meaningfully in an intelligible universe and this meaning is given through the religion's cosmology or philosophy¹⁶. Geertz's definition is not, then, an absolute definition of what religion is in all times and places but a context-determined one. With my research, I am trying to explain what happens when people find themselves and grow up within two different sets of religious symbols embodied inside different cultural systems.

I consider culture as a public symbolic system, where man, according to his own personal needs – economic, mystical, psychological, or physical needs – can arbitrarily choose the symbols which at a precise moment are more able to solve a particular trouble or to overcome a particular situation. Of course, this arbitrariness is always linked to practical and pragmatic contingencies and to the very often stringent necessities that every man must face during his life. In other words, when a person meets a problem or a new situation, he can choose, within the public system of symbols, the symbols which, according to him, will offer better help in that particular situation. Culture indeed is also this continuous change, rearrangement, (re)semantization of symbols, made by each person throughout these daily personal choices. The case of the believers of the Taiwanese Catholic Church shows how these people live inside two different symbolic systems, and how they arbitrarily use both symbolic systems in order to interpret the events that all of us could meet every day. In other words, these persons become the space, the *jian* 間¹⁷, where two cultures encounter one another and engage in dialogue. And the missionaries of the Catholic Church contribute to this dialogue. In order to translate their message and render it more understandable to Taiwanese people, they created new symbols or invested the old ones with new meanings (Chapter 5).

Within this book, the situation of the Catholic Church in Taiwan will be read as a symbolic system, the Catholic one, made and accommodated by (and at the same time maker of) centuries of history. When this symbolic system arrived in Taiwan, it encountered a pre-existing one, made and accommodated by centuries of a completely different history. Since I intend to stress the particular dialectical role of culture as a maker of/made

16. James Bishop, *Clifford Geertz – Religion as a “System of Symbols”*, February 2020, accessed March 9, 2022, <https://jamesbishopblog.com/2020/02/08/clifford-geertz-religion-as-a-system-of-symbols/>.

17. Like many Chinese characters, the character *jian* 間 expresses many meanings: between / among / space / interstice / separate. Here I use it in the meaning given to it by Nicolas Standaert (2002).

by history, in this work I will analyze in depth the complex history of this encounter. An encounter that is intrinsically dialectic, in which neither of the cultural systems can be considered dominant in absolute terms. When the Catholic Church arrived in Taiwan, it brought along centuries of discussions and disputes developed in Mainland China based on the deep contrasts between Jesuits and Dominicans. This long dispute is known also as the “Chinese Rites Controversy.” The core of this controversy, which started in the 17th century was whether the ceremonies honoring Confucius and the family ancestors should have been considered superstition and thus incompatible with the Christian faith. The Jesuits believed that they probably could be tolerated within certain limits; the Dominicans and Franciscans took the opposite view and carried the issue to Rome. This issue ended only in the 20th century and contributed to interpreting the rites and the religions linked to them (Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Popular Religion) as pagan practices spreading superstition and idolatry.

At the same time, from the perspective of Chinese people, this historical process developed on the conviction of the totally foreign nature of Christianity. It may be useful to remember that by 1721, Rome’s insistence that Chinese Catholics could not perform Confucian rituals led the emperor Kangxi to forbid Catholic teachings in the realm, though he later relented. Kangxi died in 1722, and the tensions continued under his son, the Yongzheng emperor, to whom non-institutional religions and heterodox religious groups were “alien” and accounted as *yangguizi* 洋鬼子, traditionally the foreign ghosts or devils, by the Han people¹⁸. This conception was reinforced by the hostile attitude of foreign countries toward the Chinese empire at the time of the Opium War. Therefore, since that time most Taiwanese people were already familiar with the negative interpretations of Christian symbols, and consequently, they considered the Dominican missionaries, who were the first missionaries to arrive on the island, as enemies and charlatans. This situation relegated the missionaries to the margins of Taiwanese society and strongly influenced the development of their evangelization process. Only after 1949, when many missionaries who were working in Mainland China moved to Taiwan, the Catholic Church was able to achieve a more central (and high) position within the fabric of Taiwanese society. Therefore, it is possible to find a very particular situation in Taiwan. A game played on the religious field where on the one hand we have a new cultural system that already provided interpretations of the dominant symbols of the local tradition as idols or heresy, and on the other hand, we have a local symbolic system that already approached the new in terms of barbaric consideration. As many people told me, a foreigner “ontologically” doesn’t understand the existing cultural etiquette 老外不懂禮貌.

18. Eugenio Menegon, “Yongzheng’s Conundrum. The Emperor on Christianity, Religions, and Heterodoxy,” in *Rooted in Hope: China – Religion – Christianity*, ed. Barbara Hoster, Dirk Kuhlmann, and Wesolowski Zbigniew (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2017), 311–335.

The complexity of this situation helped to develop a great number of local variations which define the peculiarity of the Taiwanese Catholic Church. In order to better understand this process, I analyzed the historical processes which, as I already mentioned above, started with the dispute about the Chinese rites at the time of Matteo Ricci, and continued in Taiwan. Especially after 1949, an important number of missionaries, expelled from Mainland China, arrived in Taiwan, creating the actual administrative and historical situation that is still present today on the island. From the material I am going to introduce in the next chapters, the reader will learn how this historical encounter produced many local and particular situations. In order to understand how this historical encounter influenced the local situations, but without missing Ariadne's thread of research in the labyrinth of phenomenology, it is necessary to define some stable theoretical guidelines.

1.4.1 Historical Contacts

This kind of historical meeting, or the encounter of two different cultures, has been studied by many anthropologists, but I found the work of Sahlins¹⁹ about the arrival of Captain Cook on the Hawaii Islands and the interpretation of this event made by the natives according to their own cultural structural schemes, more directly related to my study. Sahlins was the first anthropologist who started to consider the structure of the culture in order to understand a historical event. His analysis focuses on how the Hawaiians interpreted the arrival of Captain Cook using their cultural structures. According to Sahlins, Cook was considered a divinity – Lono – by the native people, and when the divinity created an existential crisis, with unexpected behavior, the Hawaiians determined that the divinity Cook should be killed, and sacrificed in order to preserve their cultural structures. In the final ritual inversion, which however reproduces the ultimate fate of Lono, Cook's body would be offered in sacrifice by the Hawaiian king. Cook was transformed from the initial position of the divine beneficiary of the sacrifice to the position of its victim²⁰. The point of Sahlins is that because of this encounter, the cultural schemes of the natives changed. Therefore, we can consider Sahlins' structuralist view of culture as dynamic, the structure can change because it encounters a new event. This is Sahlins' conception of history: an endless series of changes in cultural structures. However, the peculiarity of my topic led me to associate the presence of Christianity in Taiwan with the reflections that Georg Simmel made about the "stranger"²¹.

19. Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (University of Chicago Press, 1985); Marshall Sahlins, *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, For Example* (University of Chicago Press, October 1996).

20. Sahlins, *Islands of History*, 83.

21. Georg Simmel, "The Stranger," trans. Ramona Mosse, *The Baffler* 30, no. 30 (2016): 176–179.

A stranger is not a wanderer, who may come today and leave tomorrow. He comes today – and stays. He is a potential wanderer: although he has not moved on from society, he has not quite shed the freedom to stay or go, either. He remains within a specific place, but he has not always belonged to it, and so he carries into it qualities that do not, could not, belong there. The stranger is a paradox: he is here, close at hand, but his having recently been far away is also present to us.

In other words, my research wants to deal with the question: what happens after the first encounter? What happens when the stranger who came yesterday will stay also tomorrow? In order to answer these questions, I found it very useful to read the book “The Conquest of America”, by Todorov²². Todorov’s book also deals with a situation of cultural contact, but it addresses it from a different perspective. In order to further analyze the encounter between an “I” and the “other,” Todorov organized his work into four parts: Discovering, Conquest, Love, and Knowledge. By doing this, the Bulgarian scholar introduces us to the encounter between two different cultures, the Spaniard as representative of European civility and the Aztec one. From him, I borrowed the idea that this kind of encounter is in reality a process, and not a univocal and structural approach. This process involves in itself different ways to approach and relate the subject with the other. As we will see, Todorov tries to outline three moments or levels inside this encounter, levels which comprehend a first value of judgment on the basis of the subject’s own culture, followed by another level, the identification of the subject with the values of the other or the imposition of the subject own image upon him. Finally, the subject can recognize the identity of the other and in this way, he can better understand his own identity.

1.5 *Jian* 間: Where History and Culture meet

The ancestors’ rites in the Taiwanese Catholic Church must be considered as an encounter between two different cultural systems. I believe that this type of encounter between two different cultures cannot be considered other than a dialectical process. A process where the symbols are adapted by both the participants of this dialogue in order to try to interpret (Taiwanese) and communicate (missionaries) within the contingent events that everyday life brings with it. What the reader will learn in the next pages, is that cultures don’t meet or clash, people meet or clash. Cultures meet and interact only through the intercession of people, through the use of words (spoken or written), expressions (verbal or facial), gestures, and activities. Therefore, it seems to me important to consider the persons who have come into

22. Tzvetan Todorov, *The conquest of America: the question of the other* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

contact with the two religious traditions and who, very often, coexist with these traditions, as a space where these two cultures encounter each other's and start to interact creating a dialogue made of agreements, contrasts, compromises, and choices. By considering the person as a space (a *jian* 間, as suggested by Standaert²³), it is possible to understand how the encounter between these two cultures, which happened some centuries ago in China or some years ago in Taiwan, is still happening even today. Since this encounter was historical, it created a series of cultural interpretations (from both sides) that become immanent such as the concept of *doxa* described by Bourdieu²⁴, who uses the term *doxa* to denote a society's taken-for-granted, unquestioned truths. In other words, *doxa* is like a foundation of knowledge or beliefs. The historical encounter between the Catholic Church and the Taiwanese cultural context, thus, creates several *doxai* based on the negative interpretation and description of the other²⁵. These *doxai* are immanent to the context formed by the encounter of a person with the new faith. It follows that within the space formed by the person, the three levels proposed by Todorov (judgment, rapprochement, and identification) are not only a process: different levels can coexist at the same time. They are not set once and for all, but each person still refers to them as changeable and re-interpretable concepts. Throughout their (re)interpretations problems and practices are faced and different local contexts are built. The ancestors, and consequently the ancestors' rites, are symbols which, in different ways, are embodied in both cultural systems, the Han and the Catholic one. Both religious cosmologies share the concept that life will not end with the death of the body, but the soul will continue to live. The fundamental divergence is that the Han popular religion cosmology shared the belief that each person has three souls (*hun* 魂) and seven spirits (*po* 魄). This is a very old concept, that probably dates back to before the arrival of Buddhism in China²⁶, people believed that after death one soul remains with the body in the grave; one takes residence in the ancestors' tablet; and one goes to the other world, usually to a purgatory. On the contrary, Catholic doctrine is based on the belief that each person has only one soul, which after this world will go to heaven or hell, or maybe in purgatory²⁷. The Catholic soul does not continue to live in the same physical world as his descendants, and more importantly, the soul does not share their same physical needs.

23. Nicolas Standaert, "Contact between Cultures: The Case of Christianity in China (Some Methodological Issues)," in 輔仁大學第四屆漢學國際研討會「中國宗教研究：現況與展望」論文集, ed. Wesolowski Zbigniew (Taipei: Fujen University Press, 2002).

24. Pierre Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques: sur la theorie de l'action* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1994).

25. Marco Lazzarotti, *Place, Alterity and Narration in a Taiwanese Catholic Village, Asian Christianity in the Diaspora* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

26. Yu Ying-Shih 余英時, "中國古代死後世界觀的演變," in 中國思想傳統的現代詮釋, II (Taipei: 聯經出版事業公司, 1987).

27. Purgatory, from the Latin *purgatorium*, is, according to the belief of most Christian denominations (including the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches), an intermediate state after physical death for expiatory purification.

This is a big difference between the two religions regarding the conception of ancestors: Han people believe that their ancestors still share the same physical and bodily needs. If these needs are not satisfied, if nobody continues to take care of the ancestors' tablet, the ancestors would cease to be an ancestor and would become a ghost, causing in this way many troubles for the descendants. On the other hand, the deep bond between these rites and the Confucian concept of *xiao* 孝, the principle of filial piety, represents a valid reason to allow these rites inside the Catholic Church, today as five hundred years ago at the time of Matteo Ricci. The need for the Church to be open to Confucian principles has been explained by Erik Zurker with his definition of "Cultural Imperative". He considers this cultural imperative as belonging to the deep structure of Chinese religious life in late imperial China. In the case of Christianity in China, he noted how no marginal religion penetrating from the outside could expect to take root in China (at least at a high social level) unless it conformed to a pattern that in late imperial times was more clearly defined than ever. Confucianism represented what is *zheng* 正 (orthodox) in a religious, ritual, social, and political sense. In order not to be branded as *xie* 邪 (heterodox) and be treated as a subversive sect, a marginal religion had to prove that it was on the side of *zheng*. The authority of Confucianism, and its sheer mass and attractive power, were such that any religious system from outside was caught in its field, and was bound to gravitate towards that center²⁸.

1.6 God, Jesus, and the Ancestors

In order to get a complete vision of this phenomenon, I tried to extend my work to different fronts, therefore I divided my work into seven chapters.

In the first chapter, I present a broad analysis of the works of anthropologists and other scholars who worked on ancestors-related topics. This overview will help the reader to obtain an exhaustive and complete knowledge of the ancestors' rites, and also of the relationships that link the ancestors with their descendants. Also, I will introduce here the relationships between the Taiwanese Han people and their supernatural beings: gods, ancestors, and ghosts. Ancestors are deeply linked with the other-world conception of the cosmology of the Han popular religion, and these concepts are in some ways linked with the Confucian teaching about filial piety. These concepts influenced not only Catholicism but also other religions – Protestant Christianity and Buddhism – which came into contact with the Chinese world. The understanding of how these religions have addressed the phenomenon of the ancestors' rites will be a dedicated part of this chapter. This kind of research was necessary to me in order to better understand the interactions that mold the dialectic encounter between

28. Nicolas Standaert, "Matteo Ricci: Shaped by the Chinese," *China Heritage Quarterly* 23 (2010): 1–8.

religions. After this analysis, I will consider the above-mentioned works of Sahlins and Todorov, which will be my starting point in order to understand the encounter between the two different systems of symbols.

The second chapter is more oriented toward the understanding of the historical background. As I showed above, I believe that the encounter of these two cultural systems in Taiwan was deeply mediated by the historical background, a history that started in China where some cultural symbols were created – the Catholic concept of Idols and the Chinese concept of *yangguizi* for example – and directly exported to Taiwan, where, because of particular historical events – the supremacy of Dominican missionaries, the hostility of the population, the Japanese colonization and the Second World War with its political, historical and social consequences – these symbols were elaborated and developed in a particular, local way, that created the situation today.

In the third chapter, I introduced the location of my fieldwork, the Resurrection Church in Wanhua District. This chapter will present some historical data about the church and about the congregation to which it is entrusted (The CICM, *Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Marie* in Latin, Immaculate Heart of Mary, *shengmushengxinhui* 聖母聖心會 in Chinese) and it will introduce the interviews I have taken with the parish priest and the parishioners. Some of the experiences of conversion of the faithful will be also described here. Moreover, I will introduce my methodology of fieldwork, explaining how to attend the everyday Mass gave me the possibility to know, through talks with the parishioner after the Mass, a vast quantity of information about other believers who don't attend the daily or the Sunday Mass. Of course, this work was integrated with and informed by interviews with priests of other churches, bishops, theologians, and especially parishioners of other churches. Especially relevant are the materials I collected during the month of November. November is the month traditionally dedicated by the Catholic Church to the deceased. Therefore, I visited other churches in the month of November. In this way, I saw how they prepared the ancestor's altar and how this kind of rite was performed. This collected material helped me to get a more complete and holistic view of this phenomenon.

The fourth chapter is based principally on the study and on the comparison of religious symbols. To give the reader an opportunity to better understand the implications of converting to Christianity, I will present some conversion experiences that have been told to me by those directly involved. Descriptions of the rites for ancestors performed in Catholic churches will be introduced, and through identifying the differences between the adjustment of these practices made by the Church and their original version, I will try to emphasize the profound significance of these changes.

The fifth chapter will introduce some of the key concepts to better understand the complexity of the Chinese People's Religion. Such as the concepts of time and *ling*. Through these concepts, it will be possible for

me to describe the dialogical process that has formed – and at the same time shapes – the ancestor rites in the Taiwanese Catholic Church.

The sixth chapter focuses on the three categories in which most anthropologists agree on dividing the other-world entities of the Han popular religion: gods, ancestors, and ghosts. My study of these categories is addressed from the point of view of the Catholic faithful. According to my data, I tried to demonstrate that this structural division between these three categories is still real (also physically) for the Catholic people, and that consequently, these categories play a very important role inside the space (*jian* 間) represented by the individual.