

Chapter 6

Gods, Ghosts, and the Ancestors

6.1 Gods

It is almost impossible for Western people who come to Taipei not to be surprised by the impressive number of temples and representations of divinities that are present in this city. The divinities worshiped in these temples are generally historical characters who may have helped people in trouble, like Tudigong (土地公) or Mazu (媽祖). They can be mythological figures, such as the Jade Emperor, Yuhuangdadi (玉皇大帝), the first farmer (神農), or the God of War (關帝), etc. There are a considerable number of temples, and consequently, a significant number of deities that are able to answer the most particular needs of people. In addition to the more common temples like that of Tudigong, who is considered the guardian of the territory on which his temples are built, or Mazu called Queen of Heaven (*tianhou* 天后) or Queen of Heaven and Holy Mother (*tianshangshengmu* 天上聖母), there are many deities which can be prayed to. Before school examination, students usually pray to the God of Culture (*wenchan* 文昌) or Confucius (孔子). When a woman is pregnant, she would pray to the Goddess of Childbirth (註生娘娘), or refer herself to the Pond Point Madam, the goddess who controls the pool of blood, the dead, ghosts, and pregnancy. Farmers refer themselves to the God of Agriculture (*shennong* 神農), to Tudigong, and so on.

These temples are open to all people, without any distinction of sex, age, status, or nationality. It is important to observe, that temple worshipers cannot be considered parishioners in the Western sense. In fact, there are no records of temple worshipers, and more importantly, if the wishes or the prayers of the worshipers go unanswered, it is considered le-

gitimate for the worshiper to abandon the god or gods in question and to seek help from different ones¹.

Usually, religious ceremonies in folk temples are simple, pragmatic, personal, and in most cases conducted without the intervention of either a Taoist or a Buddhist priest. Especially in the big temples of Taipei city, like Longshan temple (龍山寺), Baoangong (保安宮), or Xintiangong (行天宮), people are used to worshipping the main gods as Guanyin (觀音) and Tiangong (天公), and then go to the god (or gods) of their choice. After praying silently, the worshiper may move on to the other gods of the temple and repeat this procedure². This kind of prayer can be considered a common practice for most Taiwanese people. It is not uncommon, inside the school, to meet students who want to go to worship (*wo yao qu baibai* 我要去拜拜) a particular divinity because of a coming examination, because of sentimental troubles with their loved one, and so on.

At this point, a question may be asked: if these deities are present in more than one temple, why do people prefer to go to Longshan temple even if it may be more distant from their home? To answer this, consider an additional element: the god or gods worshiped by people are always believed to have Ling (靈), therefore, to be efficacious and effective for the individual worshiper³. The success of temples such as the Baoangong or the Longshan temple is attributed to the proven Ling of their gods and goddesses. There is a sentence I heard several times: it is not important for a temple to be big, what matters is that the deity is Ling.

6.1.1 The Blessed Virgin Mary

In addition to the considerations above, a particular place in this discussion of Gods must be reserved for the Blessed Virgin Mary. Woman deities are already present in the rich Chinese pantheon. The more important and maybe the more worshiped is Guanyin. The most usual and popular representation of this Goddess is a beautiful and gracious woman, who holds a child in her arms and wears a rosary around her neck. This iconography has been reused in order to paint the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary; at the point where it is hard sometimes to distinguish between the two figures (Figures 3a and 3b). My point is not that Catholic people consider the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Christian reference of Guanyin, but I want to stress that, when honoring the “new” supernatural figure, Taiwanese Catholics still maintain the forms they learned through their involvement in popular religious practices from an early age, which are linked to the cultural system they inhabit.

1. David K. Jordan, *Gods, ghosts, and ancestors: the folk religion of a Taiwanese village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 103.

2. Eleanor B. Morris Wu, *From China to Taiwan. Historical, Anthropological, and Religious Perspectives* (Monumenta Serica Institute, 2004).

3. Jordan, *Gods, ghosts, and ancestors*, 103.

According to Lozada, the Virgin Mary, as a source of charismatic authority, has commanded more widespread devotion in different cultures than any other Roman Catholic saint has⁴. The blessed Virgin Mary, like Guanyin, serves as a bridge between the mundane needs and hopes of human beings and the strength and majesty of transcendental spiritual power. In his discussion about the Blessed Virgin Mary, Lozada particularly stresses how devotees have revered her largely through relics, shrines, and apparitions: because in her ascension to Heaven, the Blessed Virgin Mary left no body to venerate or location, like a tomb or a shrine where to venerate the place of her assumption. On the other hand, She appeared in many forms which vary locally. Indeed, the Blessed Virgin Mary is unique in both her universality and her particularity⁵.



(a) The Blessed Virgin Mary

(b) Guanyin

Figure 3: The Blessed Virgin Mary (a) and Guanyin (b), painted in traditional Chinese dress and holding a baby

According to Madsen Mary is primarily the one who helps us in our trials, defends us from our enemies, heals us when we are sick, and keeps us from sin. The eager acceptance of the reverence of Mary by Chinese Catholics was due at least partly to Mary's similarity to Buddhist Guanyin and to the Eternal Mother of Northern Chinese secret societies⁶.

4. Lozada, *God Aboveground*, 34.

5. Lozada, 34.

6. Madsen, *China's Catholics*, 88.

The Blessed Virgin Mary appeared in Taiwan, on the Shenmu Shanzhuang Mountain (聖母山莊) in the County of Yilan. Every year the parishioners of the Resurrection church go there for a pilgrimage. I am in full agreement with Madsen (1998:94) who argues that the apparitions of Mary are deeply connected with the general belief in miracles of Chinese people⁷.

Lozada further points out that the belief of Chinese Catholics in apparitions of Mary are closely connected to their general belief in miracles, a belief that defies all the education they received at school upon secular science. Catholics talk a lot about miracles.

In his work, Lozada argues that almost all the Catholics he asked said they had personally experienced miracles, and they often claimed that their faith was strong precisely because they had been blessed with such experiences. The most commonly cited miracles are humble acts of unexplained good fortune⁸, such as the miracles told to me by Mister Gao.

However, what I want to stress now is how the iconographic assimilation of the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary with Guanyin or with Mazu – also called Holy Mother (*shengmu* 聖母) – aligns with the assimilation of the symbolic behavior of believers toward these figures.

Such behavior implies a series of bows in front of the statue, and also the possibility to worship her by offering flowers instead of incense. A young man, who was the only one in his family to believe in God, told me that when he brought his mother to the church, the first thing that she mother did was to go in front of the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary and bow repeatedly, after which she told him that she was very surprised that Mazu was in churches. This last example could help us to understand how the Chinese iconography of the Blessed Virgin Mary is interpreted on the basis of cultural images that people already know, images deeply linked to a specific cultural system.

6.2 Ancestors

As previously discussed there are relationships between the reverence for ancestors and the Confucian concept of filial piety, which, according to the teachings of the great philosopher, consists of obedience, serving one's parents throughout life according to the propriety (*li* 禮), burying them according to the propriety, and in sacrificing to them according to the propriety⁹.

The great and deep meaning that relates the concept of filial piety with the ancestors' rites, endorsed Ricci's decision to allow these kinds of rites, but the relationship between living people and ancestors is true in another

7. Madsen, *China's Catholics*, 94.

8. Lozada, *God Aboveground*, 94.

9. James Legge, *Confucian analects: The great learning, and the doctrine of the mean* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), Bk. iii., pt. i., c. v., v. 4.

way. A common Chinese sentence describes the ancestors as the gods of the home (*zuxian shi jiali de shen* 祖先是家裡的神).

I was in Taipei when, after a big road accident occurred in the southern part of Taiwan, local news transmitted images of Buddhist monks and Taoist priests who were moving around the crash site in order to find souls of the deceased and guide them to their ancestors' tablets (招魂).

The Taoist priests were asked to perform this ritual by the relatives of the deceased, and this happened because the relatives did not want their dead become wandering and hungry ghosts. In order to avoid this dangerous situation, the correct thing to do is to bring the soul to the place she or he has to go: the ancestors' tablet¹⁰. This example shows that the ancestors' tablets are not only considered as a symbol made in order to remember or commemorate the deceased. The tablets are where the soul of the deceased person lives, they are linked with the complex cosmology that underlies most of everyday activities that constitute the life of most Taiwanese people. It is important to remember that ancestors differ from ghosts only because they have descendants who take care of them.

In the tradition and cosmology of the Taiwanese popular religion, those who already left, who presently live in, and who will in the future live in this world, share the same lifetime and the same existential world. This belief influences the concept of family, which thus encompassed those who currently live and those who already left this world: the ancestors.

In Taiwan, there are annual ceremonies, like the Spring Festival or the Qingming festival, where the ancestors are revered at their site of burial. However, on ordinary days, ancestors are revered at home. During the first year following the death of a relative, usually, a stick of incense is burnt every day, and rice is offered every day in honor of the dead. Prayers need to be addressed to the ancestors every day, otherwise if the departed souls are not revered; it is believed they will cause evil effects on their living kin. After the first anniversary of the death, a stick of incense is daily offered, but not more rice. Thereafter, rice and food are offered for the birthday and the anniversary of the death of the ancestor.

In the Catholic world, the situation is different. The reverence for ancestors at home was allowed only after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), so people who converted before that time were not allowed to put a traditional ancestor's shrine in their home. And it is important to remember that until 1949 the only Catholic missionaries present on the island were the Dominicans, who were completely against "the cult of ancestors".

A priest told me that before the Second Vatican Council, people who wanted to be baptized – and so enter the community of the Church – had to burn their ancestors' tablets as well as any portrait of Confucius, or images of their gods. Even though the situation changed after the Second Vatican Council, many people did not want to put their ancestors' tablets

10. 林瑋嬪Wei-ping Lin, "鬼母找女婿," 19–20.



Figure 4: Ancestor Tablets in the Jilin Road Church, Taipei

back in their homes, because they felt the position of the Church was not fully understood. “If when I was converted the priest ordered me to burn my ancestors’ tablets, why must we now put them again in our home?” Maybe because of this, I did not see ancestors’ shrines in many of the believers’ homes that I visited. Nevertheless, sometimes this absence is full of meaning. Father Martin told me that one day he received the visit of two parishioners, a young family who had recently been converted. They told Father Martin that “now we know that we cannot put these things (the ancestors’ tablets) in our home, but we do not dare to throw them away, so please, help us to solve this problem”. The priest told me that the tablets are still in Belgium in a museum of his congregation.

In some other parishes such as the San Dominic Evangelization Centre in Taipei (Jiling Road) the Catholic faithful took their ancestors’ tablets directly to the Church, where the priest organized a properly respectful place to keep them (Fig. 4).

One of the situations I encountered during my fieldwork was that most believers are women, and very often in their families, only these women converted, while their families still believe in the practices of the popular religion. Listening to many priests, it is quite common that both boys and girls attend catechism classes, but when they must make a decision about their baptism, boys usually renounce being baptized because of the pressure of their families who generally do not agree with the conversion of their son. The situation seems different as far as women are concerned: in the case of

a thirty-forty-year-old woman, it seems family members do not put as much pressure on them regarding baptism.

This phenomenon is certainly related to the fact that, traditionally, if a son survived the first years of his life, he was automatically recognized as a member of his father's line, and so is entitled to a place on his father's ancestral altar. Whereas, a daughter can never be granted this privilege because women acquire membership in the family lineage only through marriage. From her father's point of view, a daughter is an outsider. She can achieve the right to a place on his altar only by marrying a man who agrees to reside uxorilocally¹¹. Ahern points out this fact when interviewing her informants: they told her that a daughter "does not belong to us. From birth on, girls are meant to belong to other people. They are supposed to die in other people's house"¹².

Based on these concepts, it is possible to understand the situation of the Catholic Church in Taiwan, where most believers are women. The fact must be noted that a woman may be allowed by her family to participate in the activities of the Church, but after the marriage sometimes, the husband may not allow the wife to attend these activities.

Mrs. Wang was a married forty-year-old woman. I met her only once at the Resurrection church; according to the other believers she was once a very active parishioner, but after that first time, I did not meet her again at the church. Sometime later, I met her on the street. She was helping a museum committee that wanted to open a museum about the history of the Wanhua district. She invited me to visit the museum and we started to talk. I asked her why she did not come to the church for the Sunday Mass for such a long time, and she told me that she was now very busy at home as well as with this new committee. The following Sunday, when I told the other parishioners about my meeting with Mrs. Wang, they told me that the real problem was that her husband did not allow her to participate to the Church activities. When a woman gets married, she became a member of a specific ancestor line. It is common to find Catholic women that go to the market because "today it is the death anniversary of my father-in-law and we must *bai* (拜) him. Therefore, I bought a lot of things because I want to prepare his favorite food".

Catholic Believers who were converted after the Vatican Council generally still have the traditional ancestors' shrine in their houses, and some old believers reinstalled this shrine in their homes after the Council. According to my fieldwork data, there are multiple reasons that lead these people to have an ancestor's shrine in their home.

Mister Guo is a seventy-year-old parishioner. He was converted at the age of twenty and married a Catholic woman. When he heard that I was doing my research on the cult of ancestors, he invited me to his home for dinner to show me his ancestors' shrine. He told me that he got an ancestors'

11. Wolf, "Gods, ghosts, and ancestors," 148.

12. Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*, 127.

shrine only after the death of his father. At that time, he looked at how other people made their ancestors' tablets and shrine, so he carefully made his own. Carefully because as a Catholic he did not want to commit any heresy. Mister Guo's shrine looked like a traditional one, but at the center of it – where images of deities are traditionally put – there was a cross and an image of Jesus. The ancestor's tablet was on the left side of the shrine where, traditionally, it must be. On the tablet, along with the family surname, a cross was painted. He also showed me that in the genealogical book (*zupu* 族譜), starting with him, every member of the family must write the day of baptism and the Christian name (*shenmin* 聖名) besides the name and birthday. Mister Guo told me that a lot of newly converts did not want an ancestors' shrine in their house, but he was convinced that he needed an ancestors' shrine in order to let other Taiwanese people know that the Catholic religion is a Chinese local religion.

This type of argument was shared by Mister Gao, who told me that he had an ancestors' shrine at home in order to let other people know that Catholicism is a Chinese religion. He reinforced this statement by arguing that Jesus, who was born in the Middle East, could be considered to be an oriental character, and that the Christian Faith is universal.

One of the elements that Mister Gao pointed out was that after his conversion he, and consequently his family, felt freer than when they were believers in the Taiwanese popular religion. The fundamental reason for this had to do with the relationship with the ancestors: “as Catholics, we must not be afraid of them.” He told me some interesting anecdotes regarding the relationships between the Catholic faithful and non/Catholic Taiwanese people. For example, when a Taiwanese falls down in front of someone else's house, they must go to the shaman of the temple in order to expel the “dirty things” (usually ghosts) of that house from their body. However, when people fall down in front of a Catholic's house, they do not have to go to the temple, because there are no ghosts in that house. When he bought his house, the neighbors told him that the *fengshui* of the house was not good, but when they saw the cross and the images of Jesus hanging on the wall, they told him: “Are you Christian? In this case you can buy this house because for you Christians there are no such problems”. According to mister Gao, Taiwanese people know very well that the life of a Catholic or Christian believer (信耶穌的人) is more free and easy than their own life, but people don't want to convert themselves because they are still afraid of their ancestors.

Another interesting encounter was with Mister Li. He was a seventy-year-old parishioner. In doing this interview, a translator helped me, because Mister Li did not speak Chinese fluently, so sometimes he preferred to express himself in Taiwanese. His home was very interesting, the drawing room (客廳), just in front of the main door, was reserved for a big table that functioned as an ancestors' altar (Fig. 5a). A big cross was hanging on the wall, just over the ancestors' tablet. On two large plates were incised two

sentences drawn from the Mass liturgy (the first two sentences of the Gloria “Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to men of goodwill”). A cross was on the ancestor’s tablet (Fig. 5b).

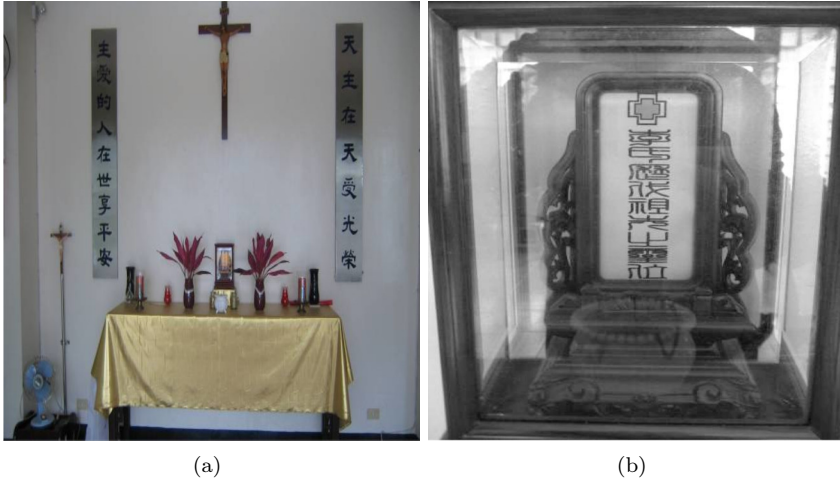


Figure 5: The Altar (a) and the Ancestors’ Tablet (b) of Mr. Li, Taipei

This type of disposition of the ancestor’s altar is exactly the same as in the traditional Taiwanese home, the *sanheyuan* (三合院), where the ancestors stand in the center of the drawing room just in front of the main door. Mister Li told me that he still prayed to the ancestors by burning sticks of incense in front of the altar and that he had kept the ancestors’ tablet as a remembrance, a memory of his ancestors because he knew the soul of his ancestor was not inside the tablets.

According to the Cardinal of Kaohsiung Paul Shan, in 2001 the Catholic Church in Taiwan celebrated the “Congress of the new century and of the new Evangelization” in order to define the pastoral work for the new century. In this congress, the importance of the lay members in the life of the Church was stressed. The attention was therefore put on the family because the family must be witnesses to faith, charity, and hope. The result of this congress was that families were asked to reserve a corner of their house for “Christian symbols”, in order to create a religious atmosphere in the family¹³. Probably for this reason many Drawing Rooms (客廳) of Catholics’ homes, have visual symbols of the Catholic faith, such as images of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Cross, or the Bible. It is interesting to note that, besides, these sacred images very often there are pictures of more recent ancestors. Like a modern version of the traditional ancestors’ shrine.

13. Meldrum, *A Cardinal Comes of Age*.

At this point, we must point out some careful considerations. The Chinese religion is inseparable from the entire spectrum of discourses and texts through which meaning is produced, reproduced, and fought for, and in which individuals create themselves socially and culturally. In addition to written and printed texts, this spectrum includes all kinds of rituals, shamanism, architecture, economic transactions, knowledge, and even daily conversations¹⁴. In this way this spectrum of discourses plays the function of the rules that arrange the everyday life of the Taiwanese people, or to make a pun using another metaphor, these are the “Weberian” webs of meanings. Paraphrasing Weber, man is a prisoner of the web of meaning that he himself made, therefore every little and apparently meaningless change hides a lot of meanings that in some ways regulate human conduct and choices. For example, in the specific case of the reverence for Ancestors’, there are several rules that a person must follow in order to make a correct ancestors’ shrine, rules which concern how to write ancestors’ tablets. Therefore the arrangement of the shrine, the position of the image of the deity and the ancestors’ tablets on the shrine, the number of Chinese characters which are written on the tablet, the form of the incense pot put in front of the deity of the home or in front of the ancestors’ tablets; all these things embody very deep spiritual meaning.

The display of a shrine is an interesting point; there are several rules which control how the shrine and the table must be made. According to these rules, the image of the god of the home must be put at the center of the shrine, while (from the point of view of a person who stands in front of the shrine)¹⁵ the ancestors’ tablets must be put on the left part of the shrine. Of course, there are exceptions, but in fact, this is considered the right way to arrange the house shrine. An interesting point is that many Catholic shrines still follow the same rules and patterns; the god image on the center is substituted by that of Jesus or the Blessed Virgin Mary and on the left side comes the ancestors’ tablet.

In a home where all family members are Catholic, the husband, a university professor uxorically married, told me that they have an ancestors’ shrine in order to demonstrate to non-believers that the Catholic religion allows these practices. As they showed me, the central part of the shrine was occupied by a painting of Jesus and beside it, there was a little statue of Mary. The tablet was located on the left side of the sacred images. On the tablet, belonging to the maternal lineage, a cross was painted. They told me that this is the correct way to paint a Catholic ancestors’ tablet. But on the other hand, we have different arrangements for the shrine, and some of them do not seem to follow the above-mentioned rules. In another home, I found the ancestors’ shrine in the Drawing Room, in front of the main door, and the ancestors’ tablet was put in the middle of the shrine.

14. P. Steven Sangren, *History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 166.

15. I will keep this point of view for all descriptions of ancestors’ shrines.

Another family invited me to see their ancestors' shrine. It was a traditional one, (the husband had converted only a few years ago) there were no sacred images and the ancestors' tablets stood at the center. In front of the table, there were two little cups full of wine.

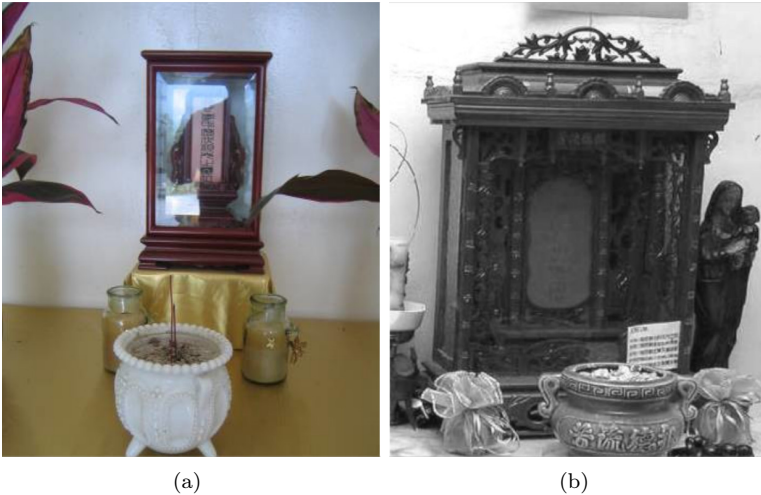


Figure 6: Detail of the altar of the ancestors of Mr. Li (a) and Mr. Zhang (b), Taipei

It is interesting to note how the incense pots put in front of the ancestors' tablet or in front of the god (or gods) of the home are differentiated by some important symbols. The first difference between these two incense pots is that the god's is bigger than the ancestors' incense pot, another meaningful difference concerns the fact that the ancestors' incense pot has two handles called "ears" (耳), while no handles are present on the god's incense pot. Furthermore, I found some homes in which this type of tradition – a tradition dictated by a precise cosmology – was respected, while I found other homes where the ancestors' incense pot was similar to the traditional god's incense pot. These different pots are described in figures 6a and 6b. Furthermore, the numbers of characters that must be written on the ancestors' tablet are subject to some rules. A believer told me that when he did his ancestors' tablet, after the permission of the Church, he wrote the characters according to a tradition for which there are a series of five Chinese characters, life, oldness, illness, death, and suffering (生, 老, 病, 死, 苦)¹⁶, which are arranged in a cyclical way. Generally, some basic information, like who made and offered the tablet, the surname of the lineage, and

16. These concepts are linked to the Buddhist concept of *Duḥkha* (translated in Chinese as 八苦), commonly translated as "suffering", "pain," or "unhappiness," is an important concept in Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism. Its meaning depends on the context and may refer more specifically to the "unsatisfactoriness" or "unease" of mundane life when driven by craving/ grasping and ignorance.

the date on which the tablet was completed, are written on the ancestors' tablets. This information is commonly written in three vertical lines. The writing on the table cannot exceed six or seven characters. In this way the last character will be linked with a bad symbol like illness or death, so the right numbers of characters are six or seven, eleven or twelve, sixteen or seventeen, and so on, in other words, the characters linked with the good meaning of life or oldness. It is important that the sum of the three lines of characters follow the above-mentioned rules. In addition, the height and the width of the tablet follow this type of rule. Knowing these rules, allows people to immediately understand if a tablet is made in the correct way, or if the man did not follow the rules, and therefore the right tradition. For example, during my fieldwork, I was able to see that while some believers made their ancestors' tablets in a way that did not agree with these rules, other Catholics did. Why this? Why are there so many differences among ways to display the ancestors' shrine? Why did some people still follow the "traditional rule" while other believers ignored them?

A possible answer was given to me by an old believer. He was baptized at the age of twenty, and then he married a woman who was born into a traditional Catholic family. He explained to me many things about his conversion and about the traditions of Popular Religion because he had taken part in many temple festivals during his adolescence, notably helping the temple shaman during the performance of some rituals. When he answered my questions, his wife told me that it was the first time she understood the meanings of many practices of the Taiwanese popular religion, like burning paper money at the grave, or during the first or the fifteenth day of the lunar month. Her husband told me "you see? This is the Old Catholic faithful situation. They don't know the meaning of these rituals, but they still do it just because they saw their neighbors perform it."

This is, in my view, the main point. Some believers do not know the meaning of these rituals, but they still perform them. They do it because they were born and grew up in a specific cultural context. Considering culture as a web of meanings, it is clear that the believers live their lives and perform such religious acts within this web. A web is made not only by the symbols that they know but by symbols that they do not know: symbols that are in some ways real and visible in the behavior of neighbors, relatives, and friends. Taiwanese Catholics are living inside two symbolic systems: they arbitrarily use these symbols, sometimes in their original way, sometimes adapting them to the new symbolic universe, in order to find peace and harmony in their everyday life.

To give a concrete example, the two ancestors' shrine shown in figures eight and nine are not in accord with the traditional way to make and display an ancestors' shrine. The ancestors' tablet stands at the center of the shrine at the place traditionally occupied by the image of a deity. On the other hand, while the first shrine does not follow the traditional rule concerning the ancestors' incense pot, the second still follows these rules.

Of more significance, the tablet of Fig. 7a shows the character *ling* (靈位) instead of the traditionally used *shen* (神位), as shown by the Fig. 7b.

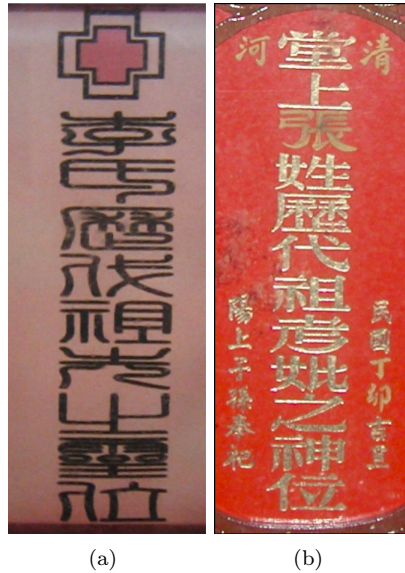


Figure 7: Detail of the ancestor tablets of Mr. Li (a) and Mr. Zhang (b), Taipei

It is possible to note that, while the first incense pot does not have any handle (Fig. 6a) – which according to the tradition means that the incense pot is for the gods’ home – the second incense pot has “two ears” (Fig. 6b). At the same time, figure number 7a shows us nine characters all written in a unique line, while figure 7b shows us three lines of characters with seven characters on the first line, twelve on the second, and seven in the third, as the traditional tablets must be made.

In many Catholic homes, families display the symbols of their faith. In many living rooms, there is a small altar full of religious objects, like crosses, images of Jesus, or Mary (often both are present), the Bible or Gospel, and the Holy Rosary. Sometimes in these types of domestic altars, pictures of the most recent dead ancestors are present, generally parents but pictures of the wife or husband.

As I discovered, the presence of a place inside the home to show the Christian symbols, and consequently their own faith, was encouraged by the Episcopal Conference of Taiwan. The bishops asked the believers to decorate their living room and their homes with Christian symbols, in harmony with the Jubilee of the year 2000¹⁷. During my research, the parish priest showed me the rules that the believers have to follow when making an ancestor

17. Meldrum, *A Cardinal Comes of Age*.

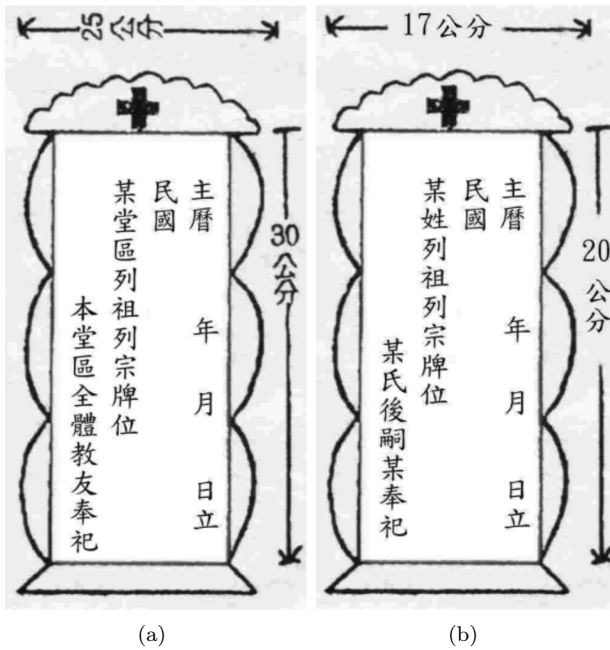


Figure 8: Outline of the tablet for the Parish (a) and for the deceased parishioner (b)

tablet, rules concerning the length, the width, the way they must write on the tablet, and concerning how high and large the tablet must be (Figures 8 a and b, Source: 殯葬禮儀)¹⁸.

The interesting thing is that these procedures follow the traditional rules, but in this case, there are other parameters to be followed, like painting a red cross on the tablet. Basic traditional rules are followed by the Catholic Church authorities (Figures 8 a and b), such as the number of characters, the width, and the height, all these rules follow the tradition, which as we saw means following the symbols and the meaning assigned to them by the Taiwanese popular religion. These examples above mentioned could be considered one more proof that man lives within a web of meaning, inside a symbolic system that we call culture. Even if a person embracing a new religious faith enters in this way inside a new symbolic system, his (or her) previous web of meaning that we call culture is still real and present. Sometimes because people have knowledge – as the believer who told me about the five characters cycle – or sometimes because they saw their neighbors' conduct like the old believer told me.

On the other hand, the Church allows the use of the ancestors' tablets and indicates rules to the believers, which represents links with the cosmol-

18. 中國主教團禮儀委員會Bishop Conference of China, 殯葬禮儀 (Taipei: Xiuding, 1989).

ogy of the popular religion, drawing a complex and interesting phenomenon. Because without a deep knowledge of the meaning embodied in these above-mentioned symbols, it is very easy to make a mistake. To use a metaphor, we can say that the Church allows the believers to continue using the traditional meaning/ signifier of these above-mentioned signs, but stresses the different meanings (signified) that the Catholic tradition brought. To try to understand this phenomenon will be the objective of the next pages. The Catholic conceptions of ancestors cannot be related only to the presence (or the absence) of the ancestor's tablets. Other facts and aspects can help us understand in more detail this interesting phenomenon.

Miss Li was a fifty-year-old parishioner. She was one of the more regular and active parishioners. She was the third of five children, four daughters, and one son. All the components of the family, starting with the daughters, were baptized, except the son, who still takes care of the ancestors' shrine. The family embraced the Catholic faith in the years following the end of the Second World War; she told me how the priest helped her and her family through the support of the American charity Caritas, help that consisted of flour, milk powder, and school education. After their baptism, the children were allowed to enter for free in a Catholic school. As I wrote above, after the daughters, the father and the mother received baptism (Chap 4). The actual situation is that the son, who was not baptized, and who after the death of the parent continues to take care of the ancestors' tablets, is still involved in the practices of the Taiwanese popular religion.

The baptism in order to receive the Caritas food and other help (especially for the children), the priest who preferred quantity instead of the quality of baptized people, the belief in the physical needs of the ancestors, and the contingent situation of poverty: it seems clear that the mediation between these different influences and motivations built a process led by cultural, cosmological and practical compromises. More interestingly, this case shows how the conception of ancestors is deeply rooted in the Taiwanese culture, the ancestors are felt as near and present, in other words, they still live with their progeny apart from their affiliation to another religion.

Another interesting case was that of Long Qi, an undergraduate student whose father died some years ago. He told me that he and his sister were baptized after they met a priest who came from the United States. When his father died, the mother asked them to go with her to the temple to visit the medium (*tongling* 通靈). At that time Long Qi was already baptized, but because of something that occurred the night after the death of his father, he decided to go with his mother. The fact that I am referring to is linked to a Hakka (客家) belief. The young student told me that there are beliefs according to which the soul of a recently departed can take the appearance of an Imperial Moth (a type of nocturnal butterfly). The night after his father's death, an imperial moth entered the house and landed just on his sister's leg, and even when they tried to let it fly out, the butterfly did not want to leave the leg of the sister. For Long Qi that butterfly was

indubitably the soul of the father. When he arrived at the medium temple with his mother and his sister, the medium asked for the name and the address of the deceased. Because they had only recently moved from their old home to a new one situated in Taizhong (台中), Long Qi's mother gave the new address to the medium, but the medium could not find any spirit to communicate with. Therefore, she gave the old address, and the father, through the medium, started to answer the questions of the woman, while Long Qi and his sister were standing behind her. When they heard the words of the medium, all family members were convinced that it was really the father who was talking. In addition, in this case, my intention is to stress the fact that the ancestors are still felt as alive by their descendants, because of the importance of the "cultural roots", but because of the importance of the context in which a person lives his everyday life. Long Qi is a very faithful believer, but he really believed the words of the medium, even if this type of thing conflicted with the fundamental doctrine of his new faith. When he told me his experience, he particularly used expressions like "I don't know how this thing could be possible but things really happened this way" or "I know that this could be explained as a psychological event or in other ways, but we really felt that it was my father speaking."

The ancestors are considered alive and present for most of the believers that I met, and for this reason, some of them used elements of the new religion according to traditional ways to solve troubles that were believed to be linked with ancestors, like offering a Mass for them or, as in the case of Long Qi, directly going to the temple and asking a medium.

The first consideration that could be raised in the interpretation of these experiences could be that within the Catholic Church, there are different ways to consider the ancestors. There are believers who still have a traditional ancestors' shrine to prove the localization of the Catholic religion and others who do not want this kind of thing in their home because they are afraid of it, as in the case of the young couple who gave the ancestors' tablet to Father Martin. There are more different cases, like that of a girl who was baptized in France where she lived for a long time and did not want to know anything about the "ancestors' tablets or whatever" because she felt this kind of thing was just superstition.

6.2.1 Ancestors and the Catholic Church

One of the principal points linked to the belief system in the ancestors is that they still are present and generate significant pressure not only on the worldview of Catholic believers but also on the evangelization process carried out by the Church. According to the testimonies that I collected, it seems to me that there is an effort of the Church to present Christ as the first ancestor (the first who resurrected and the first who defeated death). The problem arises because the believers still use their own cultural system to explain the new faith, and according to it, Christ is God, not an ancestor,

because ancestors are more linked with the home, with the property, with the parentage, and the descent.

People in Taiwan live immersed in a cultural system that molds every act of their everyday life. As consequence, according to their personal situation, contingency, and needs, they arbitrarily choose a symbol able to resolve a practical situation, as in the case of Miss Li's parents, where they were able to harmonize symbols belonging to different traditions and the contingent situation of their lives. Even when they accept the re-sematization, the reconfiguration of their belief system made by the Church, they continue to refer to the old meaning of these symbols as in the case of Mister Guo and Mister Gao, who stressed their freedom from their ancestors, proving in this way the existence of this category of supernatural beings. The problem of the relationship with ancestors is still real for them because they still participate in the everyday experiences of their neighbors, friends, or relatives, but by embracing the new faith, these problems could be resolved.

Even if these types of problems could arise again, believers very often still use their traditional way to solve them, but applied with new forms, like for example going to Church and asking a Mass in honor of their ancestors. As I said above, I was a witness to this kind of case: believers I had never met before in more than four years, suddenly appeared in the middle of the week in order to offer a Mass for their ancestors. The common practice of popular religion to go to the temple in order to solve problems, a practice that is built on a deep and strong cosmology, is seen by some of the Taiwanese Catholic people as the natural way to face problems. Therefore it asserted that this is the natural way to conceive life and the relationships with the supernatural world (that for Taiwanese people is absolutely not supernatural, but irrefutably natural) molds the Catholic's way to relating to the new symbols (or new interpretation) brought by the new religion.

This situation of compromise is helped by the conduct of the Church by trying to implement some practices in order to align herself with the local customs and culture. For example, I mentioned the fact that some Catholics still burn paper money at their ancestor's and deceased parents' grave. This practice is officially prohibited by the Church, but as a Brother told me, there are many Catholics that still burn paper money at the cemetery because they see other people do it. In order to contrast with this practice, special paper money with sacred images called Resurrection Paper (*fuhuo* 復活紙), is sold in Catholic stores (Fig. 9a and b).

Their purpose is to offer a substitute to the traditional Deep Paper, the Taiwanese *bongzua* (*wusezhi* 五色紙 or *huangseguzhi* 黃色古紙), which are placed on the graves in concordance with the Tomb Sweeping Festival, and they mean that the grave where they are placed were already cleaned and worshiped (Fig. 10).

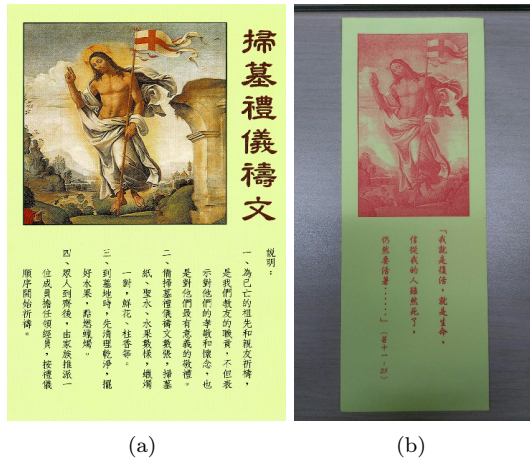


Figure 9: fuhuozi 復活紙



Figure 10: Resurrection Papers on a Traditional Tomb, Taichung

But these papers have another meaning, the *Kamhia* (*gaiwa* 蓋瓦) which is related to the conception that the dead in the other world will need a house of his property with all the commodities inside, including money, which will be used by the deceased in the other-world life. Using Resurrection papers – which imply the meaning that the deceased is resurrected, went to heaven, and already became part of God’s glory – the Church completely changed the meaning of this habit, but at the same time attest to the structural division of the categories present in the tradition of popular religion. This fact can help me explain how this dialectic process is made of contact and compromise. I say dialectic because it is undisputed that, in this case, there are two cosmologies (or cultural systems) that meet, collide and interact within

the space represented by individuals. The believers, although converted, are still linked to the practices of the popular religion of burning paper money at the ancestors' graves, because this money will be used by the ancestors in the other world. The Church forbids it but at the same time attests to the presence of the ancestors permitting to use of the resurrection papers.

6.2.2 Funerals

When does a deceased person become an ancestor? Immediately after death? Must she or he wait for some time? Is it necessary to perform some particular ceremonies? For both religions, there is no clear and univocal answer, but generally speaking, for common people, it is reasonable to fix this term to align and agree with the funeral rites.

In all religions, funerals are a particular event. In part because of the emotional power expressed by these kinds of rites, and because of the social value that they represent. Funerals are key events in the creation of a shared local history for kin and neighbors¹⁹. More important according to Watson "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"²⁰. Thus, in this view, these kinds of rites take particular and fundamental importance.

To understand the importance of funeral rites in Taiwan, it is necessary to contextualize them from the perspective of the ancestor's rites. For the traditions of both religions, it is after the funeral that the deceased becomes an ancestor, and consequently can be prayed for or revered at home. During my fieldwork, I participated in some catholic funeral ceremonies, but I was able to participate in a funeral ceremony of the Taiwanese popular religion. These kinds of ceremonies, and especially the social context that comes with them, were very well described by eminent scholars like Wolf or Freedman²¹. According to these studies and in accordance with my personal experience, every member of the family must wear a different dress. Traditionally there are five kinds of dress (*wufu* 五服, which comprehend *zhuanshuai* 斬衰, *jishuai* 齊衰, *dagong* 大功, *xiaogong* 小功, *sima* 緦麻), which express the different relationships of the relative with the deceased, and consequently the relations between the relatives. We can thus say that this type of tradition shows the structural scheme of the Chinese family.

Freedman suggests that "The *wufu* (五服) was in principle a category drawn up in regard to a given ego; it could not, therefore, be a discrete

19. Lozada, *God Aboveground*.

20. James L Watson, "The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites: Elementary Forms, Ritual Sequence, and the Primacy of Performance," in *Death ritual in late imperial and modern China*, ed. James L. Watson, Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, and Joint Committee on Chinese Studies (U.S.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 3.

21. Arthur P. Wolf, "Chinese Kinship and Mourning Dress," in *Family and kinship in Chinese society*. Ed. Ai-li S Chin et al. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1970), 189–207; Freedman, *Lineage Organization*.

segment of lineage. But while the term was used to define the range of agnatic²² kinsmen to whom a given individual was supposed to hold himself closely related and with whom he should cooperate in a number of ways, in another sense it marked out different classes of relatives, both agnatic and otherwise, for the specification of types and duration of mourning due to them; whence the literal meaning of the expression²³.

In his essay, Arthur Wolf points out that it is an ancient commonplace (and a rather dull one) that Chinese mourning dress reflects kinship relations to the deceased. Wolf, however, analyzes the use of colors and of types of fabric and distinguishes hierarchies of each and every reason for the selection of one as against another in each case. Some mean more than one thing. Wolf discovered two different uses of red: a great-great-grandson wears red as a sign of joy at the deceased having such a long line. A neighbor wears "prophylactic red" against contamination by death²⁴. As the argument progresses, Wolf finds that a finer distinction is necessary: "Mourning dress does not reflect generalized kinship statuses, but is rather a reflection or declaration of rights in property (...) Among those mourners who share property rights with the deceased (...) red expresses joy; outside of the family among people who do not share property rights (...) red is worn as a prophylactic"²⁵. To summarize, according to Wolf mourning dress does not reflect generalized kinship statuses, but is rather a declaration of rights in the property. Wolf analyzed data only for northern Taiwan, but he provides an approach for the profitable analysis of mourning apparel across China. I don't want to analyze how other scholars analyzed these phenomena, nor to make an analysis of mourning dress in Taiwanese popular religion. I want to show that in the traditional funerals of the Taiwanese popular religion, people put different kinds of clothes on and that these clothes are in some ways related to the family structure. At the end of the funeral ceremony, the specialist in ritual gives the family a temporary ancestor's tablet, a paper one. Traditionally after a year, this paper tablet will be replaced by the wooden tablet, but actually, at least in Taipei city, the specialist and the family, because of the frenetic style of life in modern-day Taiwan, tend to handle this question in six, and sometimes in two, three months. However, the central point is that after the funeral you can obtain a tablet, which attests that your parent has already become an ancestor. Contrariwise, in the Catholic funeral, the familiar relationships shown by dresses are not accentuated. There are clear regulations about the disposition of the family nearby the coffin, concerning how the believers, depending on their degree of relationship with the deceased, must take a

22. Agnatic = male/paternal lineage

23. Freedman, *Lineage Organization*, 41.

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

25. Wolf, 196.

position in the church, and about how the deceased must be revered (Fig. 11)²⁶.

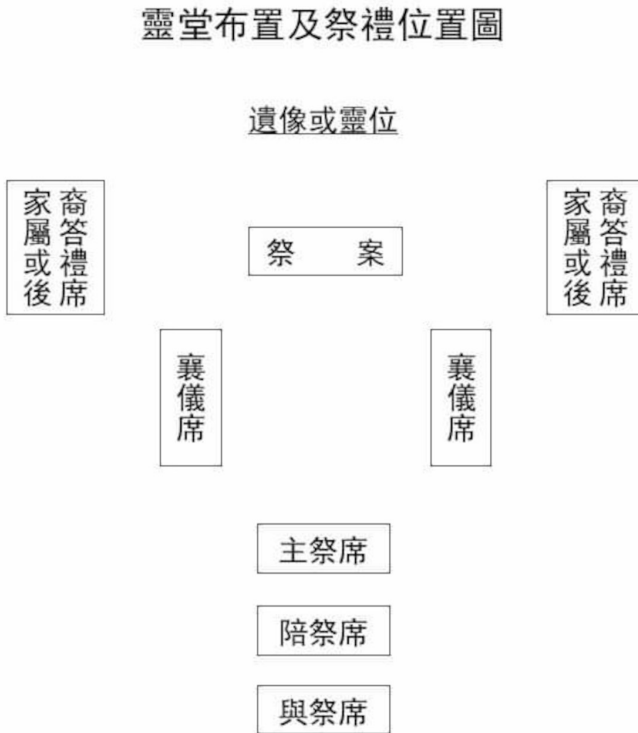


Figure 11: The division of seats inside the church during the funeral. 中國主教團禮儀委員會Bishop Conference of China, 殯葬禮儀 (Taipei: Xiuding, 1989)

Some distinction between the relatives and the group of believers who participated in the funeral is still present, but because the funeral ceremony is incorporated into the rites of the Mass, the whole funeral ceremony assumes a particular meaning. At the traditional Catholic funeral, any member of the family must wear a black dress. As pointed out above, the importance of these funeral rites within the world of Han people must be sought not only on the affective and emotional sides of these manifestations but on the

26. 中國主教團禮儀委員會Bishop Conference of China, 殯葬禮儀.

cultural link that is embedded in these ritualized practices²⁷. In order to better understand how these rites represent a type of cultural standardization, Watson tried to isolate and point out some essential points from the progress of the funeral rite, that in his view could represent the fundamental and recursive step that must be performed in a Chinese funeral²⁸ (Watson, 1988:12-13). My goal is to try to compare these “standard” points with the Catholic funeral process as I saw it in Taiwan. Watson recognizes at first the public notification of death by wailing and other expressions of grief. The death must be announced by high-pitched and stereotyped wailing to the neighbors and the community. The author asserts that there is a formal notification, such as the use of the color white to dress and hanging blue lanterns. It seems that high pitch and stereotypical wailing are basic requirements. Especially woman must express their desperation in cries and with a high pitch. And, as I heard, women have to go back to their father’s home by walking without shoes in order to show all the pain and grief of the recent death. Watson considers these types of conduct as stereotypical; other people, the neighbors, for example, are expecting this kind of conduct from the relatives of the dead. On the Catholic side, the relatives of the dead are not required to perform these kinds of rites. Since the first period of diffusion of the Church in the Roman Empire, the moment of death was considered a “second birth”: the “birth into eternal life” and in some ways the real birth of a Christian believer. Death is the moment on which we will leave this “vale of tears” and on which we finally will meet God in Heaven where we will share his peace and mercy. We live in this world as guests, in transit, but our permanent home, our purpose is to return to our Father’s home. Thus, according to these conceptions, the deceased leaves for a better place, and such desperate conduct by his relatives is not necessary. The second point shown up by Watson is linked with the above-mentioned concept of *wufu* (五服). This aspect has already been described exhaustively but there is a significant structural difference between the traditional mourning dresses and the clothes used by the Catholic believers in the Church’s ceremonies. A parallel could be built between the different colors of the traditional clothes, as seen in reference to the different degrees of family links with the dead, and the position that the believers take inside the church during the funeral’s performance (Fig. 11).

The third point that Watson proposes is the ritualized bathing of the corpse. The author considers this point as an essential feature of the rites. These kinds of practices vary from a full, vigorous scrubbing to a ritualized daubing of the forehead. Watson points out that in some places in south China water was purchased from the deity of a well or a stream; this rite is called “buying water” (*maishui* 買水). This point is very important within the Catholic rites. The sprinkling of holy water on the body of the dead

27. Watson, “The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites: Elementary Forms, Ritual Sequence, and the Primacy of Performance.”

28. Watson, 12–13.

is considered an essential part of the funeral rite. According to Catholic tradition and doctrine, the meaning of the sprinkling of holy water is linked with the meaning of baptism, the meaning of Easter, and the resurrection of Christ. Believers and people who attend the funeral are sprinkled by the priest; this symbolizes the union in God between the deceased and those who still live. Both take part in and constitute the Catholic Church.

The fourth point is the transfer of food, money, and goods from the living to the dead. This part of the ritual encompasses all the furniture (house, car, and so on) already discussed above. Watson contends that this kind of performance shows up implicit elements of symbolic communication; this elementary feature of the rites was a concrete expression of the continuing relationship between the living and the dead. As pointed out earlier, at funeral rites of the Catholic Church, offers of food (fruits, rice, and wine) and incense are allowed. According to my experience, these kinds of food offerings are not allowed in all churches, some priests do not allow them. In such cases, only incense and holy water are offered. These practices were debated throughout the history of evangelization in China. The link between these practices and the concept of filial piety (孝) was and is one of the most important factors that persuaded the Church to accept them (事死如事生). On the other hand, the concept of the “Heavenly Jerusalem” also accepts the continuing relationship between living and dead.

The fifth point is the preparation and installation of a soul tablet for the dead. Of course, these rites require the services of a literate person, usually a specialist in ritual. While the Catholic Church allows the presence of the ancestors’ shrine and consequently of the ancestors’ tablets in the Catholics’ homes, no specialist in ritual is necessary to make such ancestors’ tablets, because it is believed that there are no souls living inside the tablets. This implies that those who own an old tablet still use it, while some of those who do not have a tablet will make a new one even if they do not have full knowledge of the complex rules which regulate this type of rite.

The sixth point concerns the ritualized use of money and the employment of professionals. The proper conduct of Chinese funerary rites requires the service of specialists who perform ritual acts in exchange for money. According to Watson, the payment of money to specialists was more than a simple monetary exchange, it was a required feature of the rites. The Catholic Church does not recognize any specialist except the priest. The authority of the priest derives from different sources: his studies and the sacrament. It is believed that when a priest is ordained, he is consecrated by a special sacrament. And it is because of this sacrament that he can perform the Catholic rites. In fact, no money is requested by the priest, and usually, people leave a free offering to the priest after the ceremony.

Still following Watson, the seventh point is the music that must accompany the corpse and settle the spirit. Especially, two forms of music play a key role in the structure of funerary rites: high-pitched piping and percus-

sion. The sound of piping accompanies the corpse during critical transitions in the ritual, most notably when physical movement is required.

Music, especially songs and choirs are present in the Catholic ceremony. Music accompanies the entry and the exit of the coffin in the church, but music plays an important function in the key moments of the celebration. In contrast to the traditional funeral, the emphasis is not put on the effective role of the high-pitched instrumental music, but on the meaning of the texts sung: biblical psalms and musical adaptations of biblical texts are sung during the funeral. These songs are all centered on the Resurrection (i.e. John 1,25), the Mercy of God (i.e. psalm 33;136), and the confidence that God brings the dead to a better and peaceful place (i.e. psalm 22).

Sealing the corpse in an airtight coffin is the eighth point in Watson's paper. This action is considered by many Chinese to be the most important feature of the traditional funerary ritual. The ceremonial hammering of nails to seal the corpse within the coffin is a centerpiece of the ritual sequence; these acts are usually performed by the chief mourner or by an invited guest. This is performed at the end of the funeral ritual when the coffin must be carried away. Usually, the coffin is put behind the altar where the picture of the deceased is put, the coffin is opened and at a certain point, the relatives must go to the back in order to see the corpse of their relative. Children and pregnant women are forbidden to pay this visit or to attend the funeral because it is believed that during the funeral many dirty spirits (*huiqi* 穢氣) could be present. These are the type of spirits, which are linked with death and the funeral. They can put in danger the spirits (*po* 魄) of the children because the children's *po* tend to go out of the body. According to Catholic tradition, the body must be put inside an airtight coffin. Traditionally the Church did not allow other practices such as the incineration of the body, the body must be preserved undivided and undamaged because it will resurrect "on the last day", on Judgment Day.

In Taiwan during the Catholic funeral, sometimes the coffin is kept open until the end of the Mass. At this moment believers are invited to come closer to the coffin in order to pay the last tribute to the dead. Here, in my view, there is a clear influence of the Chinese way to perform these rituals. But the great and deep change is symbolized by the fact that while the Chinese ceremony allows only the relatives to give their homage to the deceased, the Catholic tradition extends the concept of family, and allows all the believers to pay homage to the deceased, who is addressed as brother/sister throughout the ceremony. After all the believers (at least those who want to) have seen the dead, the coffin is closed and carried away to the cemetery. Talking with many parishioners, I discovered that many believers, especially if freshly converted, do not want to see the corpse of the dead because of the concept of *huiqi* introduced above. An old parishioner told me that "we must not push these new converted to see the dead, because they are afraid (害怕) of it, when I was converted, I was afraid too."

The ninth point presented by Watson is the mandatory removal of the coffin from the community. This expulsion is the last formal act in the sequence of funerary rites. In the Catholic performance of the funeral, the removal of the coffin is the last part of the rites. The priest with the relatives and sometimes other parishioners accompanies the coffin to the grave, there they recite some prayers and sing songs and the priest sprinkles holy water on the grave and on the coffin. The interesting point is that, apart from these last rituals performed at the grave, all the Catholic funeral rites are embodied in the rite of the Mass, in this way the funeral is symbolically embodied with the life, the death, and the Resurrection of Jesus, which is celebrated within the Mass. This performance is, thus, a way to let the deceased person share Jesus' Resurrection, His eternal life, and joy.

Funerals in the Resurrection Church

During my fieldwork, I attended the funeral of a believer. An eighty-year man was unexpectedly hit by a stroke. I was able to visit him at the hospital, and just two days later he passed away. Because he was an old believer and his son and daughters were very active in the activities of the parish (the elder daughter was the organist in the Resurrection Church) many people participated in his funeral. So, the ceremony was performed not in the Dali Resurrection Church, because it was too small, but at the Holy Rosary Church in Wanda road, a Church administrated by the priests of the C.I.C.M.

The open coffin was put in front of the altar and a large picture of the deceased was put in front of the coffin. On the sides of the coffin were two benches, one on the right side and the other one on the left side. The bench on the left side (tiger part) of the coffin was reserved for the wife, the daughters, the daughter-in-law, and the granddaughter. In other words, the bench was reserved for the female part of the family. On the right side (Dragon Part) were seated the male members: the son, the son-in-law, and the grandson. Both female and male members dressed in black vests.

The funeral ceremony was celebrated within the rite of the Mass, at the end of which incense sticks, fruits, wine, and flowers were offered by the son with three ritual bows, while other relatives were standing behind him. After the son performed the rites, everybody, in order of their degree of relationship with the deceased or with the family, performed the same rites. After the Mass, the female members of the family took the seats of the male members. At this time the believers would go to the coffin for a last greeting or prayer and then give their condolence to the family of the deceased who would be seated in a line and all the believers would shake hands with them.

Every parish priest performs these rites in his own way or according to the parishioners' request. During my fieldwork, I participated in a very singular funeral. An active and old Resurrection Church parishioner, a

woman more than seventy years old, passed away. Her sons were baptized at a young age, but for many reasons, when they grew up none of them continued with the rites and activities of the church. At the time of their mother's funeral, they practiced the Taiwanese popular religion.

Because their mother was so active in the parish, they decided to perform a Catholic funeral inside the church; but at the same time, they prepared a *hū-lín-cuò* (糊靈厝, the Taiwanese *go-lín-tzù*) for their mother and asked the priest the permission to put it inside the church. The *go-lín-tzù* is a house made of paper, inside the house, there are all types of furniture and other commodities, like TV, phone and mobile phone, car, air conditioners, etc (Fig. 12). More recently I saw dogs made of paper, notebooks, and other objects of contemporary technology. This kind of house, with all the paper-made material, is usually burnt after the rites of the funeral.



Figure 12: The Taoist paper house inside the Church of the Resurrection, Taipei

The priest allowed them to put the paper house in the church for the funeral. He explained his decision stating that if he had not allowed them to put the paper house in the church, then perhaps they would not have organized a Catholic funeral for their mother. He prepared a Mass, and specifically a homily, based on a metaphorical dialectic with the paper house.

The Gospel that he chose was based on the concept of the Father's House, which in the metaphor of Jesus means Heaven, where all men will

go after death: "In my Father's House there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am preparing a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that where I am you will be. Where (I) am going you know the way." Thomas said to him, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the Truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will know my Father. From now on you know him and have seen him" (John, 2-7).

After the Gospel reading, and during the homily, the priest accentuated the metaphorical character of his intentions. He spoke about the paper house, which according to him was a symbol, and as a symbol must bring meaning, and the meaning of the paper house is that the sons hope that their mother now will be in a comfortable and beautiful place. He continued explaining that the paper house is a tradition, but not the real place where their mother will go, because the real place is the "Father's House", where Jesus already has prepared a place for all of us. Then the sons offered incense sticks with fruit, wine, and flowers. After the Mass they waited until the incense sticks burned to half, then went to the cemetery, bringing with them the paper house to burn at their mother's grave.

Thus I saw, in the same parish, two completely different ways to perform funeral ceremonies, both were performed inside the church, and within the rite of the Mass, but they emphasize different aspects of the ritual of the funeral and different ways that different priests have to face similar ritual problems. The first funerary ceremony stressed the egalitarian character of the cultural universe of the Catholic Church. Despite the funeral ceremony of the Taiwanese popular religion, where every relative must wear a different color and different forms of dress, the funeral of the Catholic Church requires that every close relative must wear black clothes. There are no distinctions between older or younger sons or between son and son-in-law. Some distinction is still found in the spatial separation inside the Church between men and women and between different degrees of kinship, differences that disappear at the end of the Mass when all the family of the deceased sits together. As seen above, this aspect of the ceremony tends to stress the equality of every person before God. Because before God we are all brothers and sisters. Apart from the separation by sex, (such separation is already present in the Bible), there are no clear distinctions. This implies that the son and son-in-law of the deceased can, in the funerary ceremony, wear similar clothes.

The second ceremony was integrally arranged in a dialectic relationship with the symbols of the popular religion: the paper house, the Gospel, the homily, and so on. The fact that the priest allowed the believer's sons to put the paper house inside the church was criticized by some parishioners, asserting that in this way people cannot distinguish between the two reli-

gions. But many believers agreed with the priest, because “at least in this way Miss Ma (the deceased mother) was able to have a Catholic funeral.”

It seems to me that these two cases of funerals, celebrated by the same priest in different contexts, can help comprehension of how not only common believers choose symbols in order to solve a problem or in order to adapt themselves to some particular situations. The priest used the same approach choosing the more appropriate symbols in order to resolve a particular situation, or in order to make clear his message that the more understanding and accommodating the Church was, then the more inclusive the Church would be.

In conclusion, it is principally the category of ancestors that stimulates and creates a dialogue, a dialectical process between the cosmologies of the two religions. This process is made by compromises, prohibitions, common sense, and personal interpretation of the doctrinal rules. A dialogue made within the person, which – as I stressed above – could be a Taiwanese Catholic, or a foreign priest as well as the relationships between them, relationships that are a historical result of communications, choices, tensions, and negotiations.

6.3 Ghosts

Ghosts (*gui* 鬼) are the third category of supernatural beings that enliven Chinese cosmology. They are souls that have left the body too fast, because of a rough death, like suicide, a car crash, or maybe drowning and so on. But specifically, all the people who died without descendants, are considered as *gui*, and without people who care for them, providing for their prayers, food, money, etc., when they are in the spirit world; in other words, those who have no descendants to revere/venerate them as ancestors. These ghosts usually are active after sunset, when they come out in order to find something to eat because there are no people who either care about them or care for them. This definition of *gui*, gives a deeper understanding of why sometimes parents are so averse to the fact that their son wants to convert and embrace a new faith. The fundamental point is that according to the Taiwanese people’s common knowledge, Christians cannot pray to their own ancestors, and their concept of Christianity includes both Protestants and Catholics. People really believe that if a son embraces a new faith, they will become a ghost rather than an honored ancestor. These spirit presences seem very real to them, and many times are believed to be responsible for the unluckiest events that happen in the everyday life of the majority of Taiwanese people. Because of ghosts, people burn paper money and make offerings at least two times a month, at home and in front of their stores, restaurants, banks, convenience stores, etc., those who work with the Stock Exchange every day burn paper money and offer incense to these *gui*.

During my stay in Taiwan, I observed many times the relationships present between Taiwanese people and *gui*. One time I read in the newspaper that a man who was driving on a road that passed through a cemetery in Taipei City was scanned by a radar gun, a small Doppler radar used to detect the speed of cars. The driver complained to the police station; that because of passing through a cemetery area, some *gui* tampered with the radar gun. Another time a friend of mine, who had given birth only a few months before, invited me to take coffee near the university. Around five o'clock in the evening – in Taipei in the winter the sun wanes around five thirty or six o'clock – she told me that she must go back home because at sunset, the *gui* come out and this could be dangerous for the child. And at the school, a schoolmate told me that he was involved in a motorcycle accident when he was passing through a cemetery. He felt like someone was pushing his motorcycle and suddenly he crashed. The time was right at sunset. These are just some experiences that I collected during my stay in Taiwan, but I could tell you many more experiences or episodes that I heard from classmates or friends.

Reading the books that eminent scholars wrote doing research upon popular religion, there are many descriptions of these types of relationships between man and *gui*. These relationships are felt as real and concrete, so concrete that a man could be married to one of these souls, as well described by Wolf²⁹. This custom described by Wolf as a “ghost marriage” is still real and absolutely present in Taiwan. One of the first things that my friends told me when I arrived in Taiwan was “please do not pick up anything from the road, especially red packets” (which are put out by relatives to find a man to “marry” a dead girl); And I have watched television programs which presented this phenomenon. What I try to demonstrate here is that these beings are real in the minds of the Taiwanese, people feel their presence and feel they interfere with people’s lives. Because of this situation, people still respect and propitiate these ghosts, at least two times a month, especially during the seventh month in the Chinese calendar, the “Month of the Hungry Ghosts”. Buddhists, Taoists, and believers of Chinese popular religions believe that during “Ghost Month”, the spirits of the dead wander the earth, and the Gates of Hell are said to be opened during this month. Therefore, For one long Lunar month, ghosts are said to roam the Earth; many people told me that they still feel uncomfortable going out at night around the Ghost Festival days. During this dangerous time, they suspend all important activities and decisions. Such as traveling, weddings, moving to a new house, and even swimming are suspended.

The specific Festival of the Hungry Ghosts is on the 15th day of the seventh moon in the Chinese Lunar calendar. On that day families solemnly pay homage to their ancestors and pay Buddhist or Taoist monks (as a charity) to pray for their souls, but at the same moment, they offer food

29. Wolf, “Gods, ghosts, and ancestors,” 150–151.

in order to propitiate the hungry ghosts that live on the surface of the Earth for that period of time. In this month it is very common, to walk on the streets of Taipei, and see people burning paper money to please the visiting ghosts and spirits, or to see people preparing ritual offerings of food, generally inferior food that is thought good enough for ghosts, such as dried pork rinds or pig head skins. Other activities include buying and releasing miniature paper boats and lanterns on water, which signifies “giving directions to the lost ghosts.”

Anthropologists who studied the Taiwanese popular religion described these ghosts as strangers or outcasts³⁰, and in this way, the author stressed the importance of an inside/outside opposition, where ancestors are prayed to facing towards the inside of the house, and ghosts are prayed to facing towards outside. This concept of *gui* as strangers has been stressed by Weller³¹. Wolf defined them as the supernatural equivalent of bandits, beggars, and other strangers³², included in the term “stranger” the ancestors from other lineages because according to him the category “ghosts” is always a relative one. Your ancestors are my ghosts, and my ancestors are your ghosts, just as your relatives are strangers to me, and my relatives are strangers to you³³.

Strangers and outsiders. Even if there are other definitions of ghosts made by other scholars, such as “anomalies inside the structure” or “entities without identity”³⁴, I chose these two descriptions because these represent, in my view, the basic points of divergence between the concept of ghosts of the popular religion and the Catholic point of view about these beings.

What I noticed through the analysis of the Catholic ancestors’ rites, the category of *gui* disappeared, both spatially and hierarchically (in Feuchtwang terms). According to Christian cosmology, in fact, all people are equally the object of God’s love and mercy, so all people when they will leave this world will meet God and could share in His mercy, or be judged based on their sins. However, in all cases they will find a precise place in another world; they will not remain here in this world. In this way, all the festivals dedicated to the *gui* are irrelevant, they have no reason to be celebrated. On the other hand, the Catholic doctrine considers all people as the children of God. He destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will (Ephesians 1,5). As consequence, all people are brothers and sisters, and the concept of the stranger is erased – “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3,27-28). In this way, any type of ceremony, with the excep-

30. Feuchtwang, “Domestic and communal worship in Taiwan,” 127.

31. Robert Weller, *Resistance, Chaos and Control in China: Taiping Rebels, Taiwanese Ghosts and Tiananmen* (University of Washington Press, 1994).

32. Wolf, “Gods, ghosts, and ancestors,” 134.

33. Wolf, 173.

34. Sangren, *History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community*, 150, 155.

tion of Tomb Sweeping Day, is performed facing inside, at the church, or at home. No ceremonies or offerings are performed toward the outside, where traditionally are posed the offerings for the ghosts, for the strangers who came from outside. Nevertheless, how it is possible these entities that are felt so concrete and active in Taiwanese everyday life have disappeared from the Taiwanese Catholics' everyday life? There is a sentence quite common among Taiwanese people, "If you believe it, there it will be, but if you do not it will not". I heard this sentence several times when I asked some Catholics about the existence of *gui*, but this kind of answer was not the only one, and more significantly was not the more common.

When I asked Mister Gao if he believed in the existence of ghosts, his answer was "of course *gui* exist!" (*gui dangran shi youde* 鬼當然是有的), and to reinforce this assertion, he started to tell me some stories about *gui* (鬼故事). He told me about an incident that occurred to his friend. He was going to his home when he saw a little boy sitting on a parapet of a bridge. The man asked him what he was doing here at that time, and the little boy answered that he was waiting for his big brother. Calmed by this answer, the man went back to his home. When he arrived home his wife told him that a little boy and his big brother had been found dead in the river, just under that bridge. Mister Gao told me this story very slowly and with great respect, like when he told me other stories about miracles.

A parishioner told me another interesting story; she told me that she had a friend who was able to see these supernatural presences (陰視). This friend told her that the cemeteries in Taiwan are usually "full of people" (which means full of ghosts), but when she went to one Catholic cemetery she did not see anyone. The parishioner told me that after this discovery she felt more confident in her faith. Through these experiences, and despite the concepts mentioned above, for Taiwanese Catholics, these presences still are real, ghosts exist, but it seems that these presences do not have a so strong relationship with the Catholic people.

Miss Tang was a forty-year-old parishioner; I worked with her for a period in 2007. She was the secretary of a Catholic organization and I was helping with some documents in her office and doing some short translations or something else. One day, when we were at the office, she received a phone call. She told me that it was another believer who called her because "someone" saw "someone" around her. This means that maybe a medium or a *Dáng-Kì* told her that some ghosts were following her. I was very surprised because it is already strange that a Catholic would go to the medium, but it was stranger for me that a ghost was believed to be moving around following a person. Miss Tang told me that working in this kind of association; she already knew of many experiences like that. In her opinion people without a strong faith, maybe because of curiosity or maybe in order to receive some help, go to the fortuneteller, *suanmin* (算命), and in this way, they allow these ghosts contact with them. Otherwise, these presences would not be able to contact them. As evidence of this theory, she told me her story. She

was the last of four children, her mother went to the *suannin* in order to choose the best names for the first three children (two girls and one male), while she chose by herself a name for Miss Tang who was the youngest daughter. Because of this, after their conversion, Miss Tang considers her faith more stable and stronger than that of her sisters and brother.

The ghosts still can be real and of course, they can enter into contact with you, even if not so directly. The interesting point is that many believers pointed out the fact that ghosts exist, but because they are Catholics, ghosts do not have any power over them.

Yi Ju was a very young woman, around twenty-three years old. She was baptized in her childhood because her parent was both Catholics. She was very active in the group of youth Catholics, and like many Taiwanese young people, she likes to talk with foreign friends. When she knew what type of studies I was doing, she told me many stories. Yi Ju told me that she heard many “ghost stories” from her parents. She told me about a girl who could see these supernatural beings; her mother was Catholic but because she divorced her husband, the girl, who received baptism, lived with her grandmother, the mother of the father. One day the little girl saw “someone” moving around the grandmother. She was very scared and suddenly she remembered that her mother taught her some Christian prayers. The little girl started to say her prayers and the ghost suddenly disappeared. Then when the grandmother brought the little girl to the temple in order to consult the *suannin*, after some moments he told the old woman that “sorry I cannot do anything with her because there is a cross on her forehead.” After this event, the grandmother started to frequent some of the Church’s activities. It is not my intention here to ascertain if these stories are real or not, and neither to demonstrate that people really saw ghosts. My aim is to that the symbolic universe, within which Catholics live, is the same that regulates the lives of the practitioners of popular religion. The experiences that they meet every day are the same experiences that ordinary people meet every day, but according to the new faith, the Catholic faith, these experiences are interpreted differently, using the order made by the new symbolic system.

In this way, the ghosts still are real but they are subjugated to the power of the new symbols. This is in my view one of the most important points of divergence with the theory of Sahlins I previously introduced. People not only still use their original cultural system in order to interpret a new event, but use the new symbolic system to re-interpret the old one. In practice, giving a new order of value to the old symbolic system, ghosts still can be real but believers do not need to offer food or money to them, because God’s power in baptism is stronger, Catholics belong to Him, so there is no reason to be afraid of these ghosts. Only if their faith is not strong enough, people, because of their curiosity or whatever, will meet problems. This situation in my view stresses the fact that the complex encounter between two different cultural systems takes place in the space represented by humans. In this

space, different symbols belonging to different systems can arbitrarily – according to people’s own current situation – be chosen in order to solve problems and troubles that people meet in their everyday life.