

TRADITIONAL CHINESE RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN AN URBAN-  
INDUSTRIAL SETTING: THE EXAMPLE OF KWUN TONG - HONG KONG.

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I. Introduction

Simply stated this chapter is about Chinese traditional religion, the forms that it assumes and the roles that it plays in a contemporary urban-industrial community with an almost exclusively Chinese population - Kwun Tong. More specifically we set out to accomplish two major tasks. The first is to assess the vitality of traditional religion in Kwun Tong with particular attention to the extent and intensity of its practice. The second is to show from a basically Durkheimian point of view how the religious situation reflects important social characteristics of Kwun Tong as a contemporary urban community.

Procedurally, we shall begin by reviewing current scholarly opinion on the interrelationship between the urban environment and religion. This will be followed by sections devoted to three key aspects of traditional religion; the cult of ancestors, the worship of deities, and the erection of temples. The data for these sections are derived from surveys conducted by the Social Research Centre of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the writer's field notes gathered during a year's residence in and numerous subsequent visits to the Kwun Tong district. In the final section we shall attempt to show how traditional religion both in its weaknesses and strength mirrors important social realities in the urban community.

## II. The Urban Setting and Religion

"Whenever ... we trace back the characteristic urban form to its beginnings we arrive not at a settlement that is dominated by commerce, a primordial market, or one that is formed on a citadel, an archetypical fortress, but rather on a ceremonial complex for religious expression." Wheatley's (1971, p.225) foregoing suggestion that man's earliest urban centres may have been sacred in origin is in sharp contrast to Cox's (1965, p.17) assessment of religion's place in the contemporary city. "This is the age of the secular city, through supersonic travel and instantaneous communication its ethos is spreading into every corner of the globe. The world looks less and less to religious rules and rituals for its morality or its meaning." By juxtaposing the preceding quotations we do not signal our acquiescence to a unilineal point of view which would assert that there is an inevitable progression from "sacred" to "secular" city. Our intent is merely to highlight the commonly held notion that the role, and even the importance, of religion in the urban milieu has to become more "restricted" rather than "pervasive".

Man's initial transition from rural to urban dweller may have had an immediate effect opposite to the above causing his religion to become more "pervasive" than previously. De Coulanges (1956, pp.126-127) avers that the move toward urban life entailed a broadening of religion's social nexus and, as a consequence, the content of its ideology, the scope of its ritual, and the composition of its localized groups. He argues that prior to the appearance of the city, man's religious behavior was centred on the family hearth around which gathered only the tight-

ly-knit rural based kinship unit. The wider social and political order of the city, however, demanded that the structural boundaries of the religious group be widened, to include the total urban population as its basic unit of composition and of focus. This was in part accomplished through the establishment of a city hearth dedicated to the supernatural protectors of the urban community. The dominant socio-political position of the urban elite was often symbolized through the conferral of ritual office and legitimized through appropriate ideology. Sjoberg asserts that the entente between the urban community and religion was essentially maintained over a long period of time in a type of setting that he has labeled the "pre-industrial city". In such a setting, "religion ... pervades all facets of urban life and religious ceremonies are crucial in integrating the individual into his community" (Sjoberg, 1960, p.256).

The erosion of religion's "pervasive" role especially in western urban regions is attributed by Parsons (1971 pp.71-85) to the influence to two possibly related developments. The first was a movement toward separation of the political order from explicit attachment to any one specific religious organization. This process began with the Reformation and was hastened by the Democratic Revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries. The second major happening was the Industrial Revolution which had a much more direct impact on the relationship between religion and the smaller structural units of society including the central component of most social systems, the family. Role sets became fragmented both inside and outside of the family as many services previously provided or tasks accomplished by a relatively small number of tightly-knit institutions became the almost exclusive preserve of a large number of

specialized ones. Religion in such a setting tended to become the domain of a variety of well-defined structurally independent institutions of the wider society. Thus separated from previous imbeddedness in other institutions religion became a variable category expressible through conscious membership in a specialized structural unit devoted primarily, if not exclusively, to mediating man's relationship with the supernatural. Religion no longer needed be in form or practice an inheritance derived simply through birth into a particular family, geographical region, or cultural tradition.

In Kwun Tong we have the opportunity to observe the consequences of rapid transition to an urban-industrial environment on the religious behavior of a people largely socialized in a tradition that seems better adapted to the rural-agricultural and the pre-industrial settings. Yang (1961) implies Chinese traditional religion's correlation with pre-industrial social forms when he posits that its structure is "diffuse" whereas that of western religion is "institutional". Listing the distinctive features for each structural type he states, "we can discern two structural forms of religion. One is 'institutional' religion which has a system of theology, rituals, and organization of its own, independent of other secular social institutions. It is a social institution by itself, having its own basic concepts and its own structural system. The other is 'diffused' religion, with its theology, rituals, and organization intimately merged with the concepts, and structures of secular institutions and other aspects of the social order" (Yang, 1961, p.20). As defined by Yang the "diffuse" type of religion because it is interwoven with the key institutions of a society would also be amen-

able to being categorized as "pervasive". Also by definition a "diffuse" religion's form and vitality is predicated on that of the secular institutions with which it is interwoven. It would seem logical therefore to assume that in a situation where the secular institutions prove weak or non-existent the religious tradition will undergo a similar fate. Yang (1961, p.374) implies the above conclusion when he notes that ancestor worship, a key component of Chinese "diffuse" religion is doomed to debility and eventual extinction in the urban setting which necessarily deprives it of its fundamental institutional base, the wider family unit.

Kwun Tong as an urban-industrial community offers an appropriate site for examining whether the Chinese religious system automatically mirrors the strengths and weaknesses of the institutions with which it has been customarily associated or whether it admits of sufficient flexibility to form a persistent alliance with the newer institutions geared to the demand of an urban-industrial population.

### III. Traditional Religion in Kwun Tong

Despite the obvious existence of numerous variations arising from regional and social class differences we shall join with Freedman (1974, p.20) in positing that one can speak without undue abstraction or distortion about a single Chinese religious system. Because a fair number of highly readable and readily available works already exist outlining the essential features of that system, e.g. Hsu (1952), Smith (1968), Thompson (1969), and Yang (1961), we shall not dwell in this paper on the details of its composition. What we shall do instead is concentrate on

the expression and vitality in Kwun Tong of three of its key practices; the cult of ancestors, the worship of deities, and the erection of temples.

a) The Cult of Ancestors

While scholars debate the finer details of its elaboration none would take issue with the assertion that ancestor worship is an integral component of Chinese traditional religion. Structurally rooted in the extended family and the patrilineal kinship group it is based on the following three assumptions listed by Hsu (1972, pp. 235-236), "First, all living persons owe their fortunes and misfortunes to the ancestors... the second ... is that all departed ancestors like other gods and spirits have needs that are not different from those of the living... the third is that the ancestors continue, as in life, to assist their relatives in the world just as their living descendants can lend a hand to them."

Our concern shall be with discovering the extent to which ancestral worship is still practiced by Kwun Tong's residents and its current relationship to secular institutions in that urban setting. Before proceeding, however, we must make clear that we disagree with those who imply that ancestor worship is a form of personal religious identification in the same sense as are "Protestantism" and "Catholicism". Our contention is that survey studies which require informants to identify themselves exclusively as ancestor worshipper, Buddhists, or members of a Christian denomination, e.g. Mitchell (1974), ignore a key characteristic of Chinese traditional religion, one which Hsu (1972, p.242) refers to as its "inclusiveness". Unlike in Western "exclusive" religion there is no con-

tradition attendant on a Chinese person doing ancestral practices along with those associated with one or several other traditions. With the above in mind our attention is directed to whether or not people participate in rites associated with the ancestral cult rather than on the frequency with which they identify themselves exclusively as ancestor worshippers.

The primary source of statistical data on the ancestral cult is a survey recently conducted of 818 representative Kwun Tong households, i.e. The People of Kwun Tong Survey (Ng, 1975). Of special interest to us are two questions which pertain directly to ancestor worship as practiced in the households surveyed. The first simply asks whether the husband and/or the wife take an active role in ceremonies associated with the ancestral cult. As revealed in Figure 1 one half of the households contain husbands (55.2%) and wives (59.4%), who profess to be

Figure 1: Active Role in Ancestral Cult

	Wife		Husband	
	N	%	N	%
1. Yes	486	59.4	452	55.3
2. No	<u>332</u>	<u>40.6</u>	<u>366</u>	<u>44.7</u>
	818	100.0	818	100.0

active participants in ancestral rites. A second question did not inquire which specific individuals were engaged in worship but simply asked whether or not there was an ancestral shrine present in the home. Figure 2 indicates that 63.8% of the homes have ancestral shrines thus implying that there are several in which neither husband or

Figure 2: Presence or Absence of Ancestral Shrine

	N	%
1. Yes	522	63.8
2. No	296	36.2
	<hr/> 818	<hr/> 100.0

wife worships but a shrine is present. This makes sense if one realizes that some households contain older relatives, usually a grandparent, who continue the rites even though other family members have ceased active participation. The writer knows of several instances in which a grandparent maintains a consistent devotion to the ancestor despite the fact that all of her children and grandchildren have joined a Christian church.

Examination of typical ancestral shrines in urban homes reveals that most are wooden shelves painted red which can be conveniently attached to the wall or placed on top of a tall piece of furniture. On each end of the altar there is inevitably a red electric lamp shaped like a burning candle. The lamps are turned on in the evening and their distinctive red glow emanating from a multi-storey residential building's windows allow one to make a reasonably accurate count of the number of living units with shrines by tallying the glows from a vantage point on the street. Altars of similar style abound in Kwun Tong commercial establishments. One finds them in such traditional enterprises as tea houses and rice shops as well as in undertakings that are distinctive products of the industrial age such as auto-repair shops and small factories. Ordinarily those found on commercial premises differ from ones in the home in that the former bear in most prominent



position a portrait of a patron deity whereas the latter do not. The altar in the home although it may also be the repository of a deity's statue or portrait usually gives its most central position to a red tablet dedicated to the family's ancestors.

To one familiar with the elaborateness of ancestral tablets found in rural halls or temples, c.f. Baker (1968, pp.105-109), those on urban family altars would appear quite simple. Most often there is only a single tablet inscribed with a general commemoration of all of the family's ancestors. The most common elaboration is a photograph of a recently deceased family member, usually a grandparent. It is rare to find a photograph or any explicit notation of a person who had not been a member of the immediate household. The rites conducted at most such single family dwellings are seldom elaborate. On special feast days or on the death day of a specific ancestor food will be offered, prayers recited, and incense sticks burned. Incense sticks are burned daily at a few shrines but given the crowded conditions of most Kwun Tong households it is not surprising to learn that this practice easily becomes a source of tension with less devout family members objecting to the smell and the smoke created by the incense.

For our purpose there are two facts about the cult of ancestors in Kwun Tong which are worthy of special note. The first is the fact that almost invariably where still operative the cult of ancestors is rooted in and focused on the small household unit, the nuclear family. Seldom has the writer heard an informant mention that he had joined in rites offered for the welfare of the wider descent group since taking up residence in Kwun Tong. The

traditional site for the ceremonies has been the village ancestral hall and/or the large dwellings that housed the more well-to-do rural extended family units. Kwun Tong, however, is almost exclusively a community of multi-storied housing blocks with individual living units barely large enough to accommodate families with several children. Ancestral worship where it persists has therefore altered its diffuse structural forms from the wider kinship unit to the compressed nuclear family. Yang (1961, p.376) contends that the nuclear family alone is not an adequate base for the long-term vitality of the ancestral cult. "While ancestral worship was a vital factor in the solidarity of the traditional consanguinary family, it performed little function for the small conjugal family, which was becoming increasingly common in the urban centers. It is the rural areas where the traditional family has remained the basic unit of social life, that the ancestral cult has retained its vitality."

The second fact is that in many cases there is a lack of family unity even at the nuclear level in the practice of the ancestral cult. We have already noted that there are instances in which only the wife or a grandparent carry on the traditional rites. As we shall note in greater detail below approximately 50% of the children in households where the ancestral rites are practiced join the ceremonies.

#### b) The Worship of Deities

The Chinese pantheon consists of an almost innumerable variety of supernatural inhabitants ranging from historical personages deified after death to gods who were from the beginning mythological. Whereas the ancestral

cult was rooted in the descent group one can argue that the pantheon in its essential features reflects the political structure of imperial China (Wolf, 1974, pp.137-145). Serving the political order was not its only role, however, the pantheon also provided gods who could act as protectors and/or advocates for the devout. Two of the gods had an especially prominent place in the traditional household.

The first was Tsao-shen, the Kitchen God, who was charged with overseeing the family's deportment during the year. His image was ordinarily placed near the stove. Each year on the 24th day of the 12th Moon, approximately one week before the Lunar New Year, his image was burned so that he could make his annual report to the Ruler of Heaven, the Jade Emperor. The second deity was Tu-ti, the Earth God, who was charged with protecting the local region from illness and calamity while also overseeing the population's social deportment. When his shrine is found in the household it is seldom elaborate consisting usually of an incense can on the floor near the doorway or threshold and occasionally a red tablet commemorating the deity.

Because the above two deities and their shrines were common fixtures in the traditional home we propose that their presence or absence in Kwun Tong dwellings is a reliable indicator of the general degree of popularity enjoyed by the cult of the deities in the urban community itself.

Figure 3 lists the number and percentage of positive responses to questions about the presence of shrines to the two key deities that were included in the People of Kwun Tong Survey (Ng, 1975, p.26). It is quite clear that

Figure 3: Presence of Shrine to

Deity	N	% of 818
Earth God	494	60
Kitchen God	362	44

Tu-ti whom Werner (1961, p.527) indentifies as a rural, agricultural deity is also popular with residents of Kwun Tong, an urban-industrial community. His shrine is present in almost as many households as are shrines devoted to the ancestores, i.e. Tu-ti = 494, Ancestral Shrine = 522. Tu-ti's greater popularity than Tsao-shen (362 households) may be attributable to both ideological and practical considerations. If, on the ideological level, as Wolf (1974, p.136) has suggested, we recognize that Tu-ti is more correctly considered a protector of locality rather than simply the guarantor of agricultural prosperity then he can serve this role equally well whether the locale is rural or urban, and, equally well whether the territorial unit be of wide expanse or the crowded quarters of a resettlement estate family. Tu-ti as overseer of the resident's social deoprtment can also, if necessary, subsume the role of the kitchen god. On the more practical level mitigating against the wider presence of shrines to Tsao-shen is the simple fact that his shrine is not as readily adaptable to the small living units of Kwun Tong dwellers as is that of Tu-ti. Many residents, especially those in older housing estates, just do not have sufficient space within their dwelling units to set aside a place to be used exclusively for cooking. It is common for them to use the passageway outside of their homes for the preparation of meals. It may indeed seem quite inappropriate to place Kitchen God's image outside of the home. Tu-ti's shrine, however,

since it can simply consist of an incense holder and a tablet placed on the outside threshold is less problematic.

Although shrines to deities are found in well over half of the surveyed households that fact alone, as was also true of the presence of ancestral shrines, provides insufficient grounds for positing that their cult is actively pursued by all members of the households concerned. The lack of family unity in religious matters is quite evident when one looks at the degree to which traditional practices have been adopted by the younger generation in Kwun Tong, the generation born and/or socialized in the urban/industrial setting. Figure 4 indicates that the traditional rites are actively pursued by only 20.2% of the children in surveyed households. Even if the 29 house-

Figure 4: Children's Practice of Traditional Religion

	N	%
1. Yes	198	20.2
2. No	577	70.6
3. No children	29	3.5
	<hr/> 818	<hr/> 100.0

holds without children are subtracted from the adult total one finds that less than half of the children with at least one parent (457 = one parent, c.f. Figure I) who is active in the ancestral cult and worship of deities follows the example of that parent in religious matters.

#### c) The Erection of Temples and Their Cults

Although the essential rites of Chinese traditional religion can easily be carried out in the privacy of the

home there is a public dimension expressed in the erection of temples dedicated to favorite local or national deities. In the rural setting such structures were often intimately associated with the host community providing space for worship and the holding of elaborate festivals on the feast day of the patron deity. If the community happens to be an important one for an extended region its temple and deity could serve as a focus of religious devotion for inhabitants of smaller, neighbouring communities, c.f. Feuchtwang (1974, pp.275-276).

One will search in vain for such a temple in Kwun Tong. The district lacks a specific temple associated with itself as a bounded locality or even with any of its sub-units. Residents of Kwun Tong who are wont to frequent temples indicate that they simply worship at those temples whose deities are judged most efficacious for their present needs. The most popular temple is the recently remodeled (1973) Wong Tai Sin Temple located in an adjacent district that bears the deity's name. The availability of relatively cheap transport also allows for many residents to journey on feast-days or weekends to popular temples in the New Territories or on one of the Colony's outlying islands. Kwun Tong, however, is not without temples. According to the latest unofficial estimates there are approximately 40 structures that can be classified as temples in the district. The reason for our offering only an approximation of the number of temples will be clear after we discuss their legal status vis a vis the laws of the Colony.

The legal status of temples in Hong Kong is explicitly determined by their conformity or non-conformity to the Chinese Temples Ordinance (Hong Kong Government, 1964,

Ch.153) enacted in 1928 and periodically revised in subsequent years. According to that legislation all temples, monasteries, nunneries, and places where Chinese gods are worshipped and money is collected for such purposes from the public should be registered with the Chinese Temples Committee of the Government's Home Affairs Office and their financial expenditures should be overseen by that same Committee. In some instances the Committee itself actually takes direct responsibility for managing the temples. The expressed purpose of the Ordinance is "to suppress and prevent abuses in the management of Chinese temples and in the administration of the funds of Chinese temples" (Hong Kong Government, 1964, Ch.153). In Kwun Tong of the approximately 40 temples in existence, only two conform to the Ordinance and are thus considered "legal".

Both of the district's legal temples are dedicated to the Goddess of the Sea - Tin Hau and both are located in the vicinity of Lyemun Village well outside of the built-up urban area. One temple is situated inside of the village. It is registered with the Chinese Temples Committee but is administered directly by a committee of local villagers. The other is located outside of the village proper on the near-by seashore. It is under the management of the Chinese Temples Committee. Except for one day a year, the feast day of the Goddess in early summer, the temples attract very little attention from Kwun Tong's urban residents.

Unlike the pair of Tin Hau temples the great majority of the remaining structures were erected by urban dwellers from the "new town". Numbering over three dozen they are considered "illegal" mainly because they are situated on Crown Land belonging to the Government. Several of them

have tried to register with the Temples Committee but have been unsuccessful because their sponsors were unable to obtain leases for the land occupied by the temples. Failure to obtain leases and registration has in no way deterred local supporters from constructing sometimes elaborate structures on large tracts of land. The "illegal" temples which are - variably located on hillsides near large housing estates fall into two further categories which define their unofficial relationship with the local authorities. The first is the "illegal-tolerated" temple and the second is the "illegal-untolerated" temple. The above classifications date from the late 1960's when the Government became concerned about the proliferation of "squatter" temples erected on public land near crowded public housing estates. It was then recognized that some served a rather sizeable clientele and seemed to be meeting the religious needs of estate residents while others were makeshift structures used infrequently by worshippers. It was decided that those in the former category could be "tolerated" as long as the land on which they stood was not required for other purposes while those in the latter category were to be torn down by the Squatter Control Division of the Urban Services Department.

At the time of our most recent inquiry, 1976, there were approximately 20 "illegal-untolerated" temples in the district. These were more often than not make-shift structures of tin and wood which were frequented by only a few worshippers. Many are facilities used by individual religious specialists to dispense sacred medicine and amulets to petitioners. The structures are from time to time torn down by the Urban Services Department but like a phoenix they appear again after a several day interval.



The second unofficial type of temple, the "illegal-tolerated", is of more importance to us because it usually commands a sizeable clientele and tends to be associated with specific dialect groups in the local community. There are presently 18 temples in Kwun Tong designated as "illegal-tolerated" structures. Two of the largest, i.e. Taih Sing Temple in Sau Mau Ping and Taih Wong Yeh in the Tsui Ping Road Estate, claim to have over 1,000 devotees each. In addition to their being located on hillsides another important geographical characteristic of these temples is their proximity to resettlement estates, the housing units generally peopled by former urban squatters, c.f. Figure 5. Their location suggests that their clientele is drawn largely from the near-by estates.

Figure 5: Location of Illegal-Tolerated Temples

Nearest Residential Complex:	N of Temples
Yau Tong Resettlement Estate	2
Lam Tin Resettlement Estate	3
Sau Mau Ping Resettlement Estate	6
Tsui Ping Road Resettlement Estate	4
Jordan Valley Resettlement Estate	1
Ngau Tau Kok Resettlement Estate	2
<hr/>	
Total	18

Another characteristic worthy of note about the "tolerated" temples and their devotees is that in the overwhelming majority of cases the temples are associated almost exclusively with natives of non-Cantonese speaking regions of Kwangtung Province. Of the 18 "tolerated" temples 14 are administered and supported by natives of the

Chiu-chow counties of eastern Kwangtung Province, 2 by residents of the Hoi Luk Fung region which is adjacent to the western edge of the Chiu-chow counties, and of the remaining 2, only 1 is administered and frequented by Cantonese. The dominant role that Chiu-chow and Hoi Luk Fung natives play in these temples is even more striking when one realizes that they constitute hardly more than a quarter of the district's total population.

We suggest that there are two major factors which account for the tendency of Chiu-chow and Hoi Luk Fung natives to erect their own temples. The first is the existence of a marked regional variation in religious practice between Chiu-chow/Hoi Luk Fung natives and their Cantonese neighbours. The former have a custom of communicating with the deities through the services of a male spirit-medium known as a "Ki-tong". Although the latter do have mediums they are invariably females who specialize in contacting spirits of the deceased rather than possession by deities, c.f. Potter (1974). Chiu-chow and Hoi Luk Fung people claim that the temples erected prior to their arrival in Hong Kong which are dominated by Cantonese don't welcome the services of "Ki-tongs". The "illegal-legitimate" temples as well as most of the "illegitimate" ones offer as their primary attraction curing ceremonies conducted by resident mediums. One of the largest and most popular of the "illegal-legitimate" temples in Kwun Tong, the "Taih Wong Yeh Miu" in the Tsui Ping Road Estate, was the subject of intensive study by this writer (Myers and Leung, 1974). Taih Wong Yeh which is a Chiu-chow enterprise boasts three official "Ki-tongs" who while possessed by patron deities administer amulets, dispense medicinal herbs, perform exorcism, and predict the future for petitioners. Unlike their rural counterparts in sections of

Taiwan, c.f. Jordan (1972, pp.68-69), the urban mediums of Kwun Tong do not conduct ceremonies on demand. Because the mediums hold daytime jobs possession ceremonies except on holidays are held each evening at 10 p.m.

The second factor is that shared religious symbols offer a minority linguistic group the justification for establishing a place where the native dialect may be spoken freely and where group solidarity can be heightened as well as demonstrated. Taih Wong Yeh is widely recognized in the estate by Cantonese and Chiu-chow as a Chiu-chow undertaking. Members of the temple committee, the spirit-mediums, the over 150 special devotees known as Tang Shang - altar tenders, and the great majority of worshippers are Chiu-chow. Although Cantonese are not explicitly excluded from seeking the medium's assistance their unfamiliarity with the possession ceremony and the Chiu-chow dialect serves as a natural deterrent, c.f. Myers and Leung (1974, pp.31-33). A much more pointed indication of the temple's exclusivity is found in a recent brochure soliciting donations for the construction of a "Hall of One Hundred Surnames" where the tablets of ancestors can be placed. It is explicitly stated that the places in the Hall are reserved for the tablets of "Fellow-Countymen" and their ancestors, i.e. "Fellow-Chiu-chow".

The theme of linguistic group solidarity is but thinly veiled in the two most prominent and conspicuously celebrated festivals in the Kwun Tong district. The first is the feast day of the mythological "Great Sage Equal to Heaven" commonly known as Monkey, c.f. Wu (1942). On that day which occurs in mid-summer the large "tolerated" temple dedicated to Monkey in the Sau Mau Ping Resettlement Estate sponsors a three day celebration in his honor. A

public playground near the temple becomes the site for a large bamboo pavillion in which a Chiu-chow opera is performed. Chiu-chow spirit-mediums from throughout Kowloon hold numerous possession ceremonies and some of the more experienced perform feats such as walking on sword ladders and various types of self-flagellation. The festival attracts by conservative estimate 10,000 people a day the great majority of whom are Chiu-chow. The second festival celebrated with great public display is the "Hungry Ghosts Festival" - "Yue Lam" which occurs during the Seventh Lunar month. In 1975 there were 13 requests to the local authorities for permission to use public land for "Yue Lam" activities. Invariably the celebration calls for the erection of opera pavillions, the holding of spirit possession performances, and the recitation of prayers for the dead. In each instance the promoters, the organizers, and the chief participants were Chiu-chow. It is evident that the festivals serve not only as a symbol of religious devotion but also as an instrument for promoting and expressing Chiu-chow solidarity.

Even our brief discussion of temples in Kwun Tong reveals an important characteristic of the district's social landscape, the importance placed by a sizeable portion of the residents on linguistic identity as a basis for the formation of sub-groups. The Chiu-chow in particular have employed that principle in the establishment of specialized associations aimed ultimately at strengthening and/or protecting their niche in the local community. Kwun Tong boasts a sizeable array of Chiu-chow organizations ranging from rice-merchants associations to a mini-bus driver's union. The temples and festivals of Kwun-Tong testify to a subtle but significant broaden-

ing of the institutional base of traditional religion for a sector of Kwun Tong's population. For many Chiu-chow and Hoi Luk Fung natives the host institution is no longer simply the family. It now includes that characteristically urban institution the minority speech group, or less correctly in this instance, ethnic group.

#### IV. Conclusion

In this chapter we have touched lightly on only one dimension of the religious situation in Kwun Tong, Chinese tradition religion. A more complete treatment must take into account the residents who have become Christians as well as other who profess no religious involvement whatsoever. However, precisely because of this study's limited scope it has been able to bring into sharper relief the role and, perhaps even the essential fate of a "diffuse" religious system's in a population's adjustment to an urban-industrial environment.

Kwun Tong conforms neither to Sjoberg's (1960) stereotype of the "sacred" pre-industrial city nor Cox's (1965) notion of the "secular" modern urban-industrial metropolis. We suggest rather that it is a community in which a religious system that was formerly "pervasive" throughout the few institutions of a solidified pre-industrial society is undergoing the process of "restriction" to a limited selection of the compressed institutions of a fragmented industrial society. Ancestral worship where practiced has been pressed into the service of an effectively restricted to the nuclear family. The cult of deities is invoked almost exclusively on behalf of the individual and his household. Temples erected in the district are devoted to the promotion of solidarity among minority sub-groups

rather than to serve the wider community. The most formidable challenge facing Chinese traditional religion is the spirit of individualism fostered by the erosion of particularistic values. As we have seen with respect to ancestral worship and the cult of the deities, family loyalty, regional customs and cultural identity are no longer viewed, especially by the younger generation of Kwun Tong residents, as sufficient cause for pursuing traditional rites. The future vitality or debility of the religious system may rest in its ability to perform a useful role for the ultimate structural unit of a fragmented society, the individual.

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