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DEATH RITUALS IN A CHINESE VILLAGE: 
AN OLD TRADITION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL CONTEXT

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Gang Chen, M. A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
2000

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ABSTRACT

Death rituals have played an important role in Chinese society for over two thousand years. Death rituals that followed the elaborated Confucian ritual canons were promoted by officials and elites in imperial China. However, after 1949, the traditional death rituals were branded as superstitious and relics of feudalistic society, and were officially banned. In the early 1980s, as China started its economic reform, the traditional death rituals were quickly revived in rural China. What has contributed to this revival? What do today's death rituals look like in rural China? What economic, political, and sociocultural changes that rural China has experienced in the last two decades are reflected in the ritual practice? This dissertation will address these questions.

The ethnographic data were collected in a village in Chongqing in southwestern China. The history of the village was investigated, and so was its contemporary way of life in terms of settlement patterns, demographics, kinship system, economic life, political activities, and religious rituals. After presenting the ethnographic setting, we center our attention on death rituals. The sequence of pre-burial, funeral, and post-burial rituals usually performed by the villagers is reconstructed. These
rituals are discussed from a cultural perspective that looks into the symbolic and normative dimensions of Chinese death ritual. The symbolic dimension illustrates the worldview of practitioners, and reveals the meanings of rituals. The normative dimension focuses on social implications of rituals, social relationship of ritual participants, and current socio-cultural structure in the village.

It is shown that the basic pattern of traditional Chinese death rituals is well kept in this village, though the performance of many rituals is simplified. The practices of these rituals perpetuate the traditional Chinese cosmology of heaven, earth, otherworld, gods, ghosts, and ancestors, though many younger villagers seem no longer to believe in the existence of heaven and otherworld. This dissertation argues that the contemporary death rituals in the village can be understood as a modified version of the traditional pattern. Such a modification came about in order for the traditional beliefs and practices associated with death rituals to be continued in a changing sociocultural context.
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I would like to thank Dr. Shu-min Huang of Iowa State University, who made all arrangements for me to come to the States to pursue a career in anthropology and guided me to obtain a Master Degree in anthropology. He also initiated my interest in studying death rituals in Chinese society. During the process of the dissertation research and writing, he was always ready to help whenever I contacted him.

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Death is a universal inevitability, but human responses to it are different. How people deal with death has always been closely studied by anthropologists, because "customary responses to death provide an important opportunity for sensitive probing into the nature of human life." (Huntington and Metcalf 1991:25) Death-related beliefs and practices provide a window for viewing a society's social organization, cultural values, and worldviews. With a long-term perspective, this window can also allow us to see mechanisms of cultural change and cultural adaptation to new socio-economic circumstances.

1.1 Death Ritual in Chinese Society: a Historical Review
Traditional Chinese society abounded with various family rituals, such as cappings, weddings, funerals, and ancestral rituals. These rituals conveyed the notions of patrilineality and assumptions about mutual dependence between the living and the dead that supported the traditional Chinese kinship system. Ideas of gender inequalities and social hierarchies that were basic to social relations beyond kinship in traditional Chinese society were also clearly demonstrated through the performance of these rituals (Ebrey
James Watson (1988:3) even argued that the standardization of family rituals, the most important being weddings and funerals, is central to the creation and maintenance of a unified Chinese culture. "What we accept today as 'Chinese' is in large part the product of a centuries-long process of ritual standardization." (ibid:4) Such standardization and increasing uniformity were promoted by the codification of these rituals by Confucian scholars and imperial state, and the popularization of Confucian ideology.

According to archaeological data, burial practices can be traced back to Paleolithic times, that is, 20,000-10,000 years ago in China (Chang 1986:61-63). Archaeological sites at the Huanghe and Yangtze river valleys that were dated to this period yielded burial sites containing pottery artifacts and animal bones, suggesting the existence of the belief in an afterlife (Wang 1982:311-313). By the Three Dynasties Period (2200 BC-256 BC), a complete set of ancestral sacrifice rituals had been established (Liu 1993:41). Both archaeological evidence and textual sources from this period show the importance of divination and sacrifices related to ancestors. People believed in the existence of another world where their deceased ancestors lived. Ancestral rituals provided the living with a means to communicate with their ancestors. Ancestors were believed to possess the power to affect the welfare of their descendants. Even the worldly powers of kings were believed to depend on their ancestors' blessing. Thus, the ability to influence the ancestral spirits seemed to affect the political powers of kings.

---

1 For example, Yangshao Culture (仰韶文化), Longshan Culture (龍山文化) found at the Huanghe River valley: Qijiaping Culture (屈家嶺文化), Majiabin Culture (馬家窪文化) at the Yangtze River valley.
Ancestral rituals also linked kings to their kinsmen (Ebrey 1991a:15). The practice of ancestral worship became the privilege of kings and nobles in ancient China.

The ancestral and other family rituals performed in the Zhou Dynasty (1122-256 B.C.) were carefully recorded in two early Confucian classics, *Li Ji* (Records of Ritual), and *Yi Li* (Etiquette and Rituals). *Yi Li* provided step-by-step instructions on how *shi* (lower rank officers or gentlemen) should perform family rituals such as capping, wedding, funeral, and sacrificial rituals to ancestors. *Li Ji* provided interpretations of these rituals. Some of its chapters contain questions and answers on family rituals, with either Confucius or his disciples giving the answers. Other chapters were philosophical essays on ritual, morality, or government. They became the most authoritative written sources on family rituals for later generations. Scholars in later centuries who wished to analyze or formulate family rituals invariably drew from these texts, directly or indirectly.

*Yi Li* and *Li Ji* clearly illustrate Confucius' attitudes and those of his followers' toward death and death ritual. Confucius did not deny death. He accepted it as a reality. He claimed that all living creatures would die and would be returned to the soil at death. Confucius was not concerned about life after death. He did not care much about communicating with ancestors through ritual performance. He was more concerned with man's *de* (virtue) and good government in the living world. He and his followers believed a person would have an eternal life by acquiring *de*. Therefore, the ultimate goal of human life for an individual was to cultivate oneself with *de* (Yuan 1996:65; Zheng 1995-5-7).

1 "<禮記:祭文>:'生必死,死必歸土。'"
Confucius believed that *li* (ritual)\(^1\) provided a means through which all moral and social orders were attained. Without ritual, no virtues could be perfected. Observing rituals would keep the powerful from arrogance and the humble from exceeding their status. A society in which rituals were observed would be a secure and tranquil one (Ebrey 1991a:14). Therefore, through his teaching, Confucius made great efforts to expand *li* (ritual) from being merely a religious "sacrifice to spirits" into a kind of reverential social conduct through which a person cultivates one's own *de* (virtue) (Skaja 1984:6). He sometimes even attributed great power to proper performance of *li*. When Confucius' disciple Yan Hui asked about *ren* (humanity), he replied:

"To restrain oneself and return to the rituals is humanity. If even for a single day, one can restrain oneself and return to the rituals, all under Heaven would return to humanity." Yan Hui said: "May I ask the details?" The Master said: "Do not look at anything that does not conform to the rituals; do not listen to anything that does not conform to the rituals; do not talk about anything that does not conform to the rituals; do not do anything that does not conform to the rituals." (my translation)\(^2\)

Confucius (551 BC-479 BC) lived and taught in an age of political and social disorder, just before the Warring States Period when China was divided into several states, involving in bitter power struggles among themselves. This was an age when some princes killed their king-fathers to obtain political power and wealth, and the social

---

1 *Li* (禮) has been translated in different ways, such as "ritual," "rites," "customs," "etiquette," "propriety," "morals," "rules of proper behavior," and "worship." *Li* is an ideograph connoting the presentation of sacrifices to the spirits at an altar (Ames and Rosemont 1998:51).

2 <論語: 頓淵>, "克己复禮為仁。一日克己复禮, 天下歸仁焉。" "克己复禮, 非禮勿言, 非禮勿動。"
political structure was rapidly disintegrating. Confucius blamed all these dilemmas to the
total collapse of conventional *li* (ritual) and *yue* (music) established by the sage-ancestors
in the early Zhou Period. Therefore, Confucius advocated vigorously for the revival of
the rituals in order to save and maintain the civilization. *Li* (ritual) thus became a central
concept in Confucius' teaching. Ritual performance became one of the fundamental
means to put Confucian doctrines of *zhong* (loyalty) and *xiao* (filial piety), social
hierarchy and differentiation of gender roles into practice. Confucius connected *xiao* with
*li*. When one of his disciples asked him about *xiao*, he answered: "While parents are
living, serve them properly according to *li*. After they die, bury them properly according
to *li*, and offer sacrifice to them following *li.*"¹ (my translation) Xun Zi, a Confucian
scholar, even said: "In treating birth, rites ornament the beginning; in sending off the
dead, they ornament the end. When both end and beginning have been fully attended to,
then the service proper for a filial son is finished and the Way of the Sage is fulfilled."²
(cited from Knoblock 1994:68)

To ensure that death rituals would be conducted properly, Confucius and his
followers described in details how funerals should be held. The proper sequence of
funerals outlined in *Yi Li* was as follows:

- Calling back the soul
- Plugging the teeth open and propping the feet
- Curtailing off the hall
- Sending announcements of the death
- Taking up the places for the wailing
- Receiving condolences and contributions of grave clothes
- Washing the body

¹ <論語·為政>, "生, 事之以禮; 死, 葬之以禮, 祭之以禮。"
² <荀子·禮論篇>, "事生, 飾始也。送死, 飾終也。終始具孝子之事畢, 聖人之道備矣。"
Putting food and valuables into the mouth
Putting on grave clothes
Setting up the libation stand and inscribed banner
The preliminary laying out
Receiving gifts
The final laying out
The encoffining
Putting on mourning garments on the third day
Wailing in the morning and evening
Divining for the grave site
Divining for the date of the burial
Taking the coffin out of the hole and presenting it to the ancestors
The farewell libation
Reading the list of contributions and gifts
The procession
The burial
Returning to wail
The sacrifice of repose
Placing the tablet in the ancestral hall
The first sacrifice of good fortune after one year
The second sacrifice of good fortune after two years (Ebrey 1991a:20-21)

Another influence that Confucius had on family ritual was his advocacy for a three-year mourning period for deceased parents, during which sons should not drink alcohol, eat meat, marry, or divide family properties. In the *Analects*, Confucius accused Zaiwo of being "unfeeling" or "unhuman" when Zaiwo said that three years of mourning for one's parents was too long. Confucius replied: "Yu is so unfeeling! For three years after he was born, he could not leave the arms of his parents. Three years of mourning is observed throughout the empire. Yu certainly received three years of loving care from his parents."¹ (Waley 1964:214-215) After Confucius died, his disciples followed his teaching and observed three years of mourning for him. The three-year mourning period was thus propagated by Confucius' disciples and became a norm of mourning till the

¹ *(論語* : 阮質), "予之不仁也！於生三年，然後免於父母之懲。夫三年之喪，天下之通喪也，予也有三年之愛於其父母乎！"
modern times (Zheng 1995:449-451). Indeed, in some dynasties, such as the Tang and Song, the protocol of imperial bureaucracy forbade those who failed to observe three years of mourning for their parents from becoming government or military officials (Luo 1988: 109; Zheng 1995:448).

Though Confucius had great influence on Chinese family ritual, he was only concerned with rituals for rulers, nobles, and high-ranking government and military officials. Family rituals of common people were treated as "relatively marginal in early theorizing on ritual," (Ebrey 1991a:15) reflecting the social reality of that time. Imperial government set up strict regulations on the performance of family rituals, especially mortuary ritual, by people from different social statuses. Legally, commoners were not entitled to set up ancestral shrines or to make offerings to ancestors other than their parents and grandparents. Ancestral rituals were reserved for rulers and the gentry class until the Sung dynasty (960-1279 A.D.) when two Confucian scholars, Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, legitimated their practice by common people (Rawski 1988:29-30).

Cheng Yi's best contribution to the Confucian discourse on family ritual was to legitimize that people of all ranks should be able to make sacrifices to their ancestors four generations back (Ebrey 1991a:61). Zhu Xi's greatest contribution to the Confucian family rituals was his book entitled *Jia Li* [Family Rituals], which drew upon the early Confucian classics *Yi Li* and *Li Ji*, and more recent books, such as Sima Guang's *Shu Yi* [Letters and Etiquette], and Cheng Yi's works. *Jia Li* consisted of five chapters—one on general principles and the other four on cappings, weddings, funerals, and sacrificial rites respectively. In the book, Zhu Xi did not discuss the moral meanings of family rituals, or the sentiments that ought to animate the actions of participants. Rather, he gave a matter-
of-fact description of how family rituals should be performed. So the book was easy to consult for people who needed to perform certain rituals.

The major steps of a funeral listed in Zhu Xi’s *Jia Li* are: 1) the beginning of the end: moving the dying person to the main room when the illness is acute, wailing when the dying person passes away, determining the presiding mourner, determining the presiding female mourner, altering one’s clothes and ceasing food consumption, preparing the coffin, sending announcements of death to relatives, colleagues, and friends; 2) washing and dressing the dead body, setting out the oblation, the mourners taking up their specific places to wail, and putting rice in the mouth of the deceased; 3) setting up a soul seat, making a soul cloth, and setting up an inscribed banner; 4) the preliminary laying out: sons and daughters assisting and moving the body to a bier in the hall, wrapping the body with a shroud; 5) the final laying out: the servants, sons, grandsons, wives, and daughters lifting the body and putting it into the coffin; 6) those in the five mourning grades putting on appropriate mourning garments; 7) wailing, presenting oblations each morning and evening, and offering meals; 8) condoling and offering gifts and contributions; 9) hearing of the death and hurrying to express mourning to the bereaved family; 10) preparing for the burial; 11) moving the coffin, visiting the ancestors, offering the contributions, setting out the utensils, and making offerings to the ancestors; 12) setting out the sending-away oblation; 13) the procession: mourners walking and wailing alongside the coffin; 14) arriving at the grave site, lowering the

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coffin. worshipping the God of the Earth, inscribing the wooden tablet, and forming the mound; 15) returning home to resume wailing: mourners carrying the soul tablet back home and wailing on arriving at the house and in the reception room where the tablet is put on the soul seat; 16) the sacrifices of repose: making three sacrifices to the soul tablet; 17) the cessation of wailing sacrifice performed after the three sacrifices of repose, indicating that mourners do not wail now; 18) the sacrifice for associating the tablet: the day after the cessation of wailing, carrying the new tablet into the family shrine and putting it on the seat with other spirit tablets; 19) when a year passes, the first sacrifice for good fortune after which mourners no longer perform the morning and evening wailings, and may eat fruits and fine vegetables; 20) when two years passes, the second sacrifice for good fortune: moving the tablet out and burying it by the side of the grave. after which, mourners may drink wine, eat meat, and sleep in bedrooms; 21) performing the peace sacrifice in the twenty-seventh month after the death, after which mourners take off mourning clothes and resume normal life; 22) miscellaneous etiquette for those in mourning. (Ebrey's translation, Ebrey 1991b:65-152)

Following Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi discarded status limitations for performing ancestral rituals. He explicitly stated that the rites described in his book could be performed by gentlemen without office and by commoners. But he made two reservations. The first was that he carefully specified that rites to ancient founding ancestors of a lineage should be performed only by the heir of a great descent line. The second was that he did not envision each household setting up a family shrine to host tablets for four generations of

\[1\text{ The five mourning grades (五服) will be discussed in Section 5.1.}\]
ancestors (Ebrey 1991a: 106). Zhu Xi emphasized that the heir of a great descent line would preside at ancestral rites, and others should attend as participants.

Like early Confucians such as Xun Zi, Zhu Xi realized that ritual could be used as a tool by government to foster proper behavior. But unlike them, Zhu Xi was "not so much concerned with how ritual taught political hierarchy, but with how it taught family hierarchy, which he saw as basic to morality." (Ebrey 1991a:136) After Zhu Xi died, his *Jia Li* [Family Rituals] was accepted as orthodox by both the scholarly community and the imperial state. It was used as the reference for family rituals.

Besides Confucianism, two schools of thought had tremendous impacts on the development of death rituals in China. One was Daoism and the other was Buddhism. Daoism was an indigenous Chinese religion. It was fully developed by the end of the Han dynasty (206BC - 220AD). Zhuang Zi, one of the founders of Daoism, pointed out that life and death are natural and inevitable events for human beings, like day and night interchanging. He believed that human life is composed of qi (natural energy). People live when qi is concentrated in their bodies. They die when the qi breaks up and leaves their bodies. He regarded life and death as the same interactive natural process, and believed that life in this world is the same as that after the death. Therefore, people should face death as they face life (Yuan 1996:99-102).

Daoism's most important contribution to traditional Chinese death rituals is its concepts of yin yang, wu xing (the five elements), and bagua (eight trigrams) which guide

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1. "大宗師","死亡,命也,其有夜旦之常,天也。人之有所不得與,皆物之情也。"
2. "知北游","人之生,氣之聚也;聚則為生,散則為死。"
3. "天地","萬物一府,生生同狀。"
Daoist self-cultivation and lead to the development of *fengshui*.\(^1\) During the dynasties of Wei, Jin, Nan and Bei (220-589 A.D.), *fengshui* was widely adopted by people to select grave sites and to time the funeral and burial according to the *fengshui* principle in order to gain the highest blessing (Wang 1982:337).

Buddhism came to China from India during the Han dynasty (206BC - 220AD). It finally blended with Chinese culture and became Sinicized. Its concepts of reincarnation and hell provided answers to the question of what would happen to humans after death. The observance of 49-day period of mourning in the traditional Chinese death ritual derived from Buddhism. This 49-day period was further divided into seven periods, each consisting of seven days. On every seventh day, Buddhist monks were invited to read scriptures to assist the deceased in the reincarnation process. For Buddhist believers, reincarnation is completed stage by stage (seven days as one stage) within 49 days after the death (Wang 1982:335). During this period of time, the deceased's worldly deeds will be judged to determine the rebirth of the deceased as a human being, ghost, or animal accordingly. The ritual of observing a mourning period of 49 days had become popular by the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.). Buddhist monks' chanting scripts became an indispensable part of a traditional Chinese funeral.

Since the Tang Dynasty, Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism—the three major components of the so-called "Chinese great tradition"—had gradually merged with folk beliefs and practices (the "little tradition"). This syncretism was shown clearly in the widely-accepted belief that after death, a person would go through trials by ten kings who ruled ten courts in the underworld or hell. This belief reflects Confucian doctrine of filial

\(^1\) The concepts of *yingyang*, *wuxing* and *fengshui* will be discussed in Section 4.5.
piety expressed by "sincerely observing mortuary rites and reminiscing one's forebears." Buddhist ideas of reincarnation and karma, and Daoist concepts of gods and ghosts (Wang 1982:342).¹ The merger of the great tradition (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism) and little tradition (folk religions) fueled the practice of elaborate funerals. By the Ming and Qing dynasties, a uniform structure of the mortuary ritual had emerged based roughly on Confucian classical models outlined in *Yi Li* and *Li Ji*, simplified by Zhu Xi and others, and promoted by the imperial state (Watson 1988:12). It consisted of nine standardized death rites, which are (ibid: 12-15):

1. Public notification of death by wailing and other expressions of grief.
2. Donning of white clothing (shoes and hoods made of sack cloth or hemp) by mourners.
3. Ritual bathing of the corpse, often accompanied by a final change of clothing into burial clothes.
4. The transfer of food, money, and goods from the living world to the world of the dead by offerings or burning.
5. The preparation and installation of a soul tablet for the deceased.
6. The ritual use of money and the employment of paid professionals.
7. Music, high-pitched piping from the *suo na* and percussion from drums and gongs, to accompany the corpse and to settle the spirit.
8. Setting the corpse in the coffin and packing it so no movement was possible and then sealing it airtight in the coffin.
9. Expulsion of the coffin from the community.

¹儒家慎終追遠的孝道觀,佛教的輪迴因果報應觀,道教的鬼神観.
Confucianism suffered a setback at the end of 19th century after China was defeated by Britain in the Opium War in 1842 and had to open up trading ports for Western colonial powers. Confucianism subsequently became the scapegoat of Chinese backwardness. Radical intellectuals launched movements to revitalize the country by adopting Western science and democracy and reforming traditional Chinese culture. The traditional family was regarded as the source of all evils (Meng 1919). Confucian family rituals were considered as superstitious and backward. Hu Shi, an outstanding Chinese intellectual, advocated the reform of the traditional mortuary rituals. In his article "My Reform on Mortuary Ritual" published in Xin Qingnian [New Youth] in 1919, Hu Shi fiercely attacked traditional mortuary rites, calling them as "hypocritical," "savage," and "superstitious." He (1919:577) claimed that all such rites should all be eliminated so as to build a more rational mortuary ritual that fit modern living. More specifically, he advocated a short-term mourning period, a new form of mourning garments (i.e., any clothes worn with a piece of black cloth, such as an armband to signify mourning), no sacrifices, and a simple obituary notice. However, when his mother died, Hu Shi yielded to the pressure from his family and participated in making sacrifice to his mother. Although he refused to wear the mourning hat and straw belt as were required by the local custom, he consented to wear hemp clothes instead of the simple black armband he advocated (Whyte 1988:292). His action indicated that traditional Chinese culture still had great power at the beginning of the 20th century.

In 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power in mainland China. After it had consolidated its rule, it started its ambitious plan to break the old social order so as to transform China into a socialist state. Traditional family rituals, especially death
rituals and ancestral worship, became obstacles to its plan, and thus became targets of its reform. The belief in gods, ancestors, and ghosts contradicted the CCP’s contention that there is no supernatural world and that human beings are the masters of their own fates. The belief in fengshui of graves not only conflicted with CCP’s materialist philosophy, but also affected the government’s plan for public construction. The function that mortuary rituals helps to reinforce kinship ties and lineage organization challenged the CCP’s call for the people to put their loyalty to the party and the nation first. Ritual specialists were looked upon as quacks profiting by false pretenses, and as potential rivals to the CCP’s authority. The concern about whether a person had male descendants to offer sacrifice to his/her soul was directly related to the preference for sons that posed a major obstacle to the implementation of current official birth-control policy. Moreover, the traditional death ritual was considered as a substantial waste of materials and resources, such as coffins, cemetery land, mourning clothes, incense and paper ritual objects, depriving the living of limited materials and natural resources (Whyte 1988:293-94). Therefore, the CCP ambitiously set out to change the traditional mortuary rituals, which were branded as the relics of feudalist society and officially banned from practice. As alternatives, the CCP promoted cremation, and memorial meeting without the sacrifices of food and incense or the use of mourning clothes. Instead, black armbands and small white flowers were used at memorial meetings (Baker 1979:202).

From the late 1950s to the late 1970s, China witnessed a series of political movements, including the Great Leap Forward, the Four Cleanups Campaign, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, and the Anti-Confucius and Lin Biao Movement. All these political campaigns had one thing in common: they were all anti-tradition and anti-
religion. Popular religion and ritual practices were labeled as "fengjian minxin" (feudal superstition), a potent signifier of "backwardness," and a by-product of ignorance and poverty. During these years, church and temple properties were destroyed or confiscated. Many monks, nuns, Daoist priests, and ritual specialists were persecuted and banned from practicing their faith. Religious activities, including mortuary ritual, were prohibited (Wang 1982:69-92). Offenders of the new rules were severely punished. Under such a political condition, elaborate traditional funerals could hardly be practiced in those years, not even secretly due to the visibility of funerary rituals.

With the death of Chairman Mao in 1976 and the return of Deng Xiaoping to political power, China underwent great economic and political change. Now, in the post-Mao period, the control of popular culture, though increasingly more relaxed, has not completely disappeared (Anagnost 1994:222). The state continues to hold a dogmatic line in discouraging folk religion, but its efforts have been mocked by the resurgent vigor of popular culture that has accompanied the economic reform (ibid:224). In rural China, decollectivization of agriculture as a part of rural economic reform started in 1978. It has not only improved peasants' economic life, but also weakened the rigid control of the CCP over the masses. As a result, traditional mortuary rituals reappeared and quickly became widely practiced again in rural China.

In recent years, as a move to enforce national unity, to stimulate patriotism, and to attract overseas Chinese and foreign tourists and investors, the state government even allowed local governments to organize large-scale public sacrifice to legendary Chinese emperors. On April 4, 1996, a few high-ranking central government officials from Beijing, accompanied by the Shaanxi provincial governor, led over one thousand
overseas Chinese and ten thousands locals to worship Huang Di, a legendary emperor who lived approximately 5000 years ago, and who was believed to be the common ancestor of the Han Chinese (Chi. et al. 1996). Since then, making sacrifice to Huang Di in April has become an annual event to attract tourists. Another news release confirmed that the mausoleum of Nu Huo, honoring another legendary figure in Chinese history, is being rebuilt by the government of Hong Dong County in Shanxi Province (Zhang 1999).

When the government is involved in offering sacrifice to the legendary ancestors of all Chinese people, it no longer forbids people from making sacrifices to their ancestors, though it officially still regards such practice as superstitious and wasteful. The government is now facing a dilemma. On the one hand, it proclaims those "superstitious" rituals as sign of backwardness and underdevelopment that undermine China's attempts to present herself to the international community as a rapidly-modernizing nation. On the other hand, it has restored many temples primarily as "cultural treasures" and tourist sites, legitimized some forms of popular ritual, and revived many local festivals to promote tourism and foreign investment (Anagnost 1994:229-237). To solve this dilemma, the government has set up a long-term task to construct liang ge wenming (two civilizations): jingshen wenming (spiritual civilization) and wuzhi wenming (material civilization). The government hopes that the material civilization will lead to rapid economic growth, and that the spiritual civilization, by contrast, will educate the masses to curtail superstitious activities including traditional Chinese death ritual.
1.2 Anthropological Studies of Death Ritual and Their Application to Chinese Context

The study of death-related beliefs and practices has been of crucial importance to anthropology from its beginning. In archaeology, remnants from burials are often the only data surviving from early paleolithic cultures. They have provided evidence of cultural activities for the world's oldest civilizations and also shed light on religious practices of prehistoric people. Mortuary structures have produced impressive and revealing evidence about ancient ways of life. The huge pyramids in Egypt and the magnificent tombs in Greece and China have yielded a plethora of information about the ideologies and values of ancient societies in those countries.

In sociocultural anthropology, interest in death-related beliefs and practices can be traced to the cultural evolutionists of the nineteenth century who attempted to construct grand evolutionary schemes of social development in the world. Edward Tylor and Sir James Frazer, for example, focused their attention on beliefs associated with death and existence thereafter (Tylor 1871, Frazer 1913-1924). They argued that early humans' contemplation of death and death-like states, such as sleeping and dreaming, was the origin of the concept of the soul and that the belief in its continued existence after death lead to the origin of all religions.

The evolutionary approach of Tylor, Frazer, and others has been discredited because of its ethnocentric scheme of universal cultural evolution, its faulty use of the comparative method, and its unsupported speculations concerning the origin of various institutions, beliefs, and practices (Danforth 1982:26). However, the subject of death-related behaviors continued to play an important role in the anthropological study of religion. In the twentieth century, anthropologists interested in the study of religion
shifted their attention from its origins and evolution to the study of basic functions that
religion serves in human society. The functional approach to religion had its origin in the
works of Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, and was developed further in the works
of his students such as Robert Hertz, and in the works of British social anthropologists
such as Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. These functionalists, through the analysis of
death-related behaviors, attempted to demonstrate how a religious system serves to affirm
and preserve the social system by establishing equilibrium and maintaining social
solidarity.

Emile Durkheim (1912) in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* puts forth
the theory that funeral rituals and other rituals, as well, are expressions of the unity of a
society. He asserts that the function of those rituals is to recreate the society or the social
order by reaffirming and strengthening the sentiments on which social solidarity and
therefore social order itself depend. His student, Robert Hertz, in his study of the second
burial in Indonesia (particularly the island of Borneo), also points out that the continuity
and permanence of a society is threatened by the death of one of its members. At the
death of a member, the society, "disturbed by the shock, must gradually regain its
balance." It is only through the performance of mortuary rituals during the period of
mourning after the death that the society, "its peace recovered, can triumph over death."
(Hertz 1960:82, 86) For Hertz, the funeral ritual is a long transformative process
consisting of different stages. His point of view has affected many anthropologists.

The works of the Durkheimian school strongly influenced British functionalists.
For instance, Radcliffe-Brown (1933:285) wrote in his study of the funeral customs of the
Andaman Islanders that a person's death "constitutes a partial destruction of the social
cohesion, the normal social life is disorganized, the social equilibrium is disturbed. After
the death the society has to organize itself anew and reach a new condition of
equilibrium." This view was also clearly expressed by another British anthropologist.
Malinowski, when he observed:

Death in a primitive society is, therefore, much more than the
removal of a member. By setting in motion one part of the deep
forces of the instinct of self-preservation, it threatens the very
cohesion and solidarity of the group, and upon this depends the
organization of that society, its tradition, and finally the whole
culture.... The ceremonial of death...counteracts the centrifugal
forces of fear, dismay, demoralization, and provides the most
powerful means of reintegration of the group's shaken solidarity
and of the re-establishment of its morale." (Malinowski 1954:52-
53, cited with ellipsis)

The functional approach has been seriously criticized for its excluding not only a
large range of data such as indigenous interpretation of ritual acts, but also important
theoretical questions such as how rituals convey meaning (Winthrop 1991:248). It was
criticized for ignoring the role of the individual in society (Doty 1986:46). It has also
been criticized for being incapable of dealing with the dysfunctional components of
religious behaviors and their contribution to the transformation of cultural systems
(Geertz 1973: 142-143).

In 1908, a French social anthropologist, Van Gennep, published *The Rites of
Passage*, in which funeral is regarded as one of a large class of rituals concerned with
transitions from one state to another. He argued that all these rites of passage share a
common tripartite structure involving first separation from one status, then a transition or
liminal period, followed by reincorporation into a new status. He pointed out that in
funerary ritual, transition plays a dominant role.
Victor Turner brilliantly elaborated Van Gennep's notion of liminality. Building on Van Gennep's concept that the transitional phase sometimes acquires a certain autonomy from the rest of the ritual, Turner (1967:93) developed a view of "a state of transition," in which the inhabitants are "betwixt and between" normal social status. Based on his intensive study of life-crisis rituals among the Ndembu of Zambia, Turner sees this liminal or transitional phase as ambiguous, inversive, ludic, and a source of the intensive, effervescent camaraderie that he describes as "communitas" (ibid:94-130).

Turner's works represent a trend in anthropological studies of ritual that shifts emphasis from seeking for function to meaning in 1960s and 1970s. Symbolic and interpretative anthropology developed out from this trend, which have had tremendous influence on anthropological studies of death ritual. They sought to understand symbols and rituals primarily through the indigenous interpretation of the society in question. Victor Turner defined ritual as "an aggregation of symbols" (Turner 1968:2), with the symbols being "the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of ritual behavior." (Turner 1967:19) From this definition, we can see a crucial feature of his methodology, which works from discrete ritual symbols ("storage units," "building blocks," and "molecules of ritual") to their incorporation in ritual systems, and then to the incorporation of such systems in the whole social complex being studied. He stressed the "common diachronic profile or processual form" in rituals, that is, the sequence of ritual acts in social contexts. He treated ritual symbols not as static, absolute objectifications but as "social and cultural systems, shedding and gathering meaning over time and altering in form." (Turner 1974:54) His emphasis on social process distinguishes Turner
sharply from his own background in British social anthropology that focused primarily on structure and static functionalism.

Turner outlined a method to analyze symbols. Symbols, according to him, should be examined in terms of three levels of meaning—exegetical, operational, and positional. Exegetical meaning consists of how indigenous people consciously understand a symbol, as well as the symbol's linguistic derivation, social history, and material substance. Operational meaning centers on how a symbol is used—in what institutions, by what groups, and so on. Positional meaning has to do with a symbol's relationship to other symbols both within a particular ritual and within the framework of a total ritual system (Turner 1974:50-51).

Clifford Geertz advocated an interpretive approach to the study of symbols and rituals. He (1973:5) argued that the analysis of culture is not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. He believed that culture should be understood to consist of "socially established structures of meaning" embodied in systems of symbols. It is through these structures of meaning, these "webs of significance," that we order our experience and make sense of the world we inhabit. Ritual, according to Geertz (ibid:126-141), is to perform a system of symbols which stands for values, codes, and rules, and to integrate two irreducible aspects of symbols. the conceptual (world view) and the dispositional (ethos). Ritual as performance enables the integration of the theorists' abstract conceptual categories and the cultural particularity of the rite. Geertz claimed that the theorists' conception should be based on the "native's view." Their perceptions and knowledge are melded to those of the indigenous people. The medium for the comparison of the two views is a system of
symbols that gives meaning to the individual and social life. Geertz (Ibid:9) said: "What we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to." In a word, Geertz's model in ritual study illustrates that ritual participants act, whereas those observing them think. Thus, the observers' understanding of the ritual behavior should be based on the performers' own emic views. The title of one of Geertz books, *Local Knowledge*, signifies his view of seeking knowledge by starting from the base of indigenous knowledge and combining it with that of the observer.

The influence of Turner and Geertz can be seen in two anthropological books on death ritual: *Celebration of Death* by Huntington and Metcalf, and *Death and the Regeneration of Life* edited by Bloch and Parry. The first, based on the authors' ethnographies of the Bara of Madagascar and the Berawan of Central Borneo, attempts to interpret the relationship between the symbols of death and sexuality and rebirth. The second book contains seven articles that incorporate the sociological, symbolic, and psychoanalytic approaches to explain the significance of symbols of fertility and rebirth in death rituals.

Anthropological studies of death rituals in Chinese society generally follow structural-functional and symbolic approaches. Early studies of Chinese death ritual were incorporated into the studies of Chinese religion. They demonstrated the theoretical influence of Emile Durkheim, as seen in the works of Marcel Granet, C. K. Yang, and Maurice Freedman. Granet, a student of Durkheim, pointed out that the cult of ancestral worship had a central place in Chinese religious life. He noticed that ancestor worship was centered on the family and expressed through filial piety which "a person should
receive during his life on earth, at the moment of his death, and in the course of his ancestral life." (Granet 1975:148) Granet observed that ancestor rituals were important in Chinese society because they reinforced Chinese moral traditions and the bond between an individual and his native soil and the duty to continue the family line. Granet's notion of the linkage between ancestor worship and kinship organization has had a profound influence on Chinese studies.

C. K. Yang studied the role of religion in Chinese society. He found that Chinese social life was filled with magical practices and beliefs. He pointed out:

The Chinese common people have always felt that, even with the utmost exertion, human abilities and efforts alone were not sufficient to guarantee physical well-being, economic success, or family harmony. There was always the profound feeling that success or failure in these respects was not entirely within human control, but needed the blessing of spiritual forces. (Yang 1961:28)

Ancestor worship provided people with access to supernatural forces. Taking a functional approach, Yang argued that mortuary rites protect both the living and the dead, and provide means for a safe and speedy journey of the spirit to Heaven and for comfort at its destination. Such rites please the spirit so that it will use its superhuman power to bring blessings to and ward off evil influences from the living. Mortuary rites also reassert the social status and social relations of the family and reaffirm the cohesion and solidarity of the family group at the time of crisis caused by the death (ibid:34). Yang's analysis of death rituals in Chinese society can be criticized for its overemphasis on equilibrium and societal maintenance, and for neglecting the possibility of conflicts arising in the ritual process (Tong 1987:49). The strength of Yang's analysis lies in its description of the death ritual in relation to the family group and the society. Later studies on Chinese
religion, such as Hugh Baker's (1979), L.G. Thompson's (1979), and David Jordan's (1972), also view ancestor worship as playing an indispensable role in reinforcing the cohesion, stability, and continuity of social groups.

Maurice Freedman based his study of Chinese society on his fieldwork in Singapore, a short stay in Hong Kong, and secondary published literature. He was primarily interested in the relationship between kinship and religion. He noted the importance of filial piety in understanding Chinese ancestor worship. "The supreme act of filial piety owed by the son is the performance of the mortuary and funeral ceremonies for the parents. These ceremonies are the first step in the transformation of parents into ancestor spirits, and the worship of the ancestors is in essence, the ritualization of filial piety."(Freedman 1966:148)

Freedman divided Chinese ancestral cult into the domestic cult and the cult of descent group. The domestic cult is symbolized by tablets of ancestors of three or four generations hosted at individual household, and is established for the benefit of the family. The cult of descent group is conducted in the lineage ancestral hall for all agnatic ascendants in order to link together all the agnatic descendants of a given forebear (Freedman 1958:132).

Freedman also observed a close relationship between ancestor worship and fengshui. He argued that the fengshui of burial is an aspect of the ancestor cult, and we can not understand the latter without dealing with the complexities of the former. Freedman believed that descendants use fengshui of burial to manipulate ancestors for their own benefits. Ancestors in tombs are passive and powerless. His argument triggered hot debates in Chinese anthropology.
Freedman's works are often criticized for his lack of first hand research experience. Further, his conclusions are often too rigid and do not reflect social reality (Tong 1987:54-55). Freedman's most important contribution is that he raises serious intellectual issues concerning Chinese society, which have stimulated many anthropologists, such as Hugh D. R. Baker, Diana Martin, Michael Palmer, Margery Wolf, and Emily Ahern.

Emily Ahern's *The Cult of the Dead in Chinese Village* gives detailed analysis of death rituals based on her fieldwork in Xinan, a village in northern Taiwan. She points out that the obligation to worship ancestors in the village is not only dependent on familial responsibilities but is also related to property inheritance. She challenges Freedman's argument that Chinese ancestors are benign in nature by asserting that the ancestors of Xinan are malevolent, inflicting illness or death as punishment. She argues that the cult of the dead reveals the social fabric of the community and shows the alliances and tensions between groups. Could her findings be applied to other Chinese communities? This will be discussed in this dissertation.

In January 1985, a conference on Chinese death ritual was held in Oracle, Arizona. The ten papers presented at the conference were later revised and published in 1988 in one volume named *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*. Six of the ten papers were written by anthropologists, three by historians, and one by a sociologist. They cover a wide range of topics related to Chinese death rituals such as food, fertility, pollution, gender issues, imperial court ritual in the Ming and Qing periods, and the death rituals promoted by the state in China after 1949. Two findings of these papers with divergent topics are relevant to this dissertation. The first is the conclusion that an
underlying structure is evident in Chinese funerary rituals and that this structure is reflected in rituals associated with settling the soul after the death. The second is that Chinese are preoccupied with the performance of death rituals rather than beliefs. "Performance—took precedence over belief—it mattered little what one believed about death or the afterlife as long as the rites were performed properly." (Watson 1988:4) The six papers by anthropologists were largely based on fieldwork in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Would findings about death ritual in villages in inland China, such as the village where I did my study, be different?

1.3 Data Collection

My interest in death ritual started in the late 1960s when I was a child living in Chongqing City in China. Whenever a person in my neighborhood died, I would always follow the funeral procession all the way to the gravesite, even though there was not much to see because traditional Chinese death rituals were banned by the state during those years. However, the mysterious atmosphere associated with death and people's behaviors at a funeral always attracted my interest.

In the late 1970s, traditional funerals revived quickly across China as the government started its economic reform and loosened its control over people's daily lives. By chance, I had the opportunity to witness one funeral in 1977 when I was visiting my grandmother in a rural village in Chongqing. I was fascinated by rituals performed by specialists at funerals and amazed at how quickly the old tradition came back to life. This experience raised many pertinent questions in my mind: Were there any changes in the
performance of death ritual? Were there any changes in the people's views of death? How did the people interpret the rituals?

In the published literature today, most of the data related to Chinese death beliefs and practices come from two sources. One is fieldwork conducted by anthropologists in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Southeast China (Ahern 1973; Chen 1967; Freedman 1957; He 1995; Jordan 1972; Nelson 1971; L. G. Thompson 1973; S. E. Thompson 1988; Tong 1987; Wilson 1961; Wolf 1974). The other source is from historical archives, such as local gazetteers, family or lineage genealogies, and archaeological findings (Yang 1933; Chen 1934; Ling 1955; Freedman 1979; Wang 1982; Rawski 1988; Watson 1988; Whyte 1988; Li 1988; Luo 1988; Xu 1990; Zhou 1991; Xu and He 1991; Song 1991; Huo and Huang 1992; Yang 1992; Zheng 1995; Yuan 1996). Ethnographic data related to peasants in mainland China, especially in inland areas, are still in short supply. This is simply because the Chinese government has been reluctant to permit Western social scientists to study Chinese peasants ever since 1949.

The ethnographic data for this case study was collected in a village in Northeast Chongqing, China. I made three trips to the village. The time I spent in the village amounted to approximately nine months. The first trip to the village was in the summer of 1992, in which I did a pilot study of the mortuary ritual, and other religious activities in the village (Chen 1994; 1996). The second trip was in the summer of 1997 and the last trip was in the winter of 1998, both supported by a small grant from Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. Participant-observation, informant interview, and collecting written materials were the approaches I applied in collecting data in my fieldwork.
Participant-observation is essential for anthropological research. It requires an anthropologist to enter the community he/she studies where "real life" is to be found (Van Maanen 1988:16), and requires an anthropologist to conduct research in the native setting of the people under study (Fetterman 1989:41). For my dissertation research, participant-observation was the most useful method, because my research involved observations at funerals, graveyards, and temples. The village I chose as my field site is my mother's natal village. Two uncles, five aunts and quite a few of my cousins and nephews are still living there. I spent part of my childhood (from the age of two to four) in the village. Thus, I was not a stranger or an outsider to the villagers. They were happy to see me, and enjoyed talking with me about "good old days" when I was in the village and about my childhood mischief. There was no distrust, no language barrier, no intentional change of behavior or concealment of interactions or activities because of my presence. I was invited to participate in all sorts of activities in the village, including funerals, betrothals, weddings, fictive adoptions, birthday celebrations, house construction rituals, family reunion dinners at Chinese New Year's Eve, a celebration of the Ghost Festival, and a pilgrimage to a temple in a neighboring county. Such acceptance by the villagers allowed me to gain insight into the internal logic of their behaviors that might be evaded to other investigators. I had all the privileges of being a "native anthropologist" who studied my own culture.

On the other hand, as described by Delmos J. Jones (1988:32-35), a native anthropologist has disadvantages. For example, a native anthropologist may fail to notice minute details of cultural events or behaviors. His/her informants may skip specifics in their narration, assuming he/she certainly knows them. They may not take the interviews
seriously and may even have doubt about the research. My informants often asked me why I bothered to study their lives and sometimes looked unconvinced when I explained my research project to them.

To overcome these disadvantages, I tried to avoid total immersion in the village life. I kept reminding myself that an anthropological fieldworker should move back and forth between immersion as a participant and observation as an ethnographer. After I had stayed at the village for three months from July 1997 to September 1997, I found out that villagers' daily activities did not attract me as much as before and I started to take things for granted. I decided that it was time for me to leave the village for a while. I returned to The Ohio State University. I benefited greatly from this break. It gave me a chance to evaluate my fieldwork from a distance, to discuss my findings and problems with my advisor and other professors and to prepare for the next round of fieldwork.

During my stay at the village, I attended two funerals, one for a man in his fifties and one for a woman in her late twenties. Participating in and observing the funerals let me visualize what my informants had told me. I took pictures of every ritual performance and tape-recorded all the singing and chanting of scripts by priests and participants. During the intervals between the two rites, I often asked priests questions about their performance. This turned out to be very valuable in reconstructing the ritual sequence later on computer. Apart from the funerals, I participant-observed some other rituals related to death and the afterlife, such as visiting tombs on Chinese New Year's Day, offering the sacrifice of mock paper money and incense to ancestors at the Ghost Festival (in August), and worshipping deities at a local temple. I joined my relatives in making the sacrifices of mock paper money, food, and incense to my deceased grandparents and two
uncles. This offered me an opportunity to play the role as a filial descendant, to get an insider's view of the ritual, and to experience emotions aroused by the ritual.

Informant interviewing is another technique I used in collecting data. After settling down in the village, I began to interview people on a random basis. All together, I interviewed over 112 villagers. The length of the interviews ranged from 20 minutes to two hours. They were all open-ended, though I had specific questions in mind for each interview. The questions I often asked were "What do you know about a funeral?" "Can you tell me the whole funeral sequence?" "Do you burn mock paper money and incense sticks to any of your ancestors? Why and why not?" "Do you believe in the existence of the otherworld? Why and why not?" "What kind of power do you think ancestors have?" These questions are of the grounded theory type. Strauss and Corbin (1990:38) have argued that a research question in a grounded theory study is a statement that identifies the phenomenon to be studied. It tells you what you specifically want to focus on and what you want to know about this subject.

All the interviews were conducted in Sichuan dialect. Most of the interviews were carried out in the informant's home. I found that at their homes, informants felt more relaxed and comfortable and talked more than they might in other settings. The disadvantage of being at home was that children or neighbors often interrupted the interviews. Many times, children's crying, dogs' barking, cocks' crowing, and many other noises were recorded, which made it difficult to transcribe from the tape.

In one case, I went to interview an old man. It happened that two of his sons were at home, too. They had been working in a city far away, but they had returned home to celebrate their mother's birthday. I took the chance and interviewed the three men as a
group. It was interesting to notice the different views between father and sons. Difference even existed between the two sons who had different educational backgrounds. These were valuable data that led me to investigate further on how villagers of different age groups and education level react to death, death related rituals, and beliefs.

Among all the interviews, four in-depth interviews with ritual specialists were most important in reconstructing the sequence of mortuary ritual in the village. One of the interviews was with a chief priest; one with a hoban (literally meaning person singing scripts with chief priest); one with a eulogy writer; and one with a yingyang master (or geomancer). Besides the verbal data I taped from the interviews, I also collected copies of the scripts that priests used at a funeral. The chief priest became my key informant. Whenever I had problems understanding scripts or their performance, I would turn to him. My close relationship with the specialists and my interviews with them yielded a large amount of data related to the performance of funerary rites in the village that enabled me to reconstruct a profile of death ritual in the village.

1.4 Data Analysis

The second stage of my research was to analyze the data collected. Data analysis is a process of making sense of the data, and finding or making a structure in the data, and presenting the meaning and significance of the data for ourselves and for any relevant audiences (Jones 1985:56). It is a process of resolving data into its constituent components so as to reveal its characteristic elements and structure (Dey 1993:30).

The first step to analyze data is to know the data. What kind of data is being analyzed? How can the data be characterized? What are the analytic objectives? Why are
these data selected? How is the data representative or exceptional? Who wants to know and what do they want to know? These are some of the questions suggested by Ian Dey (1993:66) that help find a focus in the data.

I began by going through the transcripts of the interviews, especially the interviews with the four ritual specialists. They were filed as complete interviews for each case. In order to compare them, I started to look for bits of data that seemed similar and related. Then, I labeled the data, that is, creating categories for the data. I organized the data by grouping similar or related bits of data under one category. Data within each of the categories were compared. Further distinctions were made within each category so that sub-categories were created (figure 1). Proper names were given to each category or sub-category according to the properties or the characteristics of a rite, the ways the rite was performed, and the time it was performed. Rites performed by priests were named by

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 1.** Category and sub-category of death rituals in Sanyuan Village
the terms the priests used to address their performance.

Having categorized the interviews, I compared them in order to check the consistency and variation across the informants. In order to get an accurate picture of the structure of the mortuary rituals in the village, and to check the validity of interview data, I compared the data in each category or sub-category of the interviews with the similar bits of data in my field notes that recorded what I observed at a funeral and in written ritual scripts that priests used at a funeral. By double-checking and cross-checking, the validity of the data was ensured, providing a solid basis for reconstructing the mortuary ritual in the village and revealing the villagers' views of death and death ritual.

1.5 Data Presentation

Chapter Two describes the geographic setting, settlement pattern, demographic data, family and kinship, education levels, economic, and political organization of Sanyuan Village. These subtopics provide background information about the village's physical setting, its people, its history, its subsistence pattern and its politics.

Chapter Three presents detailed description of death rituals in Sanyuan Village, and an analysis of its structure. Both emic and etic interpretation of the rituals are explored. Comparison is made between some rites performed in Sanyuan Village and those at other Chinese communities.

Chapter Four follows Van Gennep's rite of passage to discuss the death rituals in Sanyuan Village. Traditional Chinese cosmology, the nature of ancestors, death ritual and inheritance, and fengshui of gravesites and its implications are the foci of this chapter.
Chapter Five deals with the effect of death on social relations. It examines the relationship between the deceased and all participants including kinsmen and friends. It discusses the kinship hierarchy and social stratification in the village by analyzing differences in mourning garments that the participants wear, relative positions they are placed in a *xiaodan* (list of filial descendants) and in the funeral procession, values of gifts donated to the bereaved family, and treatment participants receive at a funeral. Chapter Five also reveals conflicts that occur at a funeral and the resolution of these conflicts. The involvement of individuals, families, and the community in a funeral is discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Six discusses changes and continuity in death rituals and related beliefs. Social changes exposed in the death ritual are analyzed. Special attention is given to analyzing villagers' attitudes toward their ancestors, the role of women in contemporary rural China, and the state-peasant relationship.

Chapter Seven, the concluding chapter, begins with a summary of the major contents of the dissertation. Then, it analyzes various important roles that death rituals play in contemporary rural China, and discusses the sociocultural structure in the village as reflected in ritual practices. It explores possible reasons that led to the quick revival of traditional mortuary practice and forecast the future of the traditional Chinese death ritual.
Map 3: Changshou County

Map 4: Wanshun Township
CHAPTER 2

SANYUAN VILLAGE: A SKETCH OF THE FIELD SITE

The fieldwork for this research was conducted at Sanyuan Village in Changshou County in Chongqing Municipality of China. Chongqing is situated in the southeastern part of Sichuan Basin. Administratively, it was controlled by Sichuan Province until 1997 when it was designated as a city directly under the jurisdiction of the central government. It is now the largest city in China in terms of area and population. It covers an area of 82,000 square kilometers (Chongqing Municipal Government 1999), with a population of 30.43 million at the end of 1997, of which agricultural population was 24.48 million, accounting for 80.45% (State Statistical Bureau 1998:366). It is also the largest industrial city, an inland port for international trade, and a hub of communication and transportation in Southwestern China. The Yangtze River runs through it. The Three Gorge Reservoir, which is being created by the construction of The Three Gorge Dam on the Yangtze River, is located within the boundary of the municipality.

2.1 Physical Characteristics

Sanyuan Village is situated at approximately 30°04' north latitude and 106°58' east longitude at the northeast edge of Chongqing Municipality. 49 kilometers northwest to the county seat, Changshou Cheng and seven kilometers north to the township seat.
Wanshun Zhen. It is an administrative unit, or brigade as called in the collectivization era, consisting of 18 cunmin xiaozu (villager group), or production teams as they were called before the decollectivization in 1982. Among them, ten villager groups are located on the plain over the Da Honghe Lake Valley and the other eight groups are in the valley by the river, whose fields are often submerged by the flooding river in spring and summer.

In 1998, Sanyuan Village was a farming village in Wanshun Township. There was only one gravel highway running across the northwest corner of Sanyuan Village, connecting the village with Wanshun Zhen (the township seat) and Jiulong Zhen (a market town in the neighboring county about nine kilometers away to the north of the village). A primary school and a middle school run by the township government were located in Sanyuan Village beside the highway. A bus stop was set up about 100 meters away from the schools. Scattered around the bus stop and the schools were two grocery stores, two small restaurants, and a tea house. These structures formed the center of activities for Sanyuan Village. Each day, scheduled round-trip buses took villagers to the downtown of Chongqing Municipality. Minibuses traveled in both directions of the highway, connecting the village center with Wanshun Zhen and Jiulong Zhen. Villagers who lived on the plain over the valley would go to the two market towns by minibus or on foot. For those living in the valley by the river, it was more convenient to take a boat to Wanshun Zhen connected with the village by the river.

The 18 villager groups of Sanyuan Village formed 10 natural villages or hamlets. A natural village with a population over 300 might be split into two groups so that the township government could exercise efficient control. Xiejiawan, where I stayed, was
such a natural village. Composed of two villager groups, it sat at the foot of a hill facing the Da Honghe Lake in the south and surrounded by rice paddy fields on three sides. These fields were terraced to make use of slopes that descended gradually from northeast to southwest and finally merged with the lake.

According to the *fengshui* (geomancy) principle of siting, Xiejiawan had a good site, as the villagers there believed. The *fengshui* specification in building the village compound had not survived. However, it can be reconstructed by looking at the settlement pattern of the village, its cardinal direction, and its relationship with the surrounding environment. This natural village was mainly composed by two horse-shoe patterned compounds, which were attached together on one side, like two letter U's side by side, with the opening gaps facing the south and the backs sitting against the hill (see Photo 1). It was believed that this U-patterned compound was stable and secure from

Photo 1: Xiejianwan from a distance

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floods and strong winds. Squatting on the ground inside the village, one could view the panorama of the lower land in front of oneself.

One of the U-shape compounds was built by a Huang family who were the first residents of this natural village. The other compound was built by a man named Xie Daihua and his five sons at the end of the 19th century. In 1950, when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had firmly controlled this area, the Huangs were labeled as landlords. The head of the Huang lineage was executed, and most of the Huang families left the village. Thus, Xie became the dominant surname group in this natural village. As the village grew, more houses were built around the two compounds. These houses had their own small open courts to dry rice. By 1998, the shape of the two compounds survived. But the houses had all been rebuilt. Cement and brick houses were a recent development and few in number. The majority of the houses had been built with traditional method of plastered mud and black roof tiles, with stone wall foundation. A typical house consisted of a tangwu (living room) where members of the family had meals, entertained guests, and worked; a storage room where grains and preserved vegetables were kept; two or three bedrooms, a kitchen and a pigpen either attached to the kitchen or located very close to the house.

At the centers of the two U-shape compounds were threshing floors of the village, where villagers dried their grain, firewood, herbs, vegetables and clothes (see Photo 2). The two floors were protected by the surrounding houses from the cold wind that would come from the north in winter. They took advantage of the warm breezes typically from the south that would come in through the gaps of the two compounds in summer. They got full sunlight virtually all day in the four seasons of a year. The use of solar energy
was remarkable, saving the villagers a large sum of money and not polluting their air. From a functional perspective, the threshing floor was not only a multi-purpose workspace but also a recreation center where villagers conducted various activities such as wedding banquets and certain funeral rites. In hot summer evenings, after dinner, villagers often sat on the threshing floor, relaxing and enjoying conversation or watching television programs with neighbors.

Another physical feature of this natural village shaped by fengshui was the pattern of roads that led to the village. The village was connected with the outside world by six small paths about three to five foot wide. None of the paths was straight. They were all curved, although it was possible to build straight paths to the village. This complies with one fengshui principle in shaping village landscape that straight roads passing a village
are dangerous, and that straight roads pointing directly to the village are the worst (Anderson 1996:22). Curved roads would protect the village from unwanted visitors (including ghosts).

Bamboo and trees planted at the back and two sides of the village were believed to have improved the *fengshui* of the village. Protecting the village against maligning winds (or killing *qi*), they blocked cold winter wind coming straight from the hill at the back of the village. They also provided shade to the villagers in hot summer days. Besides, bamboo was widely used by the villagers in their daily lives.

2.2 Demographics

The 1982 population census of the Wanshun Township found that the population of Sanyuan Village totaled 2,223 with 1,081 males accounting for 48.63 percent of the population and 1,142 females accounting for 51.37 percent (Wanshun Township Gazetteers:23). In August, 1997, I found that the population registered in the household records of Sanyuan Village was 2,334 with 1,196 males and 1,138 females, accounting for 51% and 49% of the total population, respectively. The possible answers for the decease of the female population were the loss of young girls who moved to live with their husbands in other villages after they got married, and the preference for boys under the pressure of the government's birth control efforts that limited the family size to one child. Villagers valued sons, because sons could both continue the family descent line and provide aged parents with care and financial support.

Another important point about the population in Sanyuan Village is its low growth rate. For 15 years, from 1982 to 1997, the population of Sanyuan Village
increased by just 111 persons. However, the household registration record indicated that 275 persons left the village from 1982 to 1997. Among them, 63 went to professional schools or colleges; 73 found permanent jobs in cities; seven men joined the army; and 132 women were married out of the village. The registration records of these individuals were thus removed from the village, as they were no longer considered as residents. Hence, they were not counted in the population census. Taking them into account, the annual population growth rate of the village between 1982-1997 was 11.58 \( \% \), much lower that the average national population growth rate from 1985 to 1997, which was 19.71 \( \% \) (State Statistical Bureau 1998:105).

There are two explanations for the slow population growth at the village. The first is the rigid government population control policy. Since 1979, the township government started to implement the birth control policy that allowed a couple to have only one child. It rewarded couples who had only one child with cash prizes, privileges to attend school, or to be recruited by the army or other government agencies. Meanwhile, it punished couples with more than one child, except for those who had special permission to give birth to a second child.\(^1\) The economic sanctions for those couples included fines, higher tuition for the second or third child, and deduction of the land allocated to the family. The high cost of having a second child had definitely reduced the number of couples who wanted to have a second child.

The second explanation is the hidden population, which is one of the results of the government's rigid birth control policy. To avoid punishment, couples who had or

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\(^1\) While I was at the village, couples whose first child was physically or mentally handicapped were eligible to have a second child. Men who were the only male descendant in a family were also eligible to have a second child.
intended to have more than one child would usually leave the village and live in cities as
unregistered residents, thus escaping the supervision of cadres in charge of birth control.
Even when they returned to the village on special occasions, such as weddings or
funerals, they would not bring back their second child. They or their relatives would not
even talk about those children. Occasionally, one might hear rumors or gossip that
someone had a second child. But they could not be verified. Those children
could not be found in the household records.

Table 1 indicates the sex and age distribution and education levels of all the
villagers whose names appeared on the household registration records by August 1997.
Villagers who went to professional schools or colleges were not counted, because their
registration records were transferred from the village to the schools or colleges where
they were enrolled. As used in the household registration records, no schooling, primary
school, junior high and senior high school are indicators of education levels. Villagers
who were attending school at a certain level are grouped together in the table with those
who had already completed that level of education.

This table demonstrates that in the 6-12 and 13-18 age groups, all village children,
except four whose education levels were not recorded, had received at least primary
school education. It indicates strongly that parents in the village considered education as
important for their children. Some parents I interviewed even regarded education as a
long-term investment. They believed that education could improve their children's living
standard and when they were old, their children could take care of them better.
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Table 1. Sex, Age, and Education Levels of Sanyuan Villagers, 1997
(Source: Household Registration Records, Sanyuan Villagers' Committee, 1997)

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Table 2: The Percentage of Age Groups in Sanyuan Village
The table indicates that women received less education than men. The total number of illiterate villagers who were older than 21 years old is 254, with 74 men and 180 women. The number of women who were attending or had completed junior or senior high school education is also smaller as compared with men.

Table 2 demonstrates the distribution of percentage of age groups. It clearly indicates the birth pattern in the village. Villagers of the age group 43-48 were born after 1949. The large size of this age group (10.1% of all age groups) suggests that a population growth peaked right after the end of the civil war and the founding of The People’s Republic of China in 1949. The unusual small size of the age group 37-42 (7%) is attributable to the three years of famine from 1959 to 1961, which took away many young lives in the village, as my informants told me. After the famine, the population continued to grow steadily until 1979, when the government started its birth control policy. The large size of the next three age groups (31-36, 24-30, 19-24), which account for 11.6%, 12.7% and 11.6%, respectively, obviously indicates this pattern of population growth. The small size of the age group 13-18 (7.6%), which is formed by children born after 1979, suggests the reinforcement of the birth control policy in the village during the early and mid-1980s. The large size of the age group 6-12 (11.1%) results from the large size of the two age groups (25-30 and 31-36). Villagers of these two age groups were born in the 60s and early 70s: they reached legal marriage age in the middle and late 1980s and started to have children. Thus, the number of births in the village came to another peak in the late 80s and early 90s.
2.3 Family and Kinship

The 1982 population census indicates that Sanyuan Village had 2,223 villagers divided into 512 households, averaging 4.34 persons per family (Wanshun Township Gazetteers:24). The household registration records show that in 1997 the village had a population of 2334 living in 699 households, with an average of 3.34 persons per family. The actual family size might be larger because of the hidden population and migration discussed in the previous section. The decrease in the average family size is further evidence of the effectiveness of the government's birth control policy.

The families in Sanyuan Village can be divided into three types: (1) the single family, which includes persons who never got married, and persons who divorced or lost their spouses; (2) the nuclear family, which consisted of a married couple and their unmarried children, or a married/unmarried person with young children, or a group of brothers and sisters who were not married; (3) the stem family, which was composed of an aged couple or individual and one married son or daughter with/without children.

Table 3 summarizes the distribution of family types in Sanyuan Village.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Nuclear</th>
<th>Stem</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>9.44</td>
<td>75.11</td>
<td>15.45</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Family Types in Sanyuan Village, 1997

Table 3 reveals several important points about the family structure in Sanyuan Village in 1997. First, the nuclear family predominated, accounting for over 75 percent of the households. Secondly, the extended family type was missed in the table. By
anthropological definition, extended family is a domestic unit in which parents reside together with two or more married children. Third, the single family stood out conspicuously.

The dominance of nuclear family at Sanyuan Village provides a sharp contrast with the stereotype of Chinese families. In traditional Chinese society, the extended family was the ideal family type. Since the Tang dynasty, emperors advocated and rewarded large extended families and reprobated those people who sought to divide the family as being heartless and worthless persons and even punished them severely (Zhu 1981:272). As time went by, the extended family became the stereotype image of the Chinese family, and the "ultimate aspiration" in Chinese society (Cohen 1991:16).

Several studies of Chinese villages found that extended and stem families accounted for a significant portion of the total families. The percentage of extended families was 16% in a Hokkien village and 18% in a Hakka village of northern Taiwan (Chuang: 1994:79 & 83). A study by Fei Xiaotong, a Chinese social anthropologist who has investigated the family structure in a village in south Jiangsu Province since 1936, found that the stem family outnumbered the nuclear family in most of the years under scrutiny. In 1984, the ratio between the stem family and the nuclear family in the village was 43.2:39 (Fei 1991:4). Fei (ibid:5-6) argued that the practice of the responsibility system and the development of rural industries and specialized-agricultural production households lead to the rise of the stem family in the village. An investigation of rural families in nine counties in Sichuan Province conducted by the Sociology Research Institute of Sichuan Social Sciences Academy in 1984 found that stem family accounted for 17.75 percent of
the total families, extended families for 8.98 and nuclear families for 59.41 percent of all the families (Zhao 1991:208).

Eric Wolf (1966:70-71) pointed out several conditions that lead to the dominance of nuclear family in peasant society: increasing industrialization in this century, extreme land pressure, greatly intensified cultivation, and the prevalence of wage-labor. All these conditions existed in Sanyuan Village. In the past three decades, China has quickly moved toward industrialization. Modernization of agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology is the top target in the government agenda. Land pressure at Sanyuan Village (about one person 0.6 mu or 0.1 acre\(^1\) land including both dry and rice paddy fields in 1997) and wet rice farming led to highly intensified cultivation. After decollectivization in 1981, many adult men went to work in distant cities, leaving women, old men, and children farming at home. This shift resulted in the increasing use of waged-labor at the sewing and harvesting time when large amount of labor was needed.

Besides the four conditions put forth by Wolf, I noticed that two additional factors contributed to the dominance of nuclear family and the lack of extended family in Sanyuan Village. The first was family division. When men in the village got married, they would either take their shares of the family property and set up their own independent households or stay with their parents for a while, usually a year. In the first case, a new nuclear family was created after the marriage. In the second case, a stem family was formed. But this stem family was usually transitory, with two exceptions. One was that the parents had only one son. The other was that the parents had no sons but

\(^1\) 1 acre = 6 mu.
daughters and one of the daughter married a man and stayed with her parents, thus forming a permanent stem family. I found no incident in which two married brothers resided under the same roof and shared food cooked in the same kitchen. This practice basically eliminated the possibility of forming an extended family.

The second factor was that aged couples, widows or widowers, though registered as living in independent domestic units, tended to live with their sons when they could no longer work in fields. Therefore, two nuclear families would merge into a stem family. But in the household registration records, their residence status remained unchanged. Their family was still recorded as nuclear family. This increased the number of nuclear families and decreased the number of stem families.

Another common practice in the village was that parents lived by themselves after all their children married and had left them. Once they were too old to take care of themselves or one of them died, they would move to live with their children, thus forming a stem family. Many of these stem families were in fact the so-called "rotating stem families."(Li 1967) In an arrangement adopted by sons to support and accommodate their aged parents on a rotating basis, the parents lived with a son's family for a period of time agreed upon by all sons, normally for a year. Then, in a rotating fashion, they would move to stay with another son. In a few cases, an aged widower or widow chose to stay with one of his/her sons who was better off economically. If so, some kind of compensation would then be arranged. Typically other sons would contribute certain amount of money monthly or annually to the son who took care of their old father or mother. As a result, a group of nuclear families and a stem family emerged.
The rotating system has also been found in other rural communities in mainland China and in Taiwan (e.g., Chen 1977:116-123; Gallin 1966:144; Yang 1945:83). The stem family is a necessary means of providing care for aged parents in a society without old age pensions and social security benefits (Potter and Potter 1990:19). An advantage of this system is that parents can avoid showing any special favor or preference to any one of their sons and avoid potential conflicts, especially the conflict between mother and daughter-in-law (Chen 1977:123). Besides, in Sanyuan Village, seasonal or long-term jobs in cities were an important source of income for most families. Taking care of one's aged parents would prevent one leaving the village to work in cities. It was impractical for a villager to bring his parents to cities because his own life in cities was unpredictable and insecure. The rotating system could solve this problem. In the village, I met a man who returned home to take his turn caring his aged mother. His wife and son were staying in the city. He had two brothers who were also working in cities. He told me that when his turn was over, he would leave the village to join his wife and son.

The change from nuclear to stem family indicates that the family structure at Sanyuan Village has not been static, but rather is dynamic. The domestic unit grows from one stage into another as the family member's social and marital statuses change (Huang 1981:21). The family cycle in the village has been of two major types:

Type 1: Nuclear Family→Nuclear Families→Nuclear Families and One Stem Family;

Type 2: Nuclear Family→Stem Family→Nuclear Families→Nuclear Families and One Stem Family.
The major factors that affected this pattern of family growing cycle were the timing of family division, the aging of parents and economic wealth. I did not find any evidence that indicated social status affected family structure of the village. I became convinced that due to birth control, the size of the nuclear family would decrease and the number of stem families would increase, because many couples now have only one son. When this son grows up and gets married, he will have to take care of his aged parents and live with them. thus forming a stem family.

The descent rule in Sanyuan Village was patrilineal. The post marital residence pattern was patrilocal with exceptions for 14 families (out of 699 or 2%) that had no sons and had married in son-in-laws. Kinship organization used to be an important social institution in the village as in southeastern China (see Baker 1968; Freedman 1958, 1966; Parish and Whyte 1978; Potter and Potter 1990). Sanyuan Village used to have a few large and powerful lineages. A lineage, as defined by Hugh D R Baker (1979:49), basically consisted of a group of males who were all descended from a common ancestor, who lived together in one settlement, who owned property in common, and who were all nominally under the leadership of the man most senior in generation and age. Even by 1998, six out of the eighteen villager groups that composed Sanyuan Village as an administrative unit were named after certain family surnames. The natural village where I stayed is a good example. Its name is Xiejiawan, which literally means "the village of the Xie families." The Xie was the largest kin group in this natural village. The village household records indicated that in 1997, out of 79 households. Xie was the surname for 27 households, accounting for 34 percent.
Before 1949, the Xies had an ancestral hall that hosted their *jiashen* (family gods). They had a written lineage genealogy. Each year in April at Qingming Festival, the Xies from Xiejiawan and two other villages not far away would meet in the ancestral hall, making sacrifice to their ancestors and other family gods. A large feast would be prepared. This activity was called locally as "Ci Qingming Huiui." which literally means "eating Qingming Festival." All the male descendants of the Xie lineage would go on a pilgrimage to their ancestral tombs at two different locations about twenty kilometers away. They would sweep the tombs and pull out weeds from the tombs, and offer sacrifices of food, incense, and mock paper money. The cost of the feast and pilgrimage would be shared by all the families in the Xie lineage.

The structure of the Xie lineage before 1949 coincided with an explanatory model for traditional Chinese kinship proposed by Maurice Freedman (1958, 1966), who was a pioneer and leading figure in studying Chinese kinship organization. According to Freedman, lineage and lineage segments constituted the very important units of social organization in the countryside in southeastern China. The internal structure of a lineage was like a pyramid. At the top was the lineage followed by sublineages. At the third level were extended families. Nuclear families were at the bottom of the pyramid. Lineage might be grouped into wider agnatic or corporate units by the similarity of surname or by intermarriage. The formation of the Xie lineage followed this model. The sublineages of the three brothers and their families living in three different villages merged and formed a Xie lineage (see figure 1).
This outcome might not be a simple coincidence, for the ancestors of the Xie lineage were from Guangdong Province in southeastern China. When migrating to Sichuan Province, they might have brought their kinship system with them. However, after 1949, the lineage collapsed. The land reform launched by the government in 1951 curtailed the lineage power by removing its land base. The ancestral hall was confiscated in 1950 and turned into a communal room for the village. The "chi qingming hui" was never held again. The lineage had ceased functioning as a social institution. Its leadership was replaced by centralized government institutions. The Xies living in the other two villages were relocated in 1959 when a dam was built on the Da Honghe River to produce electricity and they gradually lost contact with the Xies at Xiejiawan. Families with other surnames whose houses were submerged in the river were moved to settle in Xiejiawan.

Figure 2: The Pedigree of the Xie Lineage
They outnumbered the Xie families. During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), even the Xies lost their genealogy. *Jiazu* (lineage) as a social unit was a remote past for most of the Xies. Only elders could trace their kinsmen above four generations. In recent years, there has been a revived interest in reconstructing the lineage genealogy. It was a topic often mentioned by the Xie elders. In 1997, the roof and front wall of the *gongfang* (communal room), which used to be the ancestral hall for the Xie lineage, were repaired. The money came from the shares that all the Xie families had in selling one collective house. The *gongfang*, though still used as storage room for the Xies, had an altar that honored the *jiashen* (family gods) of the Xies.¹ Sacrifice of incense and mock mock paper money was offered to the gods by individual families on important occasions such as Chinese New Year or Qingming Festival. There were no lineage-wide activities.

Other anthropologists (e.g., Parish and Whyte 1978; Potter and Potter 1990) who studied the kinship and community organizations in rural Guangdong province since 1949 also found both changes and continuities in family and kinship system. They argued that the lineage system was replaced by the collective production team and brigade, which was roughly structured around the old natural villages and lineages (Parish and Whyte 1978:304; Potter and Potter 1990:257). They pointed out that peasant households were still the basic social and economic units.

Decollectivization of agriculture, which started in the early 1980s, has strengthened family and kinship ties (Potter and Potter 1990:336). The implementation of the household responsibility system has turned every peasant household into an economic

¹ *Jiashen* will be discussed in Section Two of Chapter Six.
unit directed by the male head of the family. Above the household, the close patrilineal
ingroup has now taken the place of the collective as the major group in the organization
of agricultural production. The collectives, after allotting their land and other production
resources to individual households, now remain as the "rentier unit." collecting rent from
collective property—fishponds, orchards, and small rural industries they lease out, and
dividing the rent income among the member households at the end of the year (ibid:266-
267). This is exactly how lineage property was managed before 1949. Corporate property
reinforced lineage solidarity. Simultaneously, traditional religious rituals, such as those at
ancestral halls and tombs, re-emerged. Potter and Potter (ibid:268) adopted Marx's view
that "ideas alone, unreinforced by material interests, are never determinants of social
history" and that "basic change in a society can never take place without a fundamental
revolution in its economic base—especially in the forces of production." They argued that
the persistence of Chinese rural kinship structure over the past three decades only
demonstrates that the changes in the mode of production in rural China since 1949 were
never sufficient to bring about changes in the social and cultural superstructure. They
argued that one reason for that was the inefficiency of collective production which
resulted in low quality products.

In Sanyuan Village, the decollectivization put the nuclear family, not the extended
family or patrilineal lineage, as an independent economic unit in charge of organizing
agricultural production. When a nuclear family needed help in farming, it often turned to
the wife's brothers or sisters for help or hired farm hands from other villagers. Some
families also practiced labor exchange with other families in the village. Lineage had not
revived as an economic and political unit. For my informants, restoring the communal
room and rewriting genealogy would help young people remember their root. Zhang Xiaojun (1999:16) came up with similar findings in his study of the family and lineage in South China. He pointed out that in the post-Mao era, the family and lineage have developed in different directions. The family has moved toward a smaller scale nuclear family type. The "revived" lineage has evolved into localized mass organization. Potter and Potter exaggerated the economic and political roles of lineage in rural China today.

2.4 Social Change Under Socialism

Wanshun Township, in which Sanyuan Village is located, came under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in December 1949. In 1950, with the establishment of the peasants' association, and people's government, the CCP started a campaign against ruthless landlords, local bullies, and counter-revolutionaries. Across the whole township, 33 such persons were executed and many others were either sent to prison or forced to reform themselves under the supervision of the people (Wanshun Township Gazetteer: 162). This campaign paved the way for the land reform that was launched in 1951.

The land reform assigned a class label to all the residents according to their economic status and occupation at that time. The labels included "poor peasant," "middle peasant," "rich peasant," and "landlord." Landlords were brought to class struggle meetings, and most of their properties were confiscated. The rich peasants were forced to sell to the government the land that they had leased to others or that was considered as more than enough to support their families. As a result of the land reform, the landlords and rich peasants, who accounted for 10.5% of the population but owned 61.9% percent of the arable land before 1949, now only possessed 8.9% percent of the land in Wanshun.
Township (Ibid:165-66). Landless peasants became landowners. The old social hierarchy was changed completely.

In 1952, after the land reform, the peasants were encouraged to organize *huizhucu* (mutual-aid groups) so as to incorporate their production and exchange labor. In 1954, the mutual-aid groups were replaced by *chuji nongye shengchan hezuoshe* (lower-level agricultural producers' cooperative), in which land was still owned privately, but the land was placed at the collective's disposal. Water buffalo and large farming equipment were handed to the collective and the owners were compensated with certain amount of cash money or grains. The distribution of the collective's income was based on land and labor that each household contributed at the ratio of 3:7 (30% for land and 70% for labor input) (Wanshun Township Gazetteer: 170-171). In 1956, the lower-lever cooperatives were replaced by *gaoji nongye shengchan hezuoshe* (higher-level agricultural producers' cooperative). Under this new system, private ownership of land and other production resources were abolished. Members received their shares of the collective's income according to the labor they performed for the collective. This labor was measured by a *gongfen* (workpoint) system that rewarded every piece of work in the agricultural production process with certain number of workpoints. Each workpoint was assigned a specific cash value after the collective's income had been calculated and the total number of workpoints earned by all members in a year were divided into the profit the collective made, thus establishing the current worth of one workpoint. They were the basis for the distribution of the collective's income in cash and kind at the end of each year (Potter and Potter 1990:62-63).
With the establishment of higher-level agricultural producers' cooperative and workpoint system, the socialist reform of private ownership was completed in Shanyuan Village. In 1958, the Chinese government mobilized peasants with an intense campaign to move rural China directly into a communist stage of society. This was known as "The Great Leap Forward Movement." Across the country, peasants were placed into 26,000 communes. Locally, Wanshun Township together with three neighboring townships formed one giant commune that consisted of 66 higher-level cooperatives. The difference between the agricultural production cooperative and commune was that the former was mainly an agricultural production unit, whereas the latter not only managed agricultural production, but also served political, social, educational, commercial, and industrial functions. The commune even collected grain from every household and set up public dining halls for members to dine in freely so as to save their time that was spent in cooking. This attempt failed miserably. Three years of natural calamity from 1959 to 1961 reduced agricultural yields and caused malnutrition among the commune members. In 1961, this giant commune was broken into four smaller communes. Sanyuan Village became one of the 18 production brigades under Wanshun People's Commune. It was named as "Sanyuan Brigade." The public dining halls were shut down, and individual household provided meals for its own members.

Since 1958, the villagers in Sanyuan Brigade, like people in other parts of China, went through numerous political campaigns, one after another. The major ones included the Great Leap Forward (1958-61), the Four Cleanups Campaign (1963-1966), and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). These campaigns greatly affected the social life of rural masses which directly affected religious life. Temples and shrines were
either destroyed or turned into schools or office buildings. Lineage ancestral halls were
confiscated. Buddhist monks and Daoist priests were forced to leave their temples and
resume secular life. Traditional rituals, such as wedding and funeral rites, were banned.
Religious activities were prohibited and practitioners were persecuted. It was not until
1978 when the Chinese government started its rural economic reform that the government
loosened its rigid control over the rural masses. Religious activities, though still
considered as superstitious, were tolerated by the government. Many traditional rituals
were revived. The life story of one of my key informants confirmed what had happened
in the village during this period of time. He had been a priest in a Daoist temple before
1949. In 1954, he was forced to leave the temple and start a secular life. Since he was
literate, he was assigned a teaching position at a primary school in the village. He married
and had children. For about three decades, he did not dare to talk about his religion or
conduct Daoist rituals. In 1988, he retired from the primary school. He began to perform
funerary rituals to families that paid him. By 1997, he had made a reputation as a good
priest and had trained five apprentices.

In 1982, Sanyuan Brigade adopted the household responsibility system and
divided up its arable land and contracted it to each individual household. Though
ownership of the land still belonged to the state, the villagers had the right to organize
production and the duty to fulfil the production quota set up by the local government. In
1984, the commune system was officially dismantled. Wanshun People's Commune was
turned into Wanshun Township. Sanyuan Brigade was changed back to Sanyuan Village
as an administration unit with four village cadres: a party secretary, a cunzhang (village
head), an accountant, and a person in charge of birth control. Production teams were
replaced by villager groups and each had only one cadre called *cummin xiaoizu zhug* (group leader). In 1994, Sanyuan Village had its first free election of village leaders in its history. Their term of service was five years. With the decollectivization, households resumed its traditional roles as social and economic units in the village.

2.5 The Economy

In 1998, Sanyuan Village had no modern large-scale industries. It had a small brick factory with only one traditional kiln and a small liquor brewery which were contracted to two households. The economy of the village was based on rice farming. The productivity of rice farming is dependent on three ecological conditions: water, solar energy, and soil. Sanyuan Village is located in the north subtropical climate zone. It has four distinct seasons. In a typical year, winter is warm. Spring comes early in March. The region has abundant rainfall in early summer, but its midsummer is hot and often dry. Autumn is often cloudy and rainy. It has a long frost-free period. The humidity is high. It is often cloudy or foggy, reducing the amount of sunshine it receives during the daytime (Changshou County Gazetteer: 100-101). The average annual temperature in this area from 1949 to 1985 was 17.7 °C. The record highest daily temperature was 44°C in August, 1951, and the lowest record -6.1°C in January 1956 (ibid:102). The annual rainfall was 1165.2 millimeters with 2064.5 millimeters in 1970 as the highest record, and 836.5 millimeters in 1961 as the lowest record. The average rainfall in spring was 347.7 millimeters, in summer 424.3 millimeters, in fall 314.8 millimeters, and in winter 65.6 millimeters (ibid:103-104). The average number of frost-free days in a year was 331 days (ibid:107). The warm climate and plentiful rainfall in spring, summer, and fall, which
happen to be the growing season of paddy rice, are very favorable for agricultural production. Floods of the Dahonghe Lake occasionally submerge fields surrounding it. Summer drought affects fields on slopes or the plain over the valley.

Because of the warm weather and abundant rainfall, the land can be used all year round. The land was classified as *tian* (wet rice paddy) and *di* (land on slopes that cannot be turned into wet rice paddy either because it cannot hold water or because the slopes are too steep). In 1997, Sanyuan Village had 1372 *mu* (about 228.67 acres) arable land with 961 *mu* (160.17 acres) of rice paddies, 364 *mu* (60.67 acres) of dry land, and 47 *mu* (7.83 acres) of forest land (Wanshun Township Gazetteer:16). The average cultivated land a villager had was about 0.6 *mu* or 0.1 acre. For a household with four members, it had about 2.4 *mu* (or 0.4 acre) land including rice paddies and dry land fields. The land was scattered and fragmented. To assure fairness, every household was assigned small pieces of rice paddies or dry land in areas different in soil quality, access to water resource, and distance from the village compound. Land fragmentation made farming more time consuming because villagers had to move around the whole village to cultivate their land.

Due to land scarcity, villagers made intensive use of their land. They practiced multiple cropping. Rice, corn, and wheat were major grain crops, and sweet potato was the major tuber crop. Broadbeans, green beans, peas, sorghum, and soybeans were secondary crops. Rape seed, Chinese radish, ginger, chili pepper, tobacco were major cash crops.

Rice was the most important crop in the village because of its high yield and the villagers' preference for rice in their diet. Rice appeared in China's agriculture at least
6,900 years ago according to archaeological evidence (Luo 1990:309). Wet rice cultivation requires a unique ecological adaptation that involves leveling the land, building bonds for boundaries and water conservation to make rice paddies, and channeling irrigation water by digging ditches, ponds, and wells, all of which change the natural landscape (Huang 1981:45). Small-scale rice paddies which are molded to the contour of the natural environment preserve soil and prevent erosion (Moore 1990:2). The sustainable wet rice cultivation is dependent on "the delicate balance of human labor, irrigation water, nutrient content in the soil, weeds, and the rice itself." Any change in one of these factors will eventually lead to readjustments among others to maintain the equilibrium in the ecosystem of wet rice farming (Huang 1980:59).

In Sanyuan Village, rice farming was of the irrigated paddy type. Seedling transplanting was practiced. This technique allowed maturity of rice two to three weeks earlier since seedlings could be grown in protected plastic-covered beds in cool early spring weather. This farming technique made possible two crops of rice in the village. From 1957 to 1981, the villagers planted two crops of rice a year. But since 1982, the introduction of one crop of hybrid rice replaced two-crop rice production, because the yield for the one-crop hybrid rice was higher than that of the two crops of rice together. In 1997, the township government, through its Office of Agricultural Technology, advocated zaisheng dao (rice reproduction) technique. Cheaper fertilizer was provided as incentive. After the harvest of hybrid rice, peasants were encouraged not to till their rice fields and to leave rice stalks in the fields. These stalks would reproduce rice. Though the yield was very low (ranging from 50-200 kilogram per mu. as compared with 400-500 kilogram per mu for the first crop), it saved seeds, manure, pesticide, and labor. The
intensive cultivation of the first crop of rice was shifted to extensive farming of the second crop of *zaisheng dao*. However, due to the low yield and low quality of this crop of rice, many households without sufficient labor force gave it up. Paddies were simply left fallow for green manure.

In November, wet rice paddies were plowed and filled with water. They would lie fallow until April. Rice paddies that could not hold water would be planted with winter crops, such as wheat, barley, rape seed, or broadbeans. These winter crops would all be harvested in March or April. In March, rice paddies were plowed and leveled. Seedling nursery was performed in specially selected paddies covered with plastic sheets. In early April, seedlings were transplanted to other rice paddies. Then, the paddies were filled with water. Chemical fertilizer and pesticide were sprayed over the rice. In mid-August, rice was harvested and dried. Rice stalks might be left in paddy fields to reproduce rice that would be harvested in late October or they were turned over in the fields as a green fertilizer, thus completing the cycle of wet rice cultivation in the village.

As for the *di* (land), it was used all the year round. Intercropping and relay-cropping on the dry land were commonly practiced. Villagers would sow wheat seeds in rows on their land in October. Between each row, a space about one meter wide would be saved, which would later be planted with vegetables for human and pig consumption. In March, before the rice planting season started, the vegetables would be collected and corn and soybeans would be planted side by side in the space left by the vegetables. In April, wheat would be harvested. The remaining space would be soon taken by sweet potatoes planted in May. In July, corn would be harvested and corn stalks would be removed from the land. Soybeans that were planted together with the corn were now exposed to direct
sunshine and rainfall. In early October, sweet potatoes would be gathered in and wheat would be planted in their place. In late October, soybeans would be harvested and the seeds of green vegetables would be sown in the land, thus starting a new cycle of farming on the dry land. Wheat was intercropped with vegetables, and corn and soybean were intercropped with sweet potato. Each year, the land would be rotated. The land for wheat and sweet potato in the previous year would be used to grow corn, soybean, and vegetables.

The practice of intercropping in the village is ecologically sound. Wheat, corn, sweet potato, soybeans, and other plants are at different stages of maturity. Therefore, they have different needs for soil, water, nutrition and human labor. Moreover, the low growing plants, such as soybeans, squash, and green beans, help stabilize the soil, provide a needed ground cover, reduce soil erosion, improve the soil as a green manure crop, and add to the food supplies (Wittwer 1987: 178). The plant canopy that covers fields shades weeds and controls their growth. This system also exchanges nitrogen in the soil by legume fixation which is used by the plants.

To summarize, the agricultural production in Xie Village had two multiple cropping systems. In the tian (wet rice paddy), rice (one to two crops of rice a year) was cultivated. For those paddies that could not hold water, wheat, barley, rape seeds, broadbean, or vegetables were planted. On the di (dry land), spring corn, intercropped with sweet potatoes and soybeans, was followed by wheat, barley, rape seeds, broad beans, or vegetables. These two systems made full use of every piece of the arable land in the village. Even ridges between rice paddies were used all the year round to grow sorghum, beans, or vegetables. Farming in these two systems was labor intensive. Since
the village had no tractors, all the farming work, such as tilling the soil, spreading manure or fertilizer, weeding, plowing rice paddies, transplanting, harvesting, and so forth were done by hand and water buffalo. The only electricity-powered machines they used were *tuoguji* (a machine that separate rice grains from stalks) and *damiji* (a machine that separate husks from rice grain).

To ensure high productivity and to maintain fertility of the soil and to lower farming costs in these two systems, the villagers used hybrid crop seeds promoted and provided by the local government. They practiced multiple cropping and used organic fertilizer (pigs' and human waste, green manure, and crop residues) together with a certain amount of chemical fertilizer. They practiced crop rotations and nutrient cycling. Organic manure was generally used as basal fertilizer in Xie Village, while the inorganic ones served as top dressing. However, as my informants told me, there was a steadily increasing use of chemical fertilizer, especially for the crops grown on the land. According to them, the chemical fertilizer improved yield. In 1997, the average yields for rice was 500 kilogram per *mu*; for corn 400 kilogram per *mu*; for wheat 150 kilogram per *mu*; for sweet potatoes 1000 kilogram per *mu*; for soybeans 60 kilogram per *mu*.

Besides farming, every household in the village raised two to six pigs. One or two would be consumed by the family, while the rest would be sold for profits. Pig's waste, rich in nitrogen, was the major manure in the village. Every household raised chickens. Some households raised ducks for sale. Fishery was also well developed in those natural villages located by the lake. Fishing ponds were constructed on the lakefront that was often submerged by flood. Even the Dahonghe Lake within the village territory was contracted to 10 households to raise fish for five years. Strong nylon nets divided up the
lake. The profit of raising fish was much greater than that of farming the land. Because of 
this significant difference, there was fierce competition in bidding for the contract to raise 
fish in the lake from the township government. The positive aspect of fishery was that it 
made money for a few families and the local government through its leasing the lake. 
Next to agriculture, fishery became the second largest revenue source for the township 
government. The negative impact was that fishery polluted the water. To enrich the water 
with nutrition, tons of fertilizer and organic manure were dumped into the lake to nourish 
aquatic plants. The self-interest of the profit motive overcame the need to maintain a 
balanced lake ecosystem. How this development affects people and their environment 
needs further investigation by employing human ecological methodology. But one thing 
is clear, just as Moore (1990:279) says: "Finding a balance between environmental 
preservation and culturally prescribed material luxuries will be the central problem of the 
twenty-first century."

Fishery, though profitable, generated income for only a few powerful households 
in the village. For the rest of the households, working temporarily in cities was an 
important source of income. It was very common for men and young unmarried women 
to leave the village to work in cities. Many of them would return to the village during 
busy farming seasons, particularly rice planting and harvesting times. They would bring 
or mail back the money they earned to help the family's finances. Thus, to make village 
life viable, villagers had to find opportunities not grounded in the local economy.
CHAPTER 3

DEATH RITUALS IN SANYUAN VILLAGE

In Sanyuan Village, every family now holds elaborate funerals for its members who die, excepting children who die before reaching adulthood. They are regarded as guī erzī (son of spirits) or guī nuèr (daughter of spirits) and are doomed to die. Any family who gives a deceased child a full formal funeral will suffer from misfortune or even the death of other members in the family. This way of dealing with the death of young children is quite common in Chinese communities and has been reported by Bryson (1900) in Wuchang, Coltman (1891) in Shangdong, Cormack (1935) in Beijing, and Graham (1961) in Sichuan, Tong (1987) in Singapore, and Wolf (1974) in Taiwan.

3.1 Preparation for Death

At Sanyuan Village, preparation for death usually starts when a person is more than sixty years old. A coffin might be made or purchased for him/her. The cost of the coffin is usually shared by all children, including married-out daughters. In the communal room for the Xie lineage in which the Xies hosted their family gods, I found three coffins. Their owners said that they felt secure and happy after their children had purchased coffins for them. They were sure now they would have a good coffin to be buried in. Since a coffin is the most expensive single item at a funeral, with the price ranging from
500 to 1000 Chinese yuan (approximately 60-120 US$), they were now confident that their children would be able to cover all the expenses of their funerals. As for their children, they purchased a coffin for their aged parent not only to please them but also to show to the community that they had observed their filial piety and had taken great care of their aged parent.

Another common practice is that an aged villager collects coffin-money from his/her children and saves it in a bank or entrusts it to a son. When he/she is very sick and going to die, the money will be used to purchase a coffin from a coffin shop at a local market town about eight to 15 kilometers away. In this way, the family does not have to keep a coffin at home.

Besides purchasing a coffin, many aged villagers have their _shouyi_ (burial clothing) sewn by a local tailor in the eventuality of their death. The number of layers of _shouyi_ (one layer containing a jacket and a pair of pants) depends on the wealth of the family. It is always an odd number, varying between three and nine layers. Seven is considered the ideal, because _qi_ (seven) is a homophone for the abundance of descendants, harmony, and prosperity of the family as my informants interpreted. Five is regarded as unlucky since its pronunciation as _wu_ implies that the children of the deceased will become a villain and bring trouble and disgrace to the family. The color of the _shouyi_ is either black or white for all regardless of gender difference. But the outerwear is always black. The black and white are colors used for the otherworld, a _yin_ world for all dead persons. With the coffin purchased and _shouyi_ made, the pre-death preparations for one’s funeral are completed.
3.2 Initial Rituals

When a person is seriously ill and near death, his or her houren (offsprings) will be summoned and gathered around him or her. Even those who have left the village and are working in cities far away will be called back. It is considered as unfilial if they fail to show up at the deathbed. But for accidental or sudden death, it is impossible for relatives who work far away from the village to return home in time even for funeral. One of the two funerals I observed was for a man who died accidentally from electric shock. His two adult sons who were working in Guangdong Province, thousand kilometers away from home, could not even be informed of the death until the funeral was held. Several months later, when Chinese Spring Festival came, they got time to leave their work and returned home. They could only offer sacrifices in front of their father's tomb.

During the final days before a person dies, the descendants take turns to watch the sick person. Before he or she breathes the last breath, the patient will be moved into a chair in his or her room, facing the door. To die in bed is considered as harmful because the soul of the newly deceased cannot easily leave the bed due to a mosquito net usually emplaced all the year round, which would "capture" the soul of the deceased. The deceased then would haunt the family, causing illness or death. To die in a chair is considered as the most dignified death with all the descendants kneeling down around the chair and the spouse, brothers and sisters standing around. The oldest son holds the ill person upright. Last words are exchanged between the dying and the surrounding persons. The local terminology for this process is songzhong (sending off the dying). The belief and practice that regard people dying in bed as harmful and unfortunate are shared

As soon as the dying person breathes the last breath, the descendants, especially women, burst into a loud wailing. Firecrackers are set off to scare away hungry ghosts who might be wandering around the house. The loud wailing and firecrackers also inform the community that a death has occurred in the family. Dao ton fiizi (mock paper money bound in small rectangular bundles with the names of the deceased and donors written on the cover) is burned to provide the deceased with traveling expenses on the way to the world of the dead. Messengers are sent out immediately to inform other relatives of the death in the family.

3.3 Rites of Handling the Dead Body

After a person dies, he/she is placed on a board in the tangwu and is prepared for mohang (ritually washing the deceased). Aishui, which literally means "love water" (water boiled with eucalyptus leaves), is prepared. The sons' clothes are soaked in the aishui. It symbolizes the ai (love) of the descendants to the deceased. This specially-boiled water is to clean the dead body ritually and to drive away any evil spirits that might have possibly attached to the body. The water also washes the deceased off any crimes or misdeeds he/she may have committed in life so that the deceased can enter the otherworld cleansed and will be accepted by the ancestors (Liu 1989:81).

Two or three elders in the village are invited to wash and dress the deceased. They first soak a piece of white cloth in the aishui. Then, they move it across the body three times from head to feet. The cloth does not necessarily touch the body. After this, they
dress the deceased up with shouyi that have been prepared a few years ago if the deceased is over sixty years old. They do not use any buttons to fasten the clothes. Instead, they use daizi (ribbon), which symbolizes that the deceased has descendants.

Having dressed the deceased, the elders from the village tie up the deceased's feet and waist with black threads. The number of threads they use complies with the age of the deceased. Meanwhile, a coffin is moved into the tangwu and set up on two benches. If the deceased has died outside his/her house, the corpse cannot be moved into the tangwu. If so, it will bring demons back to the family. At one of the two funerals I attended, the man died accidentally at his sister's home. He was dressed on a wood board outside his house. His coffin was also placed under the eaves outside his house.

Inside the coffin, pine needles are laid out evenly on the bottom. Over it, a cotton wadding is added. Above the cotton wadding, a white sheet of cloth is spread. A white pillow is put at the head of the coffin. Except for the pine needles, the coffin is prepared in the same way as the villagers make their beds with pillow, sheet, quilt, and mattress (made from rice stalks and cotton). The comfort of the deceased is taken seriously. It is a criterion used to judge whether the descendants have observed filial piety to the deceased. It is also a way to ensure the blessing of the deceased.

Moving a dead body into a coffin is locally called ruguan. After the corpse is put inside the coffin, the elders try to fix it tightly so that it will not shift when the coffin is moved to the grave and lowered in the ground. They must set the body flat and in the exact center of the coffin, so the deceased will be comfortable. The old people use the

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1 Daizi: 帶 "子", bring in descendants.
deceased’s clothes to fill the empty spaces in the coffin. Sons should donate a piece of their clothing if they want to receive the deceased’s blessings. Since the deceased will wear these clothes in the otherworld, all the pockets of the clothes should be torn off or cut open. One informant explained that in the otherworld, everyone is equal. No one needs pockets to contain private things and violators will be punished by deities in the otherworld.

When the body is fixed in the coffin, a piece of white cloth is laid on it. A shoubei (a very small cotton-wadded quilt) is put on top of the body. Then, the coffin is half closed only with the head open so that the face of the deceased can be seen. A piece of white cloth is laid over the face. An incense pot and a kerosene lamp (called changming deng) are set on the top of the coffin. A ceramic pot or iron basin is put under the coffin for burning mock paper money.

The orientation of the body inside the coffin is very important. It must lie flat and be aligned with the center of the coffin. The tip of the nose must be in line with the central line of the coffin. It is said that if the nose tilts to the left, the sons will suffer from bad luck, and to the right, the daughter’s families will have bad fortune. It usually takes great effort and time for the elders to settle the body properly in the coffin. The position of the dead body will be checked carefully by the bereaved family and maternal uncles.

3.4 Funeral Preparations by Specialists

A funeral at Sanyuan Village involves several groups of specialists. A bereaved family needs to hire Daoist priests and/or Buddhist monks to conduct funerary rituals, a funeral band to play mourning music, a yinyang xiansheng (fengshui master or
geomancer) to look for a gravesite, and one or two craftsmen to make a miniature paper house, paper furniture, and other items of daily necessity for the deceased to use in the otherworld. Well-to-do families often hire an educated person or persons to write a eulogy in honor of the deceased.

Traditionally, it was believed that Daoist priests had access to hell and Buddhist monks had access to heaven (Zheng: 1995:259). Daoist priests conducted rituals that would send the deceased away to the otherworld and would protect the soul of the deceased from being harmed by hungry ghosts. Buddhist monks chanted scripts to help the deceased to go through hell and finally enter heaven. But times have changed since the traditional practices were prevalent. In 1997, in Sanyuan Village, there was no such a division of labor between priests and monks. They all worked part time as priests or monks. They were married and had families. They spent most of their time farming in fields. The first funeral in which I participated hired four monks and two priests who worked side by side in performing rituals and chanting scripts. The second funeral I observed was conducted by six monks. The villagers were even confused about whether they were priests or monks. They sometimes called them priests and other times called them monks. To the villagers, their titles were not important. What was important was the proper performance of rituals. As C.K. Yang (1973:645) pointed out, the focus of popular religious interest is practical function and not theological identification. For convenience, the term "priest" is used in this dissertation to refer to both Daoist priest and Buddhist monks involved in providing funeral services at Sanyuan Village.

Priests usually arrive at the bereaved house in the afternoon. The number of priests depends on whether the bereaving family chooses to hold da kaifang (the grand
ritual of opening the way) or *xiaokai* (the little ritual of opening the way). For the former, six priests are needed. For the latter, one to three priests are needed. Most families in the village will hold *da kai* to their adult members who die. For unmarried ones, or the bereaving family is very poor, *xiaokai* might be conducted.

Priests generally spend the afternoon preparing for their rituals. The most important items they make for the funeral are a *lingpai* (soul tablet) for the deceased, a *fan* (a lantern-like object), written documents addressed to certain deities in the otherworld, five tablets representing east, south, west, north and center directions.
a *xiuodan* (a list of all filial descendants), and many bundles of *fuzi* (mock paper money) to be offered to the deceased and deities.

The soul tablet is made of red paper and bamboo sticks. Written on the paper in black ink are the deceased's name, date and place of death, and names of his sons as chief mourners. It is believed that after a person dies, one of his/her souls will reside on the soul tablet. Therefore, the soul tablet represents the deceased. It is present at the performance of virtually all funerary rituals.

The *fan* is a large lantern-like object (see Photo 3). It consists of several streamers. At the center is a major streamer. Both ends of the major streamer are made from red paper and its body is white paper on which the deceased's name, date and place of birth, and date and place of death are written. Surrounding the major streamers are minor streamers of various colors. My informants told me that the *fan* was like a flag and was used to attract the soul of the deceased. It is used outdoors, and because of its size and vivid colors, it can be seen from a distance. So people who do not want to run in a funeral can easily avoid it.

In ancient China, there was a specific rite to call back the soul of the deceased, which was called *zhaohun*. As recorded in *Yi Li* [Etiquette and Rituals], an early Confucian classic, after a person died, a man would climb to the roof of the house from the front with a piece of the deceased's clothes, shouting three times toward the north in order to attract the soul of the deceased to the clothes. Then, he would come down from the back of the house and put the clothes over the deceased (Song 1991:21-22; Zheng 1995:257-58). However, this rite gradually ceased to be performed after Song and Ming
dynasties. At Sanyuan Village today, *fan* can be seen at all funerals, but the rite of *zaohun* has not survived.

Written documents are prepared for the deceased to use as he/she travels from the *yangjian* (world of the living) to the *yinjian* (the otherworld). The documents addressed to the gods that control the five directions—East, West, North, South, and Center—contain information about the deceased and where he/she is heading to (see Photo 4). They are used to appeal to the gods to open the directions under their control for the deceased to travel to the otherworld. These documents will be burned when priests perform a rite called *kai wufang* (opening five directions), suggesting that the gods have accepted the documents.

Photo 4: Written documents to the gods in charge of five directions
The *fuzi* differs from regular mock paper money. It is packed in bundles, and written on the front cover of each bundle are the names of the donors and the receiver of the money, the reason for offering the money, the amount of money donated, and the date of the offering. Throughout the funeral, *fuzi* is burned on specific occasions such as *songzhong* (sending off the dying person) and *ruguian* (putting the corpse into a coffin).

After they have made the soul tablet, *fan*, and other items, the priests use two square tables to set up a *tan* (altar) in the *tangwu* against the North wall facing the door. They hang a portrait of Buddha on the wall over the table. Another picture of Buddha is put on the end of the altar facing the door. Four benches are placed by the two sides of the altar for the priests to sit on. The soul tablet, two kerosene lamps, and incense holders are placed on the altar. With the altar set up, the priests are ready to start their ritual performance.

As for the craftsmen, they usually work all night to make a paper house and other paper items such as TV set or bicycle as the bereaved family requires. The paper house is very beautiful and luxurious, even if the deceased and his/her family have lived in a shabby house. The deceased might have never used some of these items in his/her life. My informants explained to me that expensive paper houses and furniture would enable the deceased to have a happy and comfortable life in the otherworld. Once the deceased is comfortable and satisfied in the otherworld, he/she would bless the descendants with fortune or other rewards.
3.5 Rites Performed by Priests

When the priests have gotten everything ready and when the auspicious time comes, they start to perform funerary rites. All their rites are accompanied by their percussion music produced by drums, gongs, \textit{mu yu} (wooden sound-boxes), and brass ringing bowls, and chanting by the chief priest alone or by all the priests in chorus with the percussion music. Their performance usually lasts all night. Though different priests may conduct rites in different order and in various styles, their performance consists of the following rites:

\textbf{Rite of Pobai} The rite of \textit{pobai} (breaking the white) is the first rite performed by priests after the sun sets on the same day of the death. The priests start the rite by chanting scripts. Accompanied by their percussion music, their chants point out that life is hard and death is unavoidable. They inform the deceased that the descendants are all heart broken. They ask the \textit{xiaozi} (filial descendants) to kowtow toward the soul

Photo 5: The rite of \textit{pobai}. Note that no one has put on mourning cloth yet.
tablet. Then, they tell the xiaozí to put on xiaofu (mourning clothing). As soon as they put on mourning clothing, they should restrain themselves. Men should not drink alcohol. Women should not use makeup nor wear colorful clothes. The descendants now officially enter the mourning stage.

Xiaofu (mourning clothing) in Sanyuan Village today is actually a long piece of white cotton cloth locally called xiaopa. One end of the cloth is tied around the head of a xiaozí (filial descendant) and the other end drops behind his/her back. Xiaozí is a general term that refers to the deceased's sons (xiaonan) and daughters-in-law (xiaoxi), daughters (xiaonu) and sons-in-law (xiaonuxu), grandchildren (xiaosun), nieces (xiaozhimu) and nephews (xiaozhi), and their spouses and children. They all wear xiaopa at the funeral. The only difference is that sons and unmarried daughters should attach some hemp threads to their xiaopa. Other relatives and friends who attend the funeral also wear xiaopa. But their xiaopa are much shorter and can only be tied around their head. When the funeral is over, the xiaopo is either burned, put into other uses, or thrown away.

Rite of Qingshui The second rite performed by priests is qingshui (fetching water). The priests lead all the xiaozí to a well or a river nearby. They are accompanied by the funeral band that the bereaved family has hired. The eldest son carries the soul tablet of the deceased. Another son carries the fán. A third son carries a tray with food (five small bowls containing rice, meat, liquor, fruits, and sweets, respectively) and a kerosene lamp. If the bereaved family does not have a son or their son is not at home, their daughters, nephews, or nieces can do the job, even though traditionally only male descendants could touch soul tablets and fân (see Photo 6). The cause and significance
of this change will be discussed in Chapter 5.

When the group reaches the well or the riverside, the priests chant scripts first. They plead to the dragon and guardian spirits of the water for permission to fetch their water. Mock paper money and incense sticks are offered to them by burning. The eldest son or other siblings in his absence then fill a bottle with water. The water, called *shenshui* (sacred water), is used by the priests to cleanse the *tangwu* before they start to perform other rites. Later, they will use the water to ritually bathe the soul of the deceased before welcoming it back home.

The rite of fetching water in Sanyuan Village differs slightly from the same rite performed in other Chinese communities, where a few copper coins are thrown into the water to pay its guardian spirits (Liu 1989:80; Tong 1987:72-73; Zheng 1995:253-254).
In Sanyuan Village, only mock paper money is burned to the spirits, emphasizing the difference of this world that uses coins and bills and the otherworld that uses only mock paper money. The time of fetching water is different. In many Chinese communities, sacred water is fetched before the dead body is moved into a coffin and is used to clean the body (Liu 1989:80; Tong 1987:72-73; Zheng 1995:253-254). But in Sanyuan Village, this rite is performed after the dead body has been placed into its coffin. Besides, Sanyuan Village makes a distinction between the water used to ritually wash the dead body and the water used to clean the house and the soul of the deceased. The former is called *aishui* (love water), whereas the later is named as *shenshui* (sacred water). *Aishui* embodies the descendants' love to the deceased and *shenshui* indicates the power of the water that can be used to drive away evil spirits and ghosts.

**Rite of Jingzao** The third rite that priests perform at a funeral is *jingzao* (visiting the Stove God). The Stove God occupies the bottom level in the pantheon in Chinese folk religion. His work is to watch over members of a household throughout the year and report monthly on their behavior to the Jade Emperor in Heaven. The rite of *jingzao* starts with the priests leading the *xiaozǐ* into the kitchen. The soul tablet, a written document addressed to the Stove God, a kerosene lamp, and a food tray are put on the top of the stove. Incense sticks are burned on the stove. The chief priest chants scripts and reads the document to inform the Stove God of the name of the deceased and the time of the death (see Photo 7). He asks the stove god to report the death to the Jade Emperor. *Xiaozǐ* then owntows to the stove. Mock paper money is burned. The purpose of this rite, according to my informants, is to inform gods of the death and to appeal for their protection for both
the deceased in the yinjian (the underworld) and the surviving members in the yangjian (this world). It is believed that this rite facilitates admittance of the soul of the deceased into the world for the dead.

**Rite of Kai Wufang** The fourth rite is kai wufang (opening roads in five directions). It is considered the most important rite performed by priests. There are two kinds of kai wufang: a grand one and a little one. For the former, at least six priests are needed. It is performed for the death of adults. For the latter, one to three priests. Yet the little kai wufang is hardly seen today. It is the ritual for poor or unmarried persons.

Before the ritual starts, the priests set up five square tables in the courtyard or on a flat field close to the bereaved family. The five white tablets of directions which the priests made earlier in the afternoon are put at the center of each table. The tablets symbolize the five directions: East, West, South, North, and Center. On each table, the
bereaved family puts burning incense sticks, mock paper money, a kerosene lamp, and 
guogong (five small bowls containing rice, meat, liquor, fruits and sweets). The table at
the center of the courtyard represents the central direction. It is set on two benches and 
therefore is higher than the other four tables. A chair is put on this table. On the chair sits
the soul tablet of the deceased. An umbrella is opened over the soul tablet (see Photo 8).
One priest explained to me that the use of umbrella indicates that the deceased is
in the otherworld where there is no light, and people there are all afraid of light. So the
umbrella protects the soul of the deceased from light and from any harmful influence.
The fan is laid against the central table.

If the deceased is old and dies naturally, the bereaved family can choose to build a
bridge in the courtyard. There are two different kinds of bridges to choose from. one
called gaoqiao (high bridge) and the other pingqiao (flat bridge). Both are made up of square dining tables borrowed from neighbors. For the high bridge, as few as 11 to as many as 40 tables are needed. The tables form a pyramid-like shape, with one table on the top. Since it is high and dangerous to walk on, bamboo is used to build two fences for people to hold. By contrast, the flat bridge can be built with three or five tables placed on the same level. A space is left between two tables. Two benches are used to connect the tables. For safety, fences will be set up for people to hold.

No matter which bridge is chosen, priests put under the bridge a bronze snake (actually made of bamboo), an iron dog (made from bamboo and paper), a paper boat, and a blood basin (basin with red colored water), which symbolizes the bloody river that separates the living world and the otherworld. The bridge is called naiheqiao, and it symbolically connects the two worlds (also see Hu 1994, Liu 1989). The bridge has to be strong so that the priests and xiaozì (filial descendants) can walk across it three times, an action that suggests the crossing of three bridges. It takes a great deal of time and effort to build a bridge regardless of whether it is a high bridge or flat bridge. Besides, the bereaved family has to pay extra money to the priests. So the construction of high bridge or flat bridge at a funeral is not common today. The two funerals in which I participated had neither a high bridge nor a flat bridge. The rite of crossing the bridge was not held in these cases. My informants explained that building and crossing the bridge were so complicated that the ritual had fallen out of favor. I reconstructed this ritual structure and ceremony in its absence, based on interviews with priests.

After the priests finish setting up tables, they start the rite of kai wufang with loud music. They chant scripts, informing the gods of the death of a beloved member of a
family. They tell the gods that the children have been crying their hearts out and have shown filial piety to the deceased. They ask the gods to open all roads so that the deceased can go to the Western Heaven of Paradise. The six priests walk around the five tables sometimes slowly and sometimes quickly. All the xiaozi should follow them. From time to time, they dance by themselves with their music to please gods as well as the audience (see Photo 9). Finally, the priests walk and dance around each individual table from the order of East, South, West, North, and Center. They make their final appeal to the god that controls each direction to open up the road for the deceased. One by one, the five white tablets are burned together with mock paper money and firecrackers, suggesting that the gods have accepted the sacrifice and opened all the roads for the

Photo 9: The rite of kai wufang: priests' performance by the altar representing the Central Direction
deceased. It also indicates that the deceased has successfully entered the otherworld and will go through trials at 10 courts in the otherworld, yet the departed needs his/her descendants to perform rites to facilitate passing the trials.

The rite of *kai wufang* lasts about two hours. According to my informants, it lasts much longer for old men or women with many children and grandchildren, nephews and nieces. After the performance of this rite, a dinner is provided for the priests and all participants. The meal offers a break for the priests before they start the second phase of their performance in the evening.

**Rite of *Yingwang Anwei*** The fifth rite performed by priests is *yingwang anwei* (welcoming back the soul of the deceased, and setting it on an altar). A priest puts a kerosene lamp at the front door of the house to light the way for the soul of the deceased to return home. A make-shift bathtub is improvised by using a bucket or basin full of
water. The sacred water, obtained from the gods earlier when the rite of fetching water is performed, is poured into the tub. The tub is enclosed by a straw or bamboo mat (see Photo 11). The soul tablet of the deceased and another red tablet representing the souls of ancestors related to the deceased are first set on a chair covered by an umbrella. The fan is placed against the chair to attract the soul of the deceased.

When the priests are ready, they start to chant scripts and make requests to the gods to guide the souls of the deceased and the ancestors back home. Then, they put the two tablets over the bucket of water, indicating that the deceased and his/her ancestors are taking a bath before entering home. Since the deceased has already traveled to the otherworld, it is a long trip back home. Taking a bath washes away dirt they carry and refreshes them, just as it would do to a traveler coming home from a long journey. In addition, the sacred water cleans up any evil spirits the deceased might have brought from the otherworld.

Inside the front door of the house, the priests construct three bridges with three benches (see photo 11). The one in the middle is set higher than the other two. The bridge close to the door is called shang pingqiao. The next bridge is called zhong pingqiao. The last bridge is called xia pingqiao. The bridges connect the living world with the world for the dead. Just as the deceased needs to cross bridges to enter the otherworld, the deceased must cross bridges to return home in the living world.

On each bridge there are a kerosene lamp, an incense holder with burning incense sticks, and, most important of all, a white tablet representing the god that guards the

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1 上品橋，中品橋，下品橋。
bridge. The two soul tablets are moved across the bridge one by one accompanied by the priests' chant of scripts. After the soul tablets pass one bridge, the white tablet on the bridge is burned together with mock paper money. Food and liquor are sacrificed. Firecrackers are set off. These activities suggest that the god of the bridge has let the deceased and his/her ancestors pass the bridge.

Having passed all the three bridges, the soul tablets are first placed on the end of the altar facing the door. After the priests chant scripts and say prayers for the deceased, the soul tablets are removed to the other end of the altar against the North wall (see Photo 12). Then, the priests order the descendants to put guogong in front of the tablets and to burn mock paper money. They then ask the descendants to kneel down and kowtow
toward the tablets. The whole process reincorporates the deceased and ancestors into the household. They are now ready to receive offerings and prayers.

Photo 12: The rite of setting the soul tablets on the altar to receive sacrifice

**Rite of Tuanfu** The sixth rite is *tuanfu* (praising the deceased). This is the time that a person who specializes in writing eulogies reads his writing with great emotion in the *tangwu*. All the *xiaozi* should kneel down on the ground, while senior relatives stand around watching. The eulogy usually covers the whole life of the deceased, from the birth to the death, emphasizing his/her contributions to the family, the sufferings, and the achievements in his/her life. The eulogy is generally written in rhyme and is very touching. It often moves participants to tears. Occasionally, sudden bursts of wailing interrupts the reading.
But reading a eulogy is optional at a funeral. If there is no eulogy, the chief priest reads *Shi Yue Huaitai* (Ten Months of Pregnancy) or *Shi Erxifu Bu Xiao Niang* (Ten Daughters-in-law Don't Observe Filial Piety to their Mother-in-law) for a female client. The first is a rhymed account of the happiness and sufferings that a mother has experienced in her 10 months of carrying a baby and in nursing the baby for the first three years after the birth. The latter describes various unfilial behaviors of 10 daughters-in-law and the great sufferings their mother-in-law has experienced. If the deceased is a man, the priest reads *Shier Dian* (Twelve Large Houses) or *Xiao Fumu* (Observing Filial Piety to Parents). The first one is a story about the sufferings of a father who strives all his life to build houses for his twelve sons. The second one tells the descendants that they

Photo13: A priest is reading *Xiao Fumu*
have the obligation to observe filial piety to their parents, an obligation as natural as repaying borrowed money.

What the chief priest reads at a funeral are all ready-made stories or articles. There are other articles for the priest to choose from, such as "Xiao Gongpo" (showing filial piety to parents-in-law), "Xiongdi Heqi" (depicting good relationships between brothers), "Zhouli Heqi" (encouraging good relationships between daughters-in-law), "Xunzi Chengren" (an admonition to educate children so that they will grow up as useful persons), and "Yangyu zhi En" (reminding of the importance of gratitude for being raised). These articles are all handwritten, unauthored, and undated. I collected them from a priest who had copied them from his master before 1949 and had managed to save them during the Cultural Revolution. The reading of these articles today is to praise the deceased as a father or mother and to educate descendants who are present about the importance of observing filial piety to their dead and living parents and to encourage good relationships between other family members.

Rite of Baichan The seventh rite is baichan (reading scripts and praying to gods for the deceased). The bereaved family invites old women from the village to sing laments in the tangwu. They must be at least 40 years old and have children. Their age and the fact that they have children indicate that they are honest and reliable. So their stories about the deceased can be regarded as sincere and accepted by the gods. They kneel down on cushions or mats on the ground in front the altar in the tangwu. Priests chant scripts with their music to attract the attention of the gods. The old women kowtow toward the altar guided by the priests (see Photo 14). They sing laments (a combination of weeping, singing and speaking) to mention many good deeds the deceased has
performed in this world and they pray for the gods to release him or her from all of his/her crimes or misdeeds committed in this world. It is believed that the deceased at this time is going through the 10 courts in the *diyu* (the hell or underworld) and is being judged by magistrate, secretary-attendants, and demonical-monstrous underlings of each court. *Baichan*, and *tuanfu* as well, are intended to seek mercy for the deceased so that he or she may not be punished severely and can go to the Western Heaven of Paradise.

Photo 14: The rite of *baichan*. The two girls were offspring of the deceased.

One of the written scripts I collected in the village vividly describes the 10 courts of hell and penalties imposed by each court to sins committed in this world. From the first to the last, the courts are ruled respectively by King Qin Guang, King Chu Jiang, King Song Di, King Wu Guan, King Yan Luo, King Bian Cheng, King Tai Shan, King
Ping Deng, King Du Shi, and King Zhuan Lun. Each court judges the deceased’s crimes and virtues, and punishes the deceased accordingly. The penalties include tearing the body apart into pieces, pulling out intestines and eyes, cutting off tongue and nose, immersion in the hell of frozen pond or the hell of boiling oil, and throwing the body into bloody sea, river, or basin. For example, in the fifth court, unfilial persons are punished by having their bodies cut into parts. The tenth court decides whether the deceased will be reincarnated as an animal or human, or be kept in the otherworld.

The rite of baichan connotes the belief in three souls. My chief informant, a priest, told me that the deceased has three souls, one in the other world, one in the coffin first and then in the grave, and the last one on the soul tablet of the deceased. In the studies of Chinese religions, there are arguments about the number of souls belonging to a dead person. One argument calls for only one soul (Harrell 1979). Another argument suggests the existence of three souls (Cohen 1988), and the third argument claims that there are as many as nine souls (de Groot 1898, 1901). My finding at Sanyuan Village complies with the argument for three souls. However, I also found that many villagers simply did not believe that after a person dies, his/her soul(s) can survive. They thought that to die was like to blow out a candle. The human’s spirit simply would vanish with the death.

Rite of Chushang The eighth rite is chusang (the funeral procession). The first seven rites last all night. Early in the following morning, the bereaved family is asked to
check the coffin and corpse. If the deceased is a woman, her brother or relatives from her own natal family are invited to make the final check to make sure that the body is set at the right place and that no unwanted object such as nails are placed inside the coffin. This is also the time for the bereaved family, relatives, and friends to take a last look at the deceased. Women burst into loud wailing and sing songs of lamentation to express the great pains they feel after losing a beloved one. This is called *ku sang* (wailing at a funeral).

Then a priest approaches the coffin. He knocks at the coffin with an ax, without chopping it, while chanting scripts (see Photo 15). This is to wake up the soul of the deceased. He uses rooster blood to write a few magic spells on the coffin to drive away any hungry ghosts and evil spirits. After the priest's performance, the coffin is closed and

![Photo 15: The rite of knocking at the coffin with ax](image-url)
sealed by old men from the village. This is called *fengguan* (seal the coffin). A live rooster that the bereaved family has to purchase with cash, and a ceramic pot containing oil, salt, tea, rice, and soybeans, are put under the coffin.

When to start the funeral procession, which route to take to the gravesite, and who cannot participate in the funeral procession are all determined by a *yinyang* master (geomancer). The *yinyang* master will ask pregnant women to leave the funeral procession for fear they might have miscarriages since their fetuses are vulnerable to the attacks by ghosts or demons. The *yinyang* master will also match the deceased's horoscope with certain ages and declare that persons who are born in certain years cannot participate in the funeral procession; otherwise they will suffer from misfortune or bring harm to the deceased.

Photo 16: The rite of breaking a pot and carrying the coffin
When the right time comes, eight selected villagers tie up the coffin with thick ropes. Shoulder poles are fastened on the ropes for the villagers to carry the coffin to the gravesite. First, they move the coffin out of the house and set it on two benches. The chief priest breaks a ceramic pot that contains oil, salt, tea, rice, and soybeans (indicating that the deceased now has to leave the family and go on a journey to the otherworld) and shouts: "Qi (rise)!" The eight villagers carry the coffin on their shoulders (see Photo 16). They cannot let the coffin touch the ground until it is placed into the grave pit. They usually have to go several hundred meters. When they have to take a rest, benches carried by other villagers are used to support the coffin and prevent it from touching the ground. A live rooster with its feet tied up is put on the top of the coffin. It is believed the rooster can drive away ghosts and demons that might wander around on the way to the gravesite. Several piles of sanqian (unbound mock paper money) are burned. Rice is scattered first in the courtyard and later on the way to the grave site for hungry ghosts and demons so they will not come to haunt the deceased.

Firecrackers are set off to scare away ghosts and give courage to the deceased on his/her way to the Western Heaven of Paradise. Then, the funeral parade sets out for the gravesite. At the head of the parade is an old villager carrying a torch, which symbolizes a light in the otherworld for the deceased (see Photo 17). Next is the fan carried by a son (or daughter if no son is available at the time) of the deceased. The soul tablet of the deceased is at the third position carried by the eldest son (or daughter if no son available). The funeral band that the bereaved family has hired follows the soul tablet. Next comes the coffin carried by eight villagers. Following the coffin are the xiaozhi, relatives, friends,
and other funeral bands hired by the in-laws or other relatives to play mourning music on their way to the deceased's house. Relatives and friends carry *jizhang* (pieces of cloth offered to the deceased by relatives and friends which are put up on bamboo sticks like flags and on which the names of the donors and the deceased are written). The priests and the *fengshui* master are at the end of the parade.

When the parade reaches the gravesite, the coffin is laid on two benches beside a shallow pit which is called *jinjing* (golden well). The *fengshui* master jumps into the pit. He first burns mock paper money in the pit to the *Tudi* (Earth God). The burning of mock paper money also warms up the grave pit. A few drops of blood from the rooster drive away all evil spirits that might hide in the pit. He then scatters a few drops of the sacred water in the pit to clean it ritually. A grave pit for the dead is like a house for a living
person. It is important to make it clean and comfortable because it is the final resting place for the deceased.

The *fengshui* master figures out an auspicious time for the coffin to be lowered into the pit. When this time comes, he first puts one end of a long bamboo stick on the floor of the pit. Then, he orders the eight villagers to lower the coffin into the pit slowly and carefully. The coffin should sit on the end of the bamboo stick. One *fengshui* master told me that the coffin cannot touch the earth directly right after it is buried, otherwise it will bring misfortune to the bereaved family. The *fengshui* master needs to find a proper time for the coffin to touch the ground. The bamboo stick symbolically separates the coffin from the ground (see Photo 18).

![Photo 18: Lowering the coffin into the pit. Note the bamboo stick a *fengshui* master hold.](image)
After the coffin is moved into the grave pit, the *fengshui* master orients the coffin in the grave by using a compass and strings. He should align the coffin in the most beneficial direction to secure the best *fengshui*. The gravesite is selected by the master according to the principle of *fengshui*. It is believed that if the deceased is buried in a spot with good *fengshui*, the descendants will become prosperous. On the contrary, a grave with bad *fengshui* leads to the decline, misfortune, and even death of the descendants. Therefore, the bereaved family takes the selection of the gravesite seriously. They follow the *fengshui* master walking around the land of their village until a satisfactory site is found.

After the coffin is fixed in the grave pit, the *fengshui* master stands on the head of the pit and asks all the *xiaozi* to kneel down on the ground in front of the pit. They should turn their backs toward the master. Then, the master throws rice over the coffin and the

![Photo 19: A *fengshui* master is throwing rice and the descendants are trying to catch the rice.](image-url)
xiaozi to lure the dragons to the grave so that the fengshui will be good. The xiaozi try their best to catch as much rice as they can with the back of their coats (see Photo 19). They cannot use their hands. They go down into the pit and pick up some soil around the coffin. Later, they should will mix the soil and rice and make the mixture into a ball which they save in their houses. The one whose ball lasts the longest will receive the most blessings from the deceased.

After throwing rice, the fengshui master shovels some soil on each corner of the coffin. He then asks the xiaozi to throw dirt on the coffin with their hands. With this done, the xiaozi hurries home, each taking a different route in order to evade the soul of the deceased if it follows them. Two or three villagers stay behind to fill the grave pit with soil first and then pile up the soil into a cone-shaped tomb (see Photo 20).

Photo 20: A new tomb. Note the bamboo stick that symbolically separates the coffin from the ground.
Back home, married daughters and daughters-in-law start to sweep the floor of the tangwu. Sweeping the floor at this time brings wealth to the descendants in the future. The daughters sweep from the inside to the outside because they have been married out of the family and live with their husbands in other houses. The daughters-in-law sweep from the outside to the inside of the tangwu since they have been married into the family.

**Rite of Shao Huotang** The ninth rite is *shao huotang* (burning the paper house, the *fan*, and the soul tablet). This is the last rite performed by the priests at a funeral. Returning from the gravesite, a final feast is provided by the bereaved family to all the participants. Food and drink are offered to the soul tablet of the recently deceased, and to the soul tablets of ancestors which are at the altar in the tangwu. After the feast, the priests ask the *xiaozì* to remove the two soul tablets from the house to an open space. A miniature replica paper house made by craftsmen is also moved to the open space (see Photo 21). The soul tablets are placed inside the paper house. The *fan* is placed against
the paper house. Paper furniture, a paper TV set and other paper objects are placed either inside or outside this paper house. Then, they are all set on fire. Measures are taken to ensure that they are completely burned up. This is called ciling (sending away the souls of the deceased and other ancestors). Burning the two tablets suggests that the deceased has now joined his ancestors.

After burning the paper objects, the chief priest asks for a rooster, food, liquor, and a bundle of sorghum heads. Having chanted scriptures, the priest puts a drop of rooster blood into a bowl of liquor (see Photo 22). If the drop does not dissolve fast, it indicates that the priests have done a good job, and the soul of the deceased is pleased and will not haunt the bereaved family. If the drop dissolves fast, it indicates that the deceased is unhappy with their performance. The priests must review their rites to find out which step went wrong and they would perform it again.

Photo 22: The rite of testing to see if the deceased is pleased
After the rite of examining rooster blood, the chief priest picks up the bundle of sorghum heads and uses it as a broom to symbolically sweep the floor for the bereaved family and the village. This rite drives away all the hungry ghosts that wander around the house and the village after the death, and brings fortune back to the bereaved family and the village. This also marks the end of the burial. A typical funeral at Sanyuan lasts only one day and one night, counting the time that specialists use in making preparations for a funeral. The coffin is usually moved out of the community and buried in the morning following the death. On rare occasions, the fengshui master might predict that the following day is not a good day for burying the deceased. If that happens, the funeral will be extended in time and each rite performed by priests will take more time.

3.6 Post-Burial Rituals

Burial does not end the descendants' obligation to the deceased. On the third day after the burial, bereaved family members visit the tomb and offer sacrifice of food, liquor, and mock paper money to the deceased. They set a torch on the ridge of the tomb to light ways for the deceased. When the time set by the fengshui master comes to pull out the bamboo stick that separates the coffin from the ground, the family visits the tomb again with shrimps and small fishes, which are regarded as favorite food for dragons. They take out the bamboo stick, and put the shrimps and fishes into the hole. Some fishes and shrimps are buried in small holes dug around the tomb. According to my informants, fish and shrimp are used to attract the dragons to the tomb so as to keep the good fengshui. Then, family members cover up the tomb with a layer of stone to prevent the mound from erosion. They might set up a stone monument in front of the tomb that has
the deceased's name, and the time of birth and death. However, since stone monuments are very expensive, this practice was not popular in 1998.

The bereaved family observes a period of mourning for 49 days. All their recreation is banned. On every seventh day, the family members go to the tomb to make offerings of food and mock paper money to the deceased. Locally, this is called shaoqi. Family members who have jobs in cities are not required to attend shaoqi and stay in the village for 49 days. How long they stay at the village depends on how many days' leave they have from work. According to my informants, they usually leave the village after attending the first shaoqi, that is, seven days after the burial.

On the last seventh day (the 49th day after the burial), the bereaved family prepares a banquet and invites relatives and friends for the banquet. The observation of a 49-day mourning period is related to the Buddhist idea of reincarnation. According to Buddhism, after a person dies, he/she might be sent to hell or heaven, or be reborn as an animal or as a human being depending on his/her merits and sins committed in this world. The reincarnation should occur on the seventh day after the burial. If it does not happen, then the decease has to wait for another term, that is, another seven days. The maximum number of terms is seven. On the 49th days after the burial, the deceased will definitely be reborn (Xu and He 1991:145; Song 1991:81). Traditionally, priests would be hired to chant scripts on every seventh day. Today at Sanyuan Village, according to my informants, some families hired priests to chant scripts only on the last seventh day. Many bereaved families did not hire priests, but simply made sacrifice at tombs and prepared a banquet for relatives and friends. This marks the end of the mourning period for the bereaved family.
After the ceremony on the 49th day, the bereaved family makes offerings to the deceased on the hundredth day after the burial, the deceased's birthday, and the death anniversary. Sacrifice of food and mock paper money is also made at festivals, such as the Chinese New Year, the Qingming Festival, and the Ghost Festival.

The Qingming Festival is in April or early spring. Besides sacrificing food and mock paper money, the bereaved family sweeps the grave and pulls out weeds on the tomb at this time. By contrast, the Ghost Festival is in the seventh lunar month, or midsummer. During this month, all the families at Sanyuan Village perform a rite called *shao qiyue ban* (burning mock paper money on July 15) to their ancestors. As I observed in my fieldwork, they burned mock paper money at a roadside close to their homes. My informants explained that during this time of year, souls of the dead leave the world of the dead and wander around in the living world. It is the time for them to receive stipends from their descendants in this world. Without an offering of mock paper money, the souls of the dead will become wandering ghosts. The midnight of July 15 of lunar year is the deadline for descendants to offer mock paper money to their ancestors. The purpose of all the post-funeral rites, as Freedman (1957:209) correctly summarized, is "to intercede for the deceased, to smooth the deceased's path in the underworld, and to provide money, food, clothing, and housing."
CHAPTER 4

GODS, GHOSTS, AND ANCESTORS

In traditional Chinese society, people believed that when a person died, his/her soul entered the otherworld. His/her existence there depended on his/her descendants providing sacrifices of food and money. Without the sacrifice, the soul would be deprived of means of subsistence and become a hungry ghost who would haunt the living relatives until it was comforted (Freedman 1958:88). Thus, happiness in the otherworld depended on the actions and sacrifices of the living. It was also believed that ancestors in the otherworld had the power to bless their descendants with good fortune and prosperity. This belief enabled ancestor worship to survive in Chinese society for thousands of years (Chen 1967:171-72).

4.1 Death as Passage

Van Gennep, in his book *The Rites of Passage*, proposed a threefold sequence for all rites of passage that move people from one stage of life to another. This sequence consists of rites of separation that remove a person from a previously occupied stage; rites of transition or liminality that effect and symbolize a social transformation; and rites of incorporation that reintegrate a person into a new stage. The importance of these stages varies for different rites of passage. In his discussion of funerals as rites of passage, Van Gennep (1908:146) pointed out that although one would expect rites of separation to be
the most important component of funeral rites, transitional rites predominate. It is also important to note that each sequence of rites may contain within itself features of rites of separation, transition, and incorporation, hence constituting a rite of passage in itself (Danforth 1982:36).

We can speak of the death rituals in Sanyuan Village as a "rite of passage." The initial rites of loud wailing, setting off firecrackers, burning daotou jiizi right after the death, and the change of clothes into shouyi all indicate the community's realization of the separation of the deceased from the family and the living world. The transitional or liminal period of the death rituals is long, starting with the ritual bathing of the dead to the burning of the soul tablet of the deceased. During this period, money, food, house, and many other daily necessities are transferred from the living world to the otherworld by means of burning. This period is considered ambiguous and dangerous. The deceased is neither in one state nor in the other, but in a "betwixt and between" status (Turner 1969:93). He/she is vulnerable to harm by ghosts and evil spirits. Thus, great measures are taken to ensure a safe transition. The hiring of specialists including priests, fengshui master, and funeral musicians is for this purpose.

The rites that fall into the category of rites of transition include mohan, qingshui, jingzao, kai wufang, yingwang anwei, tuanfu, baican, and chusang. During the process of performing these rites throughout a night, the dead body is washed of dirt and sins from this world so that the deceased will be clean upon entering the otherworld. The soul of the deceased is also washed ritually of dirt from the otherworld when being called back home by priests. The soul is first provided a temporary dwelling place in the soul tablet.
The dead body is given a bed (the coffin), and later a resting place (the tomb) selected specially by a fengshui master. All the roads in the five directions are opened up for the soul of the deceased to travel to the otherworld. Bridges are constructed to help the deceased to cross the river that separates this world from the otherworld. Gods and ancestors are informed of the death and are requested to protect the deceased from hungry ghosts or demons who are also offered with food and mock paper money. Older women are invited to pray to help the deceased have a smooth passage through the ten courts and be reincarnated. The ultimate goal of all the rites is to effect a smooth and successful transition for the deceased from one status to another without hurting the living, and without the deceased being harmed by ghosts or evil spirits.

The rites of incorporation include burning the soul tablets of the deceased and ancestors together in the courtyard. This ritual integrates the deceased with his/her ancestors in the otherworld. Thus, a new relationship is established between the living and the deceased. As a member of the ancestors, he or she will be regularly offered sacrifices of food, incense, and mock paper money by the descendants.

Van Gennep focuses only on liminal persona such as the bride and groom at the wedding, the candidates at the initiation, and the deceased at the funeral. As a matter of fact, the rites of passage also affect non-liminal persons such as parents, relatives, and friends, who undergo certain changes in the process of ritual performance (Turner 1967:7; Yu 1986:240). The funeral has certain social psychological effects for the relatives left behind. In Sanyuan Village, the rite of pobai separates the bereaved family from the community. In the transitional period, their relationship with the deceased and the bereaved family's social
status in the community are also changed. They are mourners and should observe a mourning period for 49 days, during which they should not participate in public activities. The celebration on the 49th day after the burial marks the end of the mourning period, reincorporating the family into the community. The family can thus assume its normal life.

Van Gennep's three-stage theory enables us to understand the death rituals in Sanyuan Village and to see that transformation is the dominant feature of the ritual practice. One of the major functions of Chinese death rituals is to transform the discontinuity of biological death into social continuity and to transform the corpse into an ancestor (Thompson 1988:73). Performance of rites that ensure a safe, fast, and complete transformation is the most critical aspect of Chinese death rituals. Chinese death rituals help the deceased to adjust to the new environment and help the living to understand that the deceased has become one of their ancestors (Li 1971:107). Priests' performances ensures harmony between the living and the dead, and between the dead and the deities.

4.2 Death Rituals and Traditional Chinese Cosmology

Victor Turner (1968:6) pointed out that ritual expresses important values and cultural orientations. Clifford Geertz also (1973:126-141) argued that ritual reflects worldview and cultural ethos. The death rituals in Sanyuan Village illustrate these generalizations through expressing the traditional Chinese cosmology that the universe was composed of Heaven, Earth, and the Underworld (see Cohen 1991; Wolf 1974; and Yang...
The rituals also demonstrate the concept of harmony and equilibrium in traditional Chinese cosmology, which emphasizes harmony of natural order in time and space; harmony of the individual organism, including its internal and external harmony; harmony of society including the worldly relationship with kinsmen, neighbors, and other people, and the other worldly relationship with ancestors and deities (Li 1992:69).

In traditional Chinese cosmology, there were three kinds of supernatural beings: gods, ghosts, and ancestors, who possessed the power to determine the fate of every man on the basis of his moral conduct. The organization of these supernatural beings was patterned after Chinese imperial government (Yang 1961:150). In other words, Heaven, Earth, and the Underworld (or hell) were united in an arrangement modeled on that of the human imperial order (Cohen 1991:124). The monarch in Heaven was the Jade Emperor. In the Jade Emperor’s court sat the major gods and goddesses of the Chinese popular pantheon as in the central government in imperial China. The Stove God and other tutelary deities carried out their duties on earth, each in charge of a particular area. They resembled the officials at administrative districts from the province and prefecture down to the city and village. The Underworld had 10 courts, judging and punishing the dead. The 10 courts with their own magistrates, secretary-attendants, and demoniacal-monstrous underlings were images of yamen (offices in imperial China), staffed with mortal bureaucrats. Beyond the 10 courts, there was a larger underworld region where souls of the dead resided, waiting to be reincarnated, sent to the Western Heaven of Paradise, or confined in the Underworld. The Underworld mirrored the imperial prison. Here, gods, like officials, could be bribed.

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1 個體的均衡與和諧，人際關係的和諧，自然關係的和諧與均衡。
Ghosts were like local bullies whose demands had to be satisfied so that they would not bother the deceased and the people in the living world. The deceased in the otherworld were comparable to the people living on earth.

The belief that death is not the final, complete, and utter annihilation of an individual can be found in death rituals in cultures across the world (for examples, see Damon and Wagner 1989; Danforth 1982; Douglas 1969; and Klinghardt 1994). Geertz (1973:110) explained this by saying that death rituals establish a religious perspective, in which the reality of death is denied through reference to a sacred order that transcends everyday experience. Danforth (1982:32) believed this religious perspective can be maintained most easily at the subjective level. "Subjectively we are able to deny death and maintain the fiction of our own immortality of the continued existence, in some form, of significant others who have died." Perhaps Geertz's and Danforth's arguments reflect a Western conception that cannot be easily applied to non-Euro-American peoples. The villagers in Sanyuan Village do not deny death. They, like other Chinese, look upon death and marriage as hongbai xishi (happy events in a person's life distinguished by the colors of the clothes worn by the bride and the mourner: hong—red for the bride and bai—white for the mourner). Death at an old age (over 60) with sons and grandsons to continue the family line is celebrated as xishi, because death terminates sufferings in this world and with offspring to offer sacrifice, the deceased is believed to live a happy life in the otherworld.

Robert Hertz, a French anthropologist, said in his "Death and The Right Hand":

We cannot bring ourselves to consider the deceased as dead straight away: he is too much part of our substance and we have put too much of ourselves in him, and participation in the same
social life creates ties which are not severed in one day. The 'factual evidence' is assailed by a contrary flood of memories and images, of desires and hopes. The evidence imposes itself only gradually and it is not until the end of this prolonged conflict that we give in and believe in the separation as something real. (Hertz 1960:81-82)

Hertz's idea can explain why there is a 49-day mourning period and why the villages still celebrate the birthday of the deceased after death. The image of the significant other does not fade in the bereaved family for a long time.

Fung Yu-lan (1952:349-50), a Chinese philosopher, while analyzing the Confucius' theory of mourning and sacrificial rites, pointed out that human minds are divided into intellectual and emotional parts. When a beloved one dies, our intellect realizes that the deceased cannot be revived to life, yet our emotional self hopes at the same time that he or she may return to life, and that his or her soul will not perish. At this stage, to rely entirely on intellect would be to show lack of affection, while to depend entirely upon the emotions would be to show lack of wisdom. The way to maintain a grip on both the intellect and the emotions, on affection and wisdom, is to treat the dead as if they were living.

Throughout the funeral sequence in Sanyuan Village, the deceased is truly treated as if he/she were alive. He/she is bathed, dressed, fed with food and drinks, put in a carefully made bed, and sent off to the otherworld. My informants frequently used analogies between this world and the otherworld, such as "the dead needs food and money in the otherworld, just as we need them in this world"; "the jinjing (the grave pit) is like our houses. It needs to be cleaned before the coffin is set in."

After the funeral, the deceased's death anniversary and birthday are celebrated
every year. Food and mock paper money are offered to the deceased all the year round. Even the social relationship between the deceased and the bereaved family remains unchanged in the otherworld. Some of my informants told me their dreams in which the soul of a dead person appeared to them with a request for money, clothing, or a house. They fulfilled those demands promptly. Dreams constitute a channel through which the dead is believed to be able to communicate with the living. The deceased are still treated as if they were alive, even long after they die.

4.3 Death Rituals and the Nature of Ancestors

In Chinese anthropology, there is a controversy over the character of Chinese ancestors. Are they benevolent or malevolent? There are three schools of thoughts on this issue. The first one believes that Chinese ancestors are always benign and never punitive to their descendants (Hsu 1948:245, 1963:45-46, 1979:527). The second school argues that Chinese ancestors are basically benevolent but will punish their descendants when being provoked (Freedman 1979a:303; Wolf 1974:167). The third one claims that Chinese ancestors are not at all benign (Ahern 1973:200; Otake 1980:27). Ahern's Xinan informants in Taiwan told her: "You can make lavish offerings on all the proper occasions, but you never know that the ancestors won't come back and make trouble." (Ahern 1973:200) Ahern gave a few examples of Xinan ancestors causing serious disability and even death.

summarized nine causes of malevolence: asking to be worshipped; provoked by unintentional misbehavior; capriciousness; seeking revenge; letting the living know of an uncomfortable situation; in an unhappy situation; punishing people's misbehavior; being provoked; provoked by breaking an oath. Otake attributed some causes to individual ancestors and some to ancestors as a whole.

In my own research in Sanvman Village, I found that ancestors were believed to be both benign and punitive. They were usually benevolent and protective to their descendants, but they had the power to punish descendants for their misconduct. The ancestors were regarded as part of jiashen (family gods) and worshipped together with other family gods. Ancestors had authority over their descendants, just like a father's authority over his children.

These different perceptions illustrate that there exist considerable variations in the nature of ancestors. Anthropologists who attempt to explain cross-cultural variation in the attribution of benevolence or malevolence of ancestors fall into two broad schools. One school sees experiences of inheritance and succession as the source of the fear of deceased ascendant. The other school looks to childhood experiences in socialization as the source of a later attribution of aggression to supernatural beings (Ahern 1973:191).

Jack Goody concisely stated the inheritance theory in his book titled Death, Property and the Ancestors: a Study of the Mortuary Customs of the Lodagaa of West Africa. According to Goody (1962:410), when a male heir inherits property and jural authority at the death of the holder, he feels both happy and sad. Death is "an event that is
therefore hoped for as well as feared" and "the inheritance brings guilt as well as pleasure." He feels guilty because his desire to inherit makes him in some way responsible for the death. Since he feels that he has brought harm to his benefactor, he fears the benefactor's retaliation. Therefore, Goody (ibid) argued: "In the main, it is those from whose death one benefits that one fears as ancestors." If the heir suffers from misfortune, he is likely to blame the ancestor for that. This theory does not fit the ancestors in Sanyuan Village, where the transfer of property and power has been completed before the aged parents die. Inheritance is not an issue that can provoke guilt among the villagers.

The childhood experience theory states that "there is a general tendency for less indulgent treatment in infancy to be related to predominantly aggressive deities in the cultural belief system, and for more indulgent treatment to be related to benevolent deities." (Lambert, et al.:1959:164) I cannot prove or disprove this theory, since I did not systematically collect any data on child rearing in the village. I can only put forth some suggestions based on my observations of mortuary practices in the village.

At a funeral in Sanyuan Village, if the deceased has children, he/she will be highly praised (the rite of tuanfu) for giving birth to children; for bringing them up; for teaching them farming knowledge and for building houses for them. At the funeral, parents are always seen as kind and supportive to their children in this world. They feed them, teach them, protect them, and love them. They also punish them for their mischief. My informants did not believe that their ancestors would purposely cause them misfortune or trouble.

It must be noted that in Chinese society, death is seen as inevitable but not final. It is only a point of transition. It does not signify the end of a person's participation in the
lives and activities of his or her family. nor of their involvement with him/her (Watson 1988:9). The death rituals in Sanyuan Village reflect this belief in the continuity between this world and the otherworld. So after one's parents die and are transformed into one's ancestors in the otherworld, their social status and benevolent nature are not changed there. They continue to both protect their children and punish them for their misbehaviors. The benevolence of ancestors is simply the reflection of parents' attitudes toward their children. Because of their benign nature, ancestors are given crucial roles in the life of the living. They are invited to be present at most important events in a family such as birth, marriage, death, and the banquet on Chinese New Year's Eve. At other important family events, such as building a house, embarking on a long journey, choosing a marriage partner, and starting a planting season or harvesting a crop, the ancestors are consulted and their blessings requested.

Chinese ancestors are anthropomorphic. They are believed to have the same needs and desires as their living descendants (Ahern 1973: Chen 1967: Jordan 1972: Thompson 1988). Therefore, food, cigarettes, liquor, house, bicycles, TV sets, and other items of daily use are often sacrificed to ancestors. Ancestors are perceived as real and their comfort equated with the comfort of the living. There is a close interdependence between the dead and the living. Ancestors depend on their descendants for food, shelter, and money. Their descendants, in turn, may require the assistance of the ancestors to deal with the problems of their daily life. This mutual dependence between the dead and the living reinforces the importance of the rituals.

On the nature of Chinese ancestors, Maurice Freedman (1979a:296) made a
distinction between ancestors in shrines and ancestors in tombs. Ancestors in shrines are attached to tablets, with each tablet standing for one ancestor. They are tended, reverenced and fed. Ancestors in their tombs have a different fate. "As a set of bones, an ancestor is no longer in command of his descendants; he is at their disposal. They no longer worship him; he serves their purposes." (ibid:298) Freedman (ibid:299) believed that Chinese ancestors are revered in ancestor worship, but in *fengshui* of graves, they are subordinated and manipulated. Li Yih-yuan disagreed with Freedman. He (1976:332) argued that the geomancy of graves shows not only the reciprocity, but the mutual love and dependence between ancestors and descendants. Ancestors in tombs are not manipulated by their descendants. This is true in the case of Sanyuan Village, where no graves have ever been relocated by any descendants in the past and where villagers do not have individual tablets for ancestors. The villagers usually do not blame their ancestors for their misfortunes. The good *fengshui* of a grave is believed to benefit all descendants if properly handled.

### 4.4 Death and Inheritance

Marcel Mauss in his well-know essay *The Gift* argued that the giving of a gift institutes an obligation to receive and to reciprocate. He said:

> Presentations which are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous are in fact obligated and interested. The form often taken is that of a gift generously offered, but the accompanying behavior is formal pretence and social deception while the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest. (Mauss 1967:1)

The death rituals in Chinese society also involve the transaction of gifts in the form of property, wealth, authority, status, and power. Death in Chinese society provides an arena
for the exchange to take place between the living and the dead, and between the bereaved family and the community. Inheritance of property has been perceived by some anthropologists as a critical motivation for the continuation of ancestral rites (Ahern 1973 in Taiwan; Danforth 1982 in Greece; Goody 1962 in West Africa; Johnston 1910 in China).

In traditional Chinese society, property was generally divided among the sons after the death of the father. *Fenjia* (dividing the household) before the father's death was considered as a disrespectful act and subjected the family to ridicule from the community. Those who sought to divide the household might even be published severely (Zhu 1981:272). Ideally, only after the father was properly buried and all the required rituals were completed would the family property be divided among the sons. The deceased was believed to relinquish his rights to property after all the rituals were performed and the soul of the deceased was safely transferred to the otherworld. Thus, it was the execution of the funeral rituals that gave sons the right to appropriate the property of the deceased. Failure to perform proper ancestral rituals negated the right of descendant to inherit from the dead (Tong 1987:193).

On the basis of her fieldwork in Taiwan, Emily Ahern (1973:138-148) pointed out that there is a close relation between the setting-up and worship of ancestor tablets and the inheritance of property. Descendants are only obliged to worship and make sacrifice to those from whom they had inherited property. Ahern's inheritance theory might account for why sons dutifully perform the rituals; however, it cannot explain why daughters, and sons-in-law, and grandchildren take active part in the ritual practice. It does not explicate why
elaborate rituals are provided to mothers who usually do not own property.

Ahern's view has also been challenged by Li Yih-yuan and Yu Guang-hong, two native anthropologists who specialize in Taiwanese ethnology. They argued that Chinese ancestor worship is a way to memorize their ancestors for giving birth to them and taking care of them when they were young and, therefore, no matter whether the ancestors leave any property, they will be worshipped and offered sacrifice (Li 1986:53-54; Yu 1987:137).

Tong Chee-kiong (1987:189), in his study of the death rituals among the Chinese in Singapore, argued that ritual performance in Chinese society is "egocentred." What the performers commonly request from their ancestors are wealth, prosperity, and offspring. Consequently, we can regard the great amount of money spent on elaborate rituals as a kind of investment. It is hoped that such investments will be reciprocated by the ancestors. Tong (ibid:195-96) further suggested that it is the "potential for greater benefits" that motivates the descendant to spend so much money. It is believed that by converting the deceased into a rich ancestor, the now well-off ancestor will see fit, and is in fact expected, to return the favor and reward descendants with even more wealth."

In my field work at Sanyuan Village in 1997, I did not find any individual ancestor tablet, except the one at the gongfang (communal room) of the Xie lineage for a man who lived about two hundred years ago. Ancestors were all regarded as part of jiashen (family gods) and were worshipped together with them. To complicate matters, inheritance of property has gone through major changes since the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1949. Land, the most important property that parents could leave to their sons, was now the property of the state and contracted to individual household to cultivate.
Thus, when an old man died, he usually did not have much to leave to his sons. Indeed, I found that old villagers were dependent on their children. Aged villagers often lived in turns in their sons’ homes. It was a local custom that when a son got married, he would live with the parent for a year and then *fenjia* (dividing the household) would take place. He would get his share of the family property usually in the form of a new house and establish his own household. At the death of his parents, he would generally inherit nothing very valuable. The inheritance theory cannot explain why the villagers would hold elaborate funerals to their deceased parents who left them almost nothing at their death, and why the villagers would offer sacrifice to their ancestors all the year round on special occasions.

My informants in the village gave me three explanations for their participation in ancestral ritual performance. Those who believed in the existence of the otherworld wanted to show their ancestors their filial piety and generosity so as to increase the ancestors’ obligation to reciprocate. They genuinely believed that ancestors had the power to affect their lives. Their behaviors comply with Tong’s theory. However, the number of the believers was small. Since those believers were usually old villagers, their death would further decrease the total number of believers. I will discuss this topic in the next section.

There were a large number of nonbelievers who doubted the existence of the otherworld. They regarded their participating in ancestral ritual as performing a duty, an obligation to fulfill. According to them, they owed much to their parents for giving them life and bringing them up. They were in debt to their parents. The enactment of the
funeral and the wearing of mourning garments were viewed as means of repaying the
debt to the deceased. It was also a way to relieve the survived father or mother of the pain
of losing a life-long partner since their physical presence at the funeral or on other
occasions when sacrifice was offered to the deceased would bring comfort to their father
or mother. Besides, it was a way to avoid the public sanction and pressure that regard
children who failed to perform proper rituals for their deceased parents as unfilial and
worthless beings. The primary motive of their participation in ancestral rites supports Li
(1986:53-54) and Yu's (1987:137) argument that Chinese ancestor worship is a way to
commemorate the dead for what they have done to their descendants.

A third group of villagers stood between the believers and nonbelievers. They
offered food, mock paper money and incense to their ancestors because it was a local
custom observed by every family in the village. They told me that life in the village was
hard and there were not many opportunities to substantially improve their lives. They
doubted the power of ancestors since so far they had not received any blessings from their
ancestors. However, they were afraid that if they did not offer sacrifice to their ancestors,
their brothers or sisters would do it and might be rewarded by the ancestors. Then they
would lose an opportunity to change their lives. This fear or anxiety, though it was not the
fear of black magic, spirits, gods, devils, or hell as Radcliffe-Brown (1952:149) claimed,
does affect their participation in performing ancestral rites.

4.5 The Death rituals and Fengshui

Fengshui, literally meaning "wind and water," is the ancient Chinese art of
conscious placement and divination. The term fengshui was first mentioned in the
Zangjing [Book of Burial] by Guo Pu at the Qin-Han period (221 B.C.- 220 A.D.) (Fan 1992:36). It is grounded in indigenous Chinese philosophies and human experiences, and has been used in China to probe the landscape and to discern from the irregularity and asymmetry of mountains and waters appropriate locations for specific human occupancy, such as individual dwellings, graves, and the imperial capitals and village settlements (ibid:35).

*Fengshui* is generally translated into English as geomancy. But the use of the term "geomancy" could be misleading, assimilating *fengshui* to the magical practices of the Western world. Other terms have been suggested, such as "topomancy" (Feuchtwang 1974:4); "topographical sitting" or "siting" (Bennett 1978:2); "mystical ecology" (Freedman 1979b:313); and "folk science" (Anderson 1996:16). Early anthropologists and other social scientists, such as Sir James Frazer, Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, discussed Chinese "geomancy" in their works (Freedman 1979b:314). In recent years, anthropologists studying life in Chinese villages have frequently included *fengshui* in their works (see Huang 1998; Potter and Potter 1990; Sangren 1987). They have shown that *fengshui* greatly affects life in the villages, from building a house, to selecting a burial ground, to finding a right time for a marriage or funeral ceremony, and so forth.

*Fengshui* consists of several symbolic systems which include *yinyang*, *wuxing* (the Five Elements), *bagua* (the Eight Trigrams), and *tiangan dizhi* (the Ten Heavenly Stems and Twelve Earthly Branches). Zhiming Zhao outlined how these important components of *fengshui* work for divination. The *yinyang* ideology illustrates that everything has two opposite dimensions that exist side by side and complement each other. What is good or beneficial acquires meaning only in relation to what is evil and
destructive. Harmony is a balance of the *yin* and *yang* contrasts. So "*fengshui* divination seeks to place human buildings—for the living or for the dead—at sites where there is a tranquil balance of *yin* and *yang*." (Zhao 1998:245)

The Five Elements of "wood," "earth," "water," "fire," and "metal" were thought by ancient Chinese to constitute the cosmos. The five elements form either mutually destructive or mutually productive relationship (see Figure 3). For the mutually productive relationship, one element gives birth to and promote another as follows: wood generates fire; fire, earth; earth, metal; metal, water; and water, wood. For the mutually destructive relationship, one element subdues and overcomes another: wood overcomes earth; earth, water; water, fire; fire, metal; metal, wood. The *wu xing* provides an important explanatory framework for the divination of *fengshui* (ibid:247).

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![Figure 3: Global Relationships of the "Five Elements" (Zhao 1998:247)](image-url)
The Eight Trigrams primarily epitomizes a stage of the *yin* and *yang* motion used in *fengshui* divination to evaluate the physical features of landscape in cosmic and dynamic terms. It enables *fengshui* divination to investigate the metaphysical significance of both visible and invisible variables in the site (Zhao 1998:246).

The last symbolic system used in *fengshui* divination involves the classification of time. The Ten Heavenly Stems and Twelve Earthly Branches (divisions of two cycles used in keeping track of time) can form a total of sixty different combinations and be incorporated with *Yin* and *Yang*, and the Five elements into *fengshui* divination. Time is an important variable of change in *fengshui* divination (ibid:248).

In Sanyuang Village, *fengshui* divination is an indispensable part of death rituals today. *Fengshui* master is in charge of choosing sacred time for specific rites such as moving the coffin out of the community and finding a sacred place (grave) for the deceased. The auspicious time and space chosen by the *fengshui* master can prevent the influence of evil spirits and hold *qi* (energy) which leads to the growth of fortune and offspring in the deceased family.

A gravesite with good *fengshui* in Sanyuan Village usually faces the nearby Dahonghe Lake and the mountain range far away with its back against a hill or earth mound. There should be an expanse of open land in front of the grave. There should be hills on both sides of the open land. The hill on the left side should be higher than that on the right side. The technical terms a *fengshui* master uses to describe such as landscape are: the Azure Dragon on the left, the White Tiger on the right, the Vermilion Bird in the
front, and the Black Tortoise in the back. According to one fengshui master [interviewed, the two hills serve as two arms that hold the qi (energy) coming from the lake and mountain through the expanse of open land. Dragons in the mountain can bring more offspring to the family and dragons in the lake can increase the wealth of the family.

As in the case of ancestor worship, there were believers and non-believers in fengshui in Sanyuan Village. One informant who had only daughters and no sons believed that the gender of his offspring was determined by the fengshui of his ancestors' graves. One nonbeliever argued that, if the fengshui of graves could affect the prosperity of a family, then why fengshui masters (he named a few) were not richer than others, even though they could have found grave sites with the best fengshui for their parents. Yet, most of my informants, both believers and non-believers, regarded the work of fengshui master in locating grave sites as useful. For non-believers, graves located by a fengshui master would generally not suffer from erosion from rain and wind and there would not be underground water to destroy the graves. Besides, gravesites selected by fengshui master did not occupy fertile rice fields, because a rice paddy field was comparable to a pond in fengshui and no fengshui master would set a coffin in a pond of water.

Rappaport (1968), in his study of ancestral rituals in New Guinea, demonstrated how these rituals work to regulate the relationships between the people and their natural resources. He described how the Maring-speaking peoples of New Guinea killed

\footnote{左青龍，右白虎，前朱雀，后玄武。}
domestic pigs only under special circumstances and within a ritual framework. For example, if the number of pigs became so large that too much labor and food were needed to feed them, a ritual killing of pigs was then organized. At such times, the pigs competed with men for resources, degrading the environment. Killing the pigs would maintain a delicate but essential environmental balance.

Chinese death rituals, through the work of a *fengshui* master, perform a similar function. In *fengshui* ideology, man and nature share the same fate, and the harmony between them leads to the prosperity of them all. In *fengshui* perspective, human tampering with nature might disrupt its equilibrium, and changing the environment (whether in the form of a house built or a tomb on the land) might set off a series of events leading to unpredictable results. So what *fengshui* emphasizes is the co-existence of nature and culture. Selecting gravesites on marginal land that is not suitable for wet rice farming, *fengshui* masters have preserved the scarce land resource in the village and regulated the relationship between the villagers and their environment.
CHAPTER FIVE

DEATH RITUALS AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Since Fei Xiaotong published his *Peasant Life in China* in 1939, Chinese peasants have been of great interest to anthropologists and other social scientists studying complex societies. The nature of Chinese kinship and community organizations has been a hot research topic widely explored by many anthropologists and other social scientists (e.g. Baker 1979; Duara 1988; Freedman 1958, 1966; Parish and Whyte 1978; Potter and Potter 1990; Shue 1988; Skinner 1964). Francis Hsu (1965:642-44) generalized four attributes of Chinese family and kinship system: "continuity," "inclusiveness," "authority," and "asexuality." Continuity is the unbroken relationship between ancestors and descendants, and among living members, and the connection with people without kinship ties. Inclusiveness is the "the act of incorporating, or the attitude of wishing to be incorporated," and is indicated by a widening circle of relationships derived from a continuous original relationship. Authority refers to personal power that commands and enforces obedience, such as father's absolute authority over his sons. Asexuality is "the condition of having no
connection with sex." So the father-son relationship is more important than the husband-wife relationship. Hsu's student, Hendrick Serrie (1976:426), used published ethnographic data to analyze the structures and contents of social organizations in 14 Chinese communities in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and overseas. He found that these four attributes were present in all the 14 communities. Likewise, death rituals in Sanyuan Village embody these four attributes of Chinese family and kinship systems. This can be demonstrated because funerals are at the core, family events within the context of a kinship community.

5.1 Participants and Their Social Relations

Chronologically, the death rituals in Sanyuan Village can be divided into three major categories: preparation for death, funeral rites, and post-funeral rites. Participants in the first and last categories of rites are generally family members. Family members here refer to the deceased's spouse, sons, daughters-in-law, daughters, sons-in-law, and their children. Sons are called *zheng xiaozi* (chief filial mourners) locally, suggesting "continuity" and "asexuality" attributes of the family and kinship system, because as *zheng xiaozi*, the sons are obliged to continue the family line by reproducing male offspring, otherwise they will be regarded as unfilial to their parents, and the name "*zheng xiaozi*" implies a closer relationship between parents and sons, though in reality, the father-son axis has been replaced by the husband-wife axis in
Participants in the second category of rites consist of five groups: family members, kinsmen, friends and colleagues, specialists, and helpers. Their different relationship with the deceased is vividly manifested in the mourning clothes they wear.

Traditionally in imperial China, *wufu* (five grades of mourning clothes), a codified official system symbolizing the mourning duties by different mourning garments, was practiced. This system was fully established in the Zhou Dynasty over two thousand years ago. It was later prescribed by Confucian orthodoxy such as Zhu Xi's *Jia Li* [Family Rituals] (see Ebrey 1991b:86-97). *Wufu* was used not only to impose a duty of mourning upon people, sanctioned by punishment, but also to define degrees of relationship both within and outside the family unit (Baker 1979:107-109).

The first grade mourners (including sons, the eldest grandson, unmarried daughters, and daughters-in-laws) would wear untrimmed coarse hemp clothes and observe three years of mourning period. The second grade mourners (including grandsons and great grandsons) should don coarse hemp clothes and observe a mourning period of three to thirteen months. The third grade mourners (including brother, sisters and cousins) would wear less course hemp clothes and observe a mourning period of nine months. The fourth grade mourners (including nephews and nieces) should wear good hemp clothes and observe a mourning period of

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1 This topic will be discussed in Section 6.3 of next chapter.
five months. The fifth grade mourners (including relatives within one’s lineage but not directly connected with one’s father or grandfather) would wear the finest hemp cloth and observe a mourning period for three months (Luo 1988:191-93; Song 1991:70-71; Zheng 1995:274-77).

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Figure 4: Five Mourning Grades for Agnatic Kinsmen¹ (Ebrey 1991b:90)

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¹ "Untrimmed" means unhemmed. Both the shirt and the skirt use extremely coarse unprocessed hemp cloth and the sides and the lower edge are unhemmed. "Even" means hemmed. The shirt, skirt, and cap are made from the next finer grade of course unprocessed hemp cloth and hems the sides and the bottom edge (Ebrey 1991b:87-90).
The *Wufu* system is no longer practiced in China today, but its underlying concept of distinguishing between the close and distant kinsmen by different forms of mourning garments is still visible at a Chinese funeral today. In Sanyuan Village, according to my informants, a funeral would involve *san qing liu qi* of the deceased. When I asked my informants who those *san qing liu qi* were, I was told that it was just a term referring to all the kinsmen that the deceased had. Generally, it included relatives from one's father's side, mother's side, and wife's side, displaying the attribute of "inclusiveness" of a kin group as defined by Hsu (1965:642-44).

![Figure 5: The first Descent Line of Agnatic Kinsmen](image)

Figure 5: The first Descent Line of Agnatic Kinsmen

In Sanyuan Village, the agnatic kinsmen consist of four descent lines. The first line (see figure 5) includes one's own parents (*baba* [1] for...)

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1 三親六戚, literally translated as three kinds of cognates and six types of affinal kins.
father and *mama* [2] for mother; grandparents (*gonggong* [3] for grandpa, *popo* [4] for grandma); great grandparents (*zuzu* [5] for both great grandpa and great grandma); one's children (*er* [6] for son, *erxi* [7] for daughter-in-law, *nu er* [8] for daughter and *menke* [9] for son-in-law); grandchildren (*sun* [10] for grandson and *sunxi* [11] for his wife, and *sunnu* [12] for grand-daughter and *sun menke* [13] for her husband, *waisun* [14] for one's daughter's son and *waisun xifu* [15] for his wife, *waisunnu* [16] for one's daughter's daughters and *waisun menke* [17] for her husband); and great grandchildren (*chensun* [18] for great grandson, *chensunnu* [19] for great granddaughter, *waichensun* [20] for one's *sunnu's* son, *waisun's* son and *waisunnu's* son; *waichensunnu* [21] for one's *sunnu's* daughters, *waisun's* daughters, and *waisunnu's* daughters). The noticeable difference is between one's son's offspring and one's daughter's offspring. The term for the daughter's offspring has a prefix *wai* which means "outside." The term *menke* which addresses son-in-law literally means guest outside the door of the house. These terms clearly indicate a feature of patrilineal and patrilocal Chinese society. When daughters are married out, they and their families are considered as outsiders. To their natal family, their importance is reduced. The *xiaopa* (a piece of white cloth tied around a mourner's head and dropped behind his/her back) that they wear is different from those worn by sons, daughters-in-law, grandsons and unmarried daughters who have hemp threads attached to their *xiaopa*. 

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The second line of agnatic kinsmen (see figure 6) includes one's brothers (ge for elder brother and di [1] for younger brother) with their wives (saozi for elder brother's wife, dixi [2] for younger brother's wife),

![Diagram of the Second Descent Line of Agnatic Kinsmen]

Figure 6: The Second Descent Line of Agnatic Kinsmen

wui (outside) is added to the terms addressing one's sister's offspring, indicating that the sister is married out. At a funeral in Sanyuan Village, offspring of one's brothers and sisters are included in the xiaodan (list of filial descendants). They are also required to wear xiaopa, but they do not attach hemp thread to their xiaopa, which distinguishes them from the deceased's own sons, daughters-in-law, grandsons, and unmarried daughters.

![Figure 7: The Third Descent Line of Agnatic Kinsmen](image)

The third line (see figure 7) includes one's father's brothers (da ye [1] for one's father's eldest brother, a cardinal number added to ye referring other brothers) with their wives (da niang [2] for father's eldest brother's wife, and combination of a cardinal number and niang for father's other brothers' wives), their children (ge for elder males and di for younger males [3], saozi or dixi for their wives accordingly [4], jie for elder females and mei for younger females [5], jiege or meifu for their husbands [6]), and their grandchildren (zhizi [7], zhinu [8], waizhi [9] and
waizhinu [10]: one's father's sisters (niangniang [11]) with their husbands(guye [12]), their children (laobiao [13] for their sons and biaosao [14] for their wives. biaojie for their daughters older than oneself and biaomei for their daughters younger than oneself [15] and biaojiege or biaomei for their husbands respectively [16]). and their grandchildren (biaozhi [17] for father's sister's son's son. biaozhinu [18] for father's sister's son's daughter, biaowaizhi [19] for father's sister's daughter's son. and biaowaizhinu [20] for father's sister's daughter's daughter). Terms used to address one's own brothers. sisters. their children. and grandchildren are used here for one's father's brother's offspring. However, one's father's sister's children and grandchildren are called differently. This difference suggests exclusiveness of Chinese patrilineal descent groups. It also illustrates Chinese kinship structure formed by a vertical descent line and horizontal affinal ties. At a funeral. the deceased's zhizi [7], zhinu [8], waizhi [9], waizhinu [10], biaozhi [17], biaozhinu [18], biaowaizhi [19], and biaowaizhinu [20] join other xiaozzi (filial descendants) in performing rituals with priests, and wear xiaopa without hemp thread.

The fourth line (see figure 8) includes one's grandfather's brothers (da gong [1] for his eldest brother and a combination of a cardinal number and gong for the other brothers according to individual's age) with their wives (da po [2] for da gong's wife and a cardinal number plus po for
others). their children (ye [3] for sons and niang [4] for their wives, niangniang [5] for daughters and guye [6] for their husbands), and their grandchildren (ge or di compared with one's age [7], jie or mei according to age difference with oneself [8], laobiao [9] for one's grandfather's brother's daughter's son, and biaojie/biaomei [10] for one's grandfather's brother's daughter's daughter); one's grandfather's sisters (gupo [11]) with their husbands (gugong [12]), their children (biaoshu [13] for sons and biaoshuniang [14] for their wives, niangniang [5] for daughters and guye [6] for their husbands), and their grandchildren (laobiao [9] for males, and biaojie for elder females or biaomei [10] for younger females). Relatives descended from one's grandfather's brothers are treated the same as one's father's brothers' offspring. It indicates that they are all members of one lineage group. They might participate in a funeral. Those whose genealogical status is either higher than or equal to the deceased's do not
wear any mourning garments for the deceased. But those who are at a lower genealogical position have to wear xiaopà without hemp threads attached at a funeral.

Maternal relatives (see figure 9) include mother's parents (waigong [1] for her father and waipo [2] for her mother); mother's brothers (jiujìu [3]) with their wives (jiuniàng [4]), their children (laobiao [5] for sons and biaosao [6] for their wives, biaojie for daughters older than oneself and biaomei for daughters younger than oneself [7] and biaojiege for biaojie’s husband and biaomeifu for biaomei’s husband [8]), and their

![Figure 9: Maternal Relatives](image)

or *mei* [17] for elder or younger daughters as compared with one's own age and *jiege* or *meifu* [18] for their husbands), and their grandchildren (*yizhi* [19], *yizhun* [20], *yiwazhi* [21], and *yiwaizhun* [22]). Mother's brothers play an important role at a funeral in Sanyuan Village. If a mother dies, her brothers will check the dead body and inquire the cause of the death. They often take charge of receiving gifts and make sure that the gifts will be properly handed to their nephews and nieces. They serve as guardian of the bereaved family, taking care of their interests at the funeral. Mother's brothers' and sisters' children represent mother's natal family in participating in ritual performance with priests. The *xiaopa* they wear have no hemp thread.

![Figure 10: Relatives from One's Wife's Side](image)

Relatives from one's wife's side (see figure 10) include her parents [1,2], her brothers [3], their wives [4], sisters [11], and their husbands [12], and their children and grandchildren. Terms that one uses to address
one's own parents, brothers and sisters (baba, mama, ge/di, and jie/mei) are used for one's wife's parents and siblings. Neizhi [5] is used to refer to her brother's son and neizhixifu [6] for his wife, and neizhinu [7] for her brother's daughter and neizhimenke [8] for her husband. Neizhisun [9] and neizhisunnu [10] are terms for mother's brother's grandchildren. The prefix nei (inside) indicates that they are related to one's wife by blood. Her sister's children are called yizhi [13], yizhixifu [14], yizhinu [15], and yizhimenke [16]. Her sister's grandchildren are called yizhisun [17] and yizhisunnu [18]. These terms, especially those for a man's parents and siblings used in addressing his wife's parents and siblings, show a close relationship between a man's natal family and his wife's natal family.

Neizhi, neizhinu, yizhi, yizhinu, and their children are included as filial descendants in the xiaodan (list of filial descendants) and should wear xiaopa for the deceased. But unlike zheng xiaozí (chief mourners), they do not wear hemp thread attached to their xiaopa.

Among kinsmen, there is another special group of participants if the deceased is an old person. They are his/her gan er (adopted son) or gan nu (adopted daughter). In Sanyuan Village, it is a common practice for parents to look for gan ma (guardian mother) and gan ba (guardian father) for their children, especially if the children are weak and often fall sick. An adoption ceremony will be held and some elders in the village will be invited to witness the ceremony. A document that authorizes the adoption and changes the child's last name will be drawn and signed by both
parties. After the ceremony, the child returns home with his/her own biological parents. From that point on, he/she has two names until he/she is 16 years old. He/she is obliged to visit his/her *gan ma* and *gan ba* with gifts on their birthdays and Chinese New Year and to attend their funerals. It is believed that only by being adopted to someone can the child grow up healthily. The adoption sets up a fictive kinship that establishes dyadic horizontal and vertical relationships with others outside the kin-group and the community.

Friends and colleagues present at a funeral are friends and colleagues of both the deceased and members of the bereaved family. Friends and colleagues of the deceased come to mourn over the death of their friend or co-worker. Friends and colleagues of the members of the family show up to console the survived members. Specialists hired at a funeral include priests, a *fengshui* master, funeral musicians, and craftsmen to make paper houses. Helpers at a funeral are neighbors and other villagers who volunteer or are asked to help the bereaved family. They help wash and dress the deceased and put the deceased into a coffin. They cook for all participants. They carry the coffin to the grave site and pile up the tomb with soil. Friends, colleagues, specialists and helpers all wear short *xiaopa* (mourning garments) that distinguish them from *xiaozi* (filial descendants) who have to wear long *xiaopa*.

Different mourning garments represent different rights and duties for all participants at a funeral toward the deceased and the bereaved.
family. It clearly illustrates some important features of Chinese kinship system. Li Yih-yuan (1986:48) argued that Chinese ancestral worship ritual demonstrates three kinds of relationships in Chinese kinship system: 1) parent-child relationship; 2) descent relationship; and 3) jural-authority relationship.\footnote{親子關係，世系關係，權力關係。} Death rituals in Sanyuan Village emphasize the mutual support between parents and children while the parents are alive and after they have passed away. The line of descent is demonstrated in the positions that participants take in following priests to perform funerary rites. Agnatic relatives are always placed ahead of affinal relatives. The jural-authority is manifested in competition and conflicts that occur at a funeral, which is a topic for the following sections.

5.2 Ritual and Social Stratification

Chinese death rituals set the kin group apart from outsiders and "illuminate formal kinship relations by highlighting segmentations and hierarchies within the group. The assumption is that every social relationship in Chinese society is by definition, unequal." (Tong 1987:163) In traditional Chinese society, the Confucian five cardinal principles regulated the relationships between ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brother, and between friends. Within this hierarchy, people were bound to one another by a set of duties and obligations. According to Confucius, there should be a
righteous sense of duty between ruler and minister: affection between father and son; division of function between husband and wife; a proper order between old and young; and good faith between friends. If these duties and obligations are properly observed, there would be no conflict in society.

At a funeral in Sanyuan Village, xiaodan, a list of all filial descendants of the deceased that is prepared by priests, first demonstrates the existence of kinship hierarchy. It only includes persons whose genealogical status is lower than the deceased's. Xiaodan arranges all descendants according to the order of sons, daughters-in-law, daughters, sons-in-law, grandsons and granddaughters, brother's sons and daughters, mother's brother's sons and daughters, wife's brother's sons and daughters, father's sister's sons and daughters, mother's sister's sons and daughters, and their children, and adopted sons and daughters and their children. The xiaodan demonstrates the three kinds of kinship ties among peasant households based on "blood," affinity and fictive kinship. The distance of consanguineous, affinal, and fictive relationships to the deceased and the importance of these relationships to the bereaved family vary according to the position that each individual holds in this list.

The order that the names of filial descendants appear on xiaodan is followed during the funeral when priests need to line up descendants to perform rites. Sons can hold the soul tablet and the fan for the deceased. If the deceased had no son, daughters are now allowed take the soul tablet.
and the fan. This development sharply contrasts with the expectations held in the past, when women were not allowed to touch the soul tablet or the fan. Traditionally, if the deceased had no sons, agnatic nephews, instead of the deceased's daughters, would hold the soul tablet and carry the fan. This change shows the rising social status of women in the village as a result of the government's long-term policy that advocates equality between men and women.

The mourning garments also indicate the hierarchical nature of kinship in Chinese society. In traditional Chinese society, the wufu (five different grades of mourning) system determined what kind of mourning garment a relative of the deceased should wear and how long the mourning period should last. An observer could immediately figure out the relationship between a mourner and the deceased by looking at the mourning garment he/she wore (Tong 1987:165). Today, in Sanyuan Village, though the traditional five-grade mourning system has been neglected and mourning garments are simplified, three different grades of mourning garments can still be observed at a funeral.

The first grade of mourning garment is for sons, daughters-in-law, and unmarried daughters. They should have hemp threads attached to their xiaopa (mourning cloth). The second grade of mourning garment is worn by the rest of xiaozi listed on the xiaodan. These are married daughters, their husbands and children, both agnatic and affinal nephews and nieces of the deceased and their children. They all wear xiaopa on their head
without hemp threads. The third grade of mourning garment is for friends, specialists and volunteers who wear xiaopa that are shorter than those worn by xiaoz. Parents or relatives whose genealogical statuses are senior or equal to the deceased will not wear any mourning garments. The kinship hierarchy manifested by the death ritual in Sanyuan Village indicates the attribute of "authority" of senior members in Chinese family and kinship as defined by Hsu (1965:642-44).

Non-kin social ties are manifested in the gifts that the bereaved family receives. An accounting table is always set up at a funeral. All the gifts are carefully recorded. There are cash gifts and gifts in kind which include different grains (rice, corn, wheat, soybean, and mung bean), cloth, mock paper money, and firecrackers. What to send and how much to send to a bereaved family are generally determined by four major factors.

The first is the social hierarchy in the village. Yunxiang Yan (1996:34), in his intensive study of gift-giving in a village in Northeast China, identified four status groups in the village during the collective years according to their prestige, privileges, and ability to gain access to resources and opportunities in the bureaucratic redistribution system. Arranged in hierarchical order from top to bottom, the four status groups are: 1) cadres; 2) si shu hu (four types of households which include the spouses and children of four types of prestigious people: state cadres, workers, teachers, and military officers); 3) ordinary villagers; and 4) "four bad elements" (landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries.
and rotten elements). This system has been changed as a result of rural reforms started in the late 1970s and the decollectivization launched in the early 1980s. Class labels were officially abolished in 1979, terminating the "four bad element" group. Reforms have reduced privileges of *si shu hu*. since all the villagers are now allowed to seek temporary jobs in cities. Decollectivization has broken the cadres' monopoly over resources and undermined their control over the life of ordinary villagers. The social hierarchy with four status groups is being replaced by a "dual system of social stratification characterized the coexistence of bureaucratic rank with a market-based economic class order." (ibid:37-38) This was also the case in Sanyuan Village. During the collective years, it had four status groups as defined by Yan. Its social hierarchy consisted of cadres and economically successful families at the top, and the ordinary villagers at the bottom.

Anthropologists and sociologists have found that unilateral gift giving eventually leads to an increase of power and prestige for the donor (Yan 1996:160). Many ethnographic studies have argued that in many societies, it is the donors of gifts who gain prestige and power (see, e.g., Befu 1966-67; Gregory 1982; Malinowski 1984, Mauss 1967 and Sahlins 1972). Sahlins (1972:205) pointed out: "In primitive society social inequality is more the organization of economic equality. Often, in fact, high rank is only secured or sustained by overbearing generosity: the material advantage is on the subordinate's side." However, these
anthropological studies of gift exchange are mostly based on observations of social life in relatively "simple" societies whose internal economy and social relations have been only "marginally or incompletely affected by the penetration of a political state." (Yan 1998:162)

Sanyuan Village, like all other rural villages in China, is incorporated into the centralized state. The gift exchange in the village does not follow the model suggested by many anthropologists. In Sanyuan Village, it is usually the receiver, not the donor, who demonstrates prestige and power in the gift exchange. Cadres, though they have lost much of their political power, still enjoy privilege in the village due to their connections with government offices at higher levels and their control of public resources such as water pumping station. Therefore, giving more gifts to cadre families is like a long-term investment, setting up a patron-client relationship in which "favors need not be immediately repaid. The balance sheet may stretch over many years." (Oi 1989:146)

Yan (1996:154) in his study of reciprocity and social network in a village in Northeast China also found an unbalanced flow of gifts between villagers and their leaders. Yan (ibid: 159-60) argued that the social hierarchy based on two sets of binary oppositions (cadre vs. villager, city vs. countryside) still persists in present-day rural China. He pointed out:

In a hierarchical context unilateral giving does not necessarily generate power or create superiority on the part of the donor. On the contrary, the previously existing social hierarchy may overshadow the reciprocal obligation inherent to the gift and free the recipient
of super rank from falling into debt to the donor. Furthermore, when the social superior's power is based on a monopoly of resources, the subordinates' gifts become obligatory dues, with unilateral gift giving serving to express subordination and the respect of inferiors for their superiors. (Yan 1996:168)

This was also true in Sanyuan Village. Gifts received at a funeral held by a cadre's family outnumbered those held by a common villager both in quantity and quality.

The second factor that determines the value of gifts to the bereaved family is the economic status of the donors. One detailed record of gifts received by a bereaved family in 1993 listed 135 donors including 103 cash donors. The total amount of cash received was 789 yuan. The average was 7.67 yuan. Only 25 donations surpassed the average. Among these 25 donors, there were 16 workers or small business owners: three engaged in raising fish: one was a retired school teacher: one, a local doctor: and four donors' occupations were unknown. These people were considered as economically better off than local peasants and were expected to donate more than peasants. Otherwise, they would lose face. By donating more, they showed off their economic success and maintained their prestigious social status in the village.

The third factor is the relative kinship distance between the bereaved family and donors. From the same record mentioned above, I noticed that close relatives of the bereaved families tended to give more gifts either in cash or material than distant relatives.
The fourth factor is the value of the gift that the bereaved family gave to the donor on previous occasions. Every family in the village has an accounting book to record all gifts the family receive on any special occasions such as weddings and funerals. With such a record for reference, a family reciprocates properly when it is time for the family to do so.

Another indicator of the social status is the treatment that participants receive at a funeral. At the two funerals in which I participated, I noticed that local cadres, *si su hu*, and persons who made significant donations to the bereaved family, were treated differently. They were the first to be seated for dinner. They were often attended by members or close relatives of the bereaved family. Their presence was highly appreciated by the bereaved family.

The social hierarchy, as revealed at funerals in this rural community, indicates the existence of two forces that shape the village social landscape. The first is the party-state's authority, which is based on its monopoly of resources, maintained and reinforced by the new ruling class of cadres (Yan 1998:162). The second is the economic success resulted from the rural reform. The rural reform has created a new elite class in the village. This class is composed of villagers who do business or work in cities and villagers who have signed contracts with the local government to raise fish in ponds or in the Honghe Lake.
5.3 Ritual, Conflict, and Resolution

Anthropologists generally agree that ritual can reinforce group unity. They also believe that ritual can create conflicts. Turner (1967:38) even pointed out that conflicts are an inherent part of many rituals since "selfish and factional interests, oath breaking, disloyalty, sins of omission as well as sins of commission pollute and disfigure" people's ritual behaviors. Conflicts might lead to the segregation of social group. Therefore, societies develop means to control conflicts. In the case of Chinese society, conflicts are resolved (even if only partially) within the private domain of the social group, not revealed to the public (Tong 1987:174).

In Sanyuan Village, conflict may occur as soon as a father or mother draws the last breath. Siblings, especially women, burst into loud wailing. The wailing shows their grief over the death of a beloved member of the family on the one hand. On the other hand, it displays to the public that they have observed filial piety to the deceased both in his/her lifetime and at his/her death. To this end, daughters and daughters-in-law often compete against each other in singing laments. For the daughters, it is a way to show that, even though they have been married out, they still have great concern for their natal family. For the daughters-in-law, loud wailing prevents gossip that they have ill-treated the deceased while he/she was alive. Traditionally, the relationship between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law is very tense in Chinese society. Sanyuan Village is
not exceptional. Fights between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law are not uncommon in the village. Wailing or ritually singing laments at the funeral is a measure taken by a daughters-in-law to avoid being criticized by the public for being unfilial to the deceased.

Wailing is also a way for the siblings to compete for the affections of the dead. Besides, they compete in providing their clothes to be packed into the coffin so that the body will be stable during any movement of the coffin. They individually make sacrifice to the deceased. It is believed that the more affection one shows to the dead, the more blessings one will receive from the dead in return. It is like siblings competing for their parents' love and favor in their childhood.

Conflicts may occur when the dead body is put into a coffin. As previously explained, the body should be fixed tightly in the coffin. The tip of the nose should be aligned with the central line of the coffin. Because it is believed that if the nose tips to the left, the sons will suffer from bad luck; and when it tips to the right, the daughters will have bad fortune, great cautions are usually taken to fix the body and the position of the tip of the nose is checked carefully before the coffin is closed and nailed. Because of potential danger, fights occasionally occur between brothers (often their wives) and sisters when one accuses the other for positioning the tip of the nose to endanger them.

At the gravesite, descendants compete for the benefit of fengshui and blessings of the deceased. One informant, a priest, even told me that
there were rare cases in which siblings hired different *fengshui* masters or tried to bribe the same *fengshui* master to find a site that was favorable to themselves. Generally, the competition is kept at the minimum level. In Sanyuan Village, no tombs except those submerged by water have ever been relocated, indicating that all siblings are satisfied with the *fengshui* master's work.

Another source of conflicts, as Tong (1987:172) correctly argued, centers on the issue of money. In Sanyuan Village in 1998, the cost of a funeral was approximately 1500 to 2000 yuan (about 180-240$). Conflicts might occur over how to cover the expenses. Usually sons are responsible for paying the expenses, and married daughters are expected to contribute toward the expenses. How much money daughters should contribute often causes conflicts. To contribute less than the appropriate amount, a daughter is regarded as unfilial and stingy. How to use the daughters' contribution creates conflicts, too. In one case of the death of a mother, the daughters gave their contributions to their surviving father who put the money in his own pocket. His daughter-in-law complained to me about it.

A common practice at the village to cover the expenses is for the family members to get together and examine the account book after the funeral. All material goods that each member supplies to the funeral are converted into cash as expenses. Then, all the expenses are aggregated. Cash and gifts from friends and relatives will be added together to
counteract the expenses. Deficit or surplus is then divided equally among all the sons. This process might lead to conflict among brothers and sisters-in-law. My informants told me that conflicts over financial issues were quite common among family members even in their daily lives. I witnessed a conflict between two brothers in the village. One accused the other for failing to return a certain sum of money he borrowed. The other denied it. They could not convince each other since no one could provide written evidence or produce a witness. They finally went to their father's tomb and swore in front of the tomb. Both of them later told me that they would no longer recognize each other as brothers. The villagers, however, believed that their resentment against each other would not last long.

Conflicts at a funeral might be the outcome of similar problematic relationships among family members, yet the death of a family member allows them to work out their problems. No matter what kinds of conflicts are kindled through death ritual among siblings, the conflict and competition, according to my informants, are seldom serious enough to jeopardize a proper performance of funerary rituals and disrupt the unity of the family at the time of crisis. Otherwise, the family will lose face in the community, and all the members will be the subjects of gossip and disdain.
5.4 Individual, Family and Community

Individual members of the bereaved family play different roles at a funeral in Sanyuan Village. If a father or mother dies, sons, daughters-in-law, daughters and sons-in-law, and grandchildren are the filial descendants of the deceased with the eldest son as the chief mourner. They are obliged to follow the instructions of the priests and participate in the rites with the priests throughout the night with a few breaks during the intervals.

The spouse of the deceased does not participate in the rites performed by the priests. If a husband dies, the wife spends most of her time in her bedroom during the night. She comes out and sings laments in front of the coffin on occasions when the deceased is laid into a coffin, when female relatives from her natal family arrive and wail before the coffin, and when the coffin is nailed shut and moved to the gravesite. If a wife dies, the husband burns mock paper money and incense in front of the coffin and makes sure a kerosene lamp, which is set on the top of the coffin, is always burning brightly.

The deceased's agnatic and affinal nephews and nieces participate in the ritual performance as filial descendants. Other agnatic relatives of senior or the same genealogical generation status as the deceased's watch the ritual performance and make sure that priests' demands are satisfied promptly and the guests, especially honor guests, are entertained. Affinal relatives, especially wife's brothers, play a unique role at a funeral. They
are usually put in charge of receiving and recording gifts because they take as their duty to take care of their sister and her children and make sure that their interests will not be violated by other agnatic relatives. If their sister dies, they need to examine the body and inquire the cause of the death. It is also their job to check the coffin before it is permanently closed to make sure that nobody puts anything in it that might haunt their nephews and nieces. They will make sure that the dead body is fixed precisely at the center of the coffin so that all the descendants can receive blessings from the deceased. They are entrusted with such sensitive tasks due to their close tie with their sister and their equal distance to her children. Their special role at the funeral can prevent potential conflicts between husband's and wife's own natal families and among siblings.

Death rituals at Sanyuan Village involve not only the bereaved family and their relatives, but also the whole community, i.e. the natural village in which the deceased has lived. The neighbors' participation is vital for the successful performance of funerary rituals. They do a variety of things for the bereaved family members who at this time are overwhelmed with grief and are engaged in performing funerary rites with priests. Old villagers wash and dress the deceased and put the deceased into a coffin. Young and strong villagers carry the coffin out of the village to the gravesite. Old women are invited to perform the rite of baican (reading scripts and praying to gods for the deceased). Villagers are also in charge of cooking, digging the grave pit, filling it, and piling
Neighbors even lend their dining tables to the bereaved family. Their involvement in the funeral is not symbolic but real.

James Watson (1982, 1988), in his study of death rituals in two Cantonese villages in the New Territories of Hong Kong, found that death was considered to be highly polluting and that attending a funeral could bring illness to those attending. So ordinary villagers there were reluctant to become involved in funerals and they participated only to the extent that obligation defined. Village men were extremely careful to avoid touching the corpse. When the funeral procession passed by, villagers would shut their doors and windows and take their children indoors. In Sanyuan Village, however, the pollution of death was not taken so seriously. Only pregnant women and those whose horoscopes were divined by fengshui master to be in conflict with the deceased's would be warned not to attend the funeral procession. All my informants, both men and women, told me that they were not afraid to attend funerals.

Why is there such a big difference in dealing with death pollution? Cantonese have followed a system of double burial for centuries (Watson 1982:155-58). Cantonese believe that the flesh of the corpse must disintegrate completely before the bones begin to function for the benefits of descendants. So the corpse is first buried in a coffin and then after approximately seven years, the bones are exhumed and stored in a ceramic urn. Finally, the urn is reburied when an auspicious location has been acquired. This liminal phase is the most critical and dangerous for
Cantonese believe that *shaqi* (killing airs) associated with decaying flesh and the soul of the deceased contaminating everything and everybody in the immediate vicinity. "This pollution is transmitted to humans by physical proximity, secondary contact, and--most dangerously--by touching the corpse." (Watson 1988:113) Therefore, specialists are hired to handle the corpse and villagers try to avoid the killing airs by not attending funerals.

The villagers of Sanyuan Village do not practice second burial. Unlike the Cantonese, they do not have a strong belief that the corpse is surrounded by dangerous killing airs, except for the dead who met unnatural death. Yet even the killing airs caused by unnatural death can be controlled by priests. Therefore, Sanyuan villagers are not afraid of death or death pollution. One funeral I observed was for a man who had died from electric shock outside his house, an unnatural death. According to local custom, his body could not be moved inside the house. His coffin was stationed outside the house next to the door. Neighbors did not shut their doors to avoid pollution, nor did they hesitate to help dress the deceased, carry the coffin to the gravesite, or fill the grave pit with soil. Participants went inside the house passing by the coffin. No one bothered to enter the house through the back door so as to avoid the coffin. Thus, in many ways a funeral in Sanyuan Village is comparable to a wedding. Like wedding ceremony, banquets are provided to participants, and the
priests' performance of rites, like a drama, is meant to attract an audience to the funeral. In fact, the priests I talked to at the two funerals I attended told me that the size of the audience and their responses to them were criteria used to judge their performance. A funeral in the village provides a chance for the bereaved family members, their relatives, and their friends to interact with their neighbors and other villagers.
CHAPTER SIX

RITUAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Since the government launched rural reform in 1978, rural China has witnessed tremendous economic, sociocultural, and political changes. The reform has led to rapid economic growth. Per capita annual national gross income in rural China in 1978 was just 151.79 yuan (about 18 US$), and increased to 2999.20 yuan (about 361US$) in 1997 (China Statistical Bureau 1998:345). Politically, the commune system was dismantled and free election of cadres at the village level has been established (Lin 1995). Culturally, many traditional rituals have revived and are flourishing in rural China (Chen 1996). Change and continuity in these rituals clearly manifests social changes in rural China in the last two decades.

6.1 Change and Continuity in the Death Rituals

The structure of traditional Chinese mortuary rituals has not undergone fundamental changes for about two thousand years since the Han Dynasty (Lu 1990:203). In 1998, the death rituals of Sanyuan Village
maintained many typical features of traditional Chinese mortuary practices. The nine standardized mortuary rites in late imperial China as summarized by James Watson (see Chapter 1) could be found in the death rituals in Shanyuan Village (see chapter 3). They overlapped in these respects: 1) public notification of death by wailing; 2) wearing white clothing to express kin relationship; 3) ritualized bathing of the corpse; 4) transfer of food, money, and goods from the living to the dead; 5) preparation and installation of a soul tablet for the deceased; 6) ritualized use of money and the employment of paid professionals; 7) music to accompany the corpse and settle its spirit; 8) sealing the corpse in an airtight coffin; and 9) expulsion of the coffin from the community.

However, the death rituals in Sanyuan Village had experienced many changes as seen in 1998. One obvious structural change, according to my informants, was the change in the scale of the funerary ritual. A pre-1949 formal mortuary ceremony was longer in time and more elaborate in scale: a full-scale funeral lasting at least three days and nights. Today, however, a typical funeral usually lasts only one night and one morning. In addition, funerals used to involve more specialists. There were more professional Daoist priests and Buddhist monks, as well as other specialists and participants in pre-1949 China than are used in today's funeral rituals.

Further, some rites, such as making offerings to gods in the local temples or shrines, are no longer practiced, because there are now no
temples or shrines in this area, being destroyed in the 1960s. In the past, the funeral parade often went a long distance and would pass other villages or bridges. The parade would stop and make offerings to the local gods that controlled the village or the bridge. This is no longer the case. The state government set up boundary lines among the villages, and the deceased can only be buried within the boundary of their own villages. As a result, these rites were cut off.

Another important change from the pre-1949 period concerns the formal large-scale mortuary ceremony that was previously held only among the elite class. In the early part of the twentieth century, many common people could only afford xiao kaifang that could be performed by one priest. The communist revolution wiped out the whole elite landlord class and distributed their properties equally among the peasants. And the rural reform in 1981 increased the average income of each family. So now, when someone in the village dies, as long as he is an adult, the bereaved family can afford da kaifang. This outcome reflects the fact that the party-state has created a kind of equilibrium in the village, so there is now a less distinct contrast between the rich and the poor than was true in the past.

Mourning clothing also underwent changes. Before 1949, all xiaozı had to wear xiaofu (mourning dress). A set of xiaofu included a white hemp coat, a pair of white hemp pants, a pair of white shoes, and a xiaopa. Xiaopa was actually a piece of white cotton cloth for a participant
at a funeral to wear on his/her head. *Xiaopa* worn by a *xiaozi* was longer than those worn by visitors. *Xiaopa* worn by *zheng xiaozi* (sons, daughters-in-law, grandsons, and unmarried daughters) were attached with hemp threads. Today, wearing a white coat, pants, and shoes has been discontinued in the village. But *xiaopa* survived as one symbol of mourning in the village.

Ritual specialists experienced changes, too. There were no full-time professional Buddhist or Daoist priests in the village in 1998, since all the temples had been destroyed in the village and adjacent areas during the Cultural Revolution that lasted from 1966 to 1976. Therefore, present-day priests never learned any scripts or ritual performances in temples. Rather, they learned from their masters. Priests had families and farmed their fields most of the time. When performing rites, priests today even did not wear traditional costumes. Performing funerary rites was a part-time job for them. Making money was the incentive. Priest membership had become "professionalized" and "commoditized."¹ At one of the two funerals I attended, the priests even stopped their performance in the morning after the coffin was buried. They did not perform the last rite until the bereaved family paid the money owed to them. Without the last rite, all the previous rites were performed in vain according to the

¹ These two terms are borrowed from Chung-min Chen's study of *dang-ki* (spirit medium) in contemporary Taiwan, in which he (1999:9) points out: "As spirit mediumship became more popular in recent times, it has also become more professionalized and somewhat commoditized."
ideological underpinnings of the local folk religion. In another dimension, the revival of religious specialists was related to supply and demand rules in availability of religious rituals.

6.2 Ritual and Changing Attitude toward Ancestors

Another obvious change in the death rituals practiced in Sanyuan Village was the attitude toward ancestors. Ancestor worship in China predates the advent of Buddhism and the rise of religious Daoism by about two thousand years (Zhao 1998:228). It is believed that for thousands of years Chinese have worshiped their ancestors and lived "under the ancestors' shadow." (Hsu 1971) Ancestor worship is based on the belief that the soul of the deceased persists and has the power to bring either blessings or evil influence to its descendants. Those who do not make proper sacrifice to their ancestors will be punished by them (He 1995:80). However, most of my informants, especially young informants in the village, did not have this belief in 1998. They believed that their prosperity was at their own hand and was not bestowed by ancestors. They were not afraid of their ancestors. They did not believe in the existence of the world of the dead. To them, to die was like blowing out a candle. Life was terminated at death.

In traditional Chinese society, the ritual for worshiping ancestors was often performed by means of making sacrifices to ancestor tablets and to ancestors' graves. Worshiping ancestor tablets was carried out either at
the home or at the ancestor hall of a lineage (Chen 1967:172; Li 1984:8). The domestic ancestor worship provided sacrifice to the household ancestors, while the extra-domestic ancestor worship (worship at an ancestral hall) focused on lineage ancestors (Freedman 1970:164-165). Sacrifice might consist of daily burning incense, burning candles and mock paper money, and offering food and drink on special occasion (Yang 1961:39).

In Sanyuan Village in 1998, one surname group, Xie, had a room that was formerly the ancestral hall for the group and it was now often called gongfang (communal room). There was an altar in this room on which sat one ancestral tablet to a man named Xie Xingtang who died in
1810. He was the earliest ancestor that the Xies could trace. Over the altar on the wall, there was a paper scroll with the Chinese characters (see Photo 24): tian (heaven), di (earth), guo (state), qing (kinsmen), shi (teacher), and wei (place). They represented the family gods of the Xies. According to my informants, heaven and earth were worshiped as the source of life. The state (or emperor before 1911) was worshiped for its power and the hope that a good emperor or state government would bring peace and prosperity to the people. Kinsmen, actually refer to the ancestors who were expected to bless their descendants with happiness and fortune. Teachers had a place at the altar because education was highly valued as a way to change social status and life.

Even though it had an altar for family gods, the room was used as a storage room for the Xies. Spare furniture, logs, and two empty coffins almost filled the room. The last communal sacrifice to ancestors performed in this room was before 1949, as my elder informants remembered. Today, it is only on festival days, such as Chinese New Year or Qingming Festival, that some elders of the village might come to burn incense at the altar.

Families of the Xie lineage did not set up individual ancestral altars in their homes. When the villagers wanted to make sacrifices to their ancestors, they would burn mock paper money at the graves of their ancestors, or at roads close to the village, or in front of the family gods in the communal room. Only on Chinese New Year's Day would food and
drink be offered in addition to paper money and incense at the graves. Sacrifices to ancestors at their graves were now performed by each individual household on certain occasions throughout the year. But before 1949, the Xie lineage held a communal sacrifice to ancestors once a year at Qingming festival. They would prepare a feast and all the males of the Xie lineage would go on a pilgrimage to their ancestor tombs far away.

I asked my informants whether there was any connection between the prosperity or decline of a family and sacrifice to ancestors at graves. I received negative answers. I asked them why they spent money and time making sacrifice to ancestors at graves. I was often told that it was a custom practiced by all families in the village and a way to remember the dead.

Do the villagers worship their ancestors? My informants used the word *jinian* which coincides with Freedman's "memorialism" (1979a:302) in meaning to explain their behaviors in burning mock paper money and incense to their ancestors. The changes in the death ritual and its related beliefs reflect the changing attitude toward ancestors in the village. What caused the decline of ancestors' role in the life of their descendants?

In his study of ancestor worship among the Tallensi of Ghana, Fortes (1965) argued that ancestors are significant points of genealogical unification/differentiation that serve to identify segments of the lineage system, while at the same time they also exercise a moral guardianship over their descendants. In his study of Chinese ancestor worship, C. K.
Yang (1961:53) pointed out the ancestor worship, operating with elaborate mortuary and sacrificial rites, consolidated and stabilized the Chinese kinship system, which in turn gave life to the ancestor worship in China.

In traditional China, the agnatically constituted lineage stood out as a religious congregation worshiping its common forebears (Freedman 1979a:301-302). Every lineage had its ancestral hall, shrine, or at least the tomb of a focal ancestor at which rites to ancestors were performed. If a lineage had broken down, the worship to its ancestors might have been affected and declined. In his study of ancestor worship and clan organization in a rural village in Taiwan, Chung-min Chen (1967) found the co-relationship between the decline of ancestor worship and the loss or dying out of the social functions of the clan organization. These functions included serving as an agency for social control, providing psychological security to its individual members, and working as a main group for its members' social activities.

Sanyuan Village used to have a few lineage organizations before 1949, but they were dismantled in 1950 when lineage properties were confiscated. Taking one lineage, the Xie lineage, as an example, we see that its ancestral hall was turned into a storage room and its annual communal sacrifice to ancestors ceased. With it, the elders of the Xie lineage lost their authority to organize ceremonies to worship ancestors, and gradually they also lost control over the young lineage members.
Family division is another factor that has contributed to the loss of the authority of the elders and ancestors in the village. It is common that after a son gets married, he will be given a share of the family property to set up his own household. When all the children are married, the parents usually do not have much left. They have to depend on their children for support when they are old. The theory that sees the experience of inheritance and succession as the source of the fear of deceased ascendants might be used here to account for the lack of fear to ancestors in the village. Since descendants do not receive much from the deceased at the time of the death, they do not blame themselves that their desire to inherit properties or authorities has caused the death. So they are not afraid of the retaliation from the deceased.

The Communist ideology with its materialistic basis is another factor leading to the decline of ancestor worship. For decades, the Chinese Communist Party, through its control of mass media, education, literature, and other propagandistic instruments, has tried to instill in the minds of peasants that there is no god, no otherworld, and no supernatural beings (including ancestors). From 1949 to the late 1970s, ancestor worship and elaborate death rituals were banned by the state government. Through its monopolistic control of the national bureaucracy, legislation, military, and law enforcement, the government had the power to ban the practice of ancestor worship and mortuary ritual. Meanwhile, through its control of the mass media, education, literature, the arts, and other
propagandistic instruments, the government tried to terminate traditional beliefs by labeling them as feudal superstition, and to instill its sanctioned moral tenets upon the rural masses. These developments have left a noticeable impact on the villagers, especially young villagers. My young informants regarded the traditional belief in death and the after-life as superstitious. This supports Huang's (1993:164) argument that Marxist and neo-Marxist's critical theory (or philosophy) is equally applicable to socialist China.

According to Huang, this critical theory claims that in Western bourgeois society, aside from their control of the means of production, the elite classes maintain cultural hegemony through the dual forms of external political control in the form of state bureaucratic machinery—namely, the legal system, the police, courts and the military—and internal moral persuasion through education, mass media, literature, arts and beliefs. The themes, tastes, values, ethos, and even aesthetics of this hegemonic culture have been successfully and unconsciously reproduced by the underclass (ibid:144). In the case of China, the revolutionary elite imported Western ideology and values through Marxism, and imposed them onto villagers' daily life through both external political control and internal moral persuasion (ibid:164).

Besides the changes surrounding ancestral worship, the death rituals seem to have lost their religious implication among young villagers. All my young informants (age 18-35) told me that they did not believe in the
existence of another world and the afterlife. They did not believe in gods or deities. For them, success in life was at their own hand, depending on their own hard work, not on the fengshui of the graves of their ancestors. They did not understand many rites performed by priests at a funeral, and participated in the performance only because they were required to do so by their parents. They considered the death ritual as a local custom that they had to follow as a way to honor their parents.

In his article on traditional rituals during the process of modernization in Taiwan, Li Yih-yuan (1985:86-88) adopted Edmund Leach's classification of human behaviors into three major categories: 1) practical or rational-technical behavior; 2) communicative behavior; 3) magical-religious behavior. The second and third categories of human behaviors all use symbols or symbolism to express human emotions and desires, even though the former relates to human beings while the latter is associated with supernatural beings. Therefore, both of them can be regarded as ritual behavior, which can be further divided into secular rituals that refer to the communicative behavior and sacred rituals that relate to magical-religious behavior. Secular and sacred rituals interact upon each other in a society based on the signs and symbols they use. The faster a society is changing, the more frequently rituals are performed for various purposes. It is often difficult to distinguish secular from sacred rituals. As for my young informants in Sanyuan village, it was not important to understand whether the death rituals they performed were
secular or sacred. Participation in the performance of the death rituals was just a part of their life.

The function of ancestral cult has changed for young people in the village though the same symbols, such as mock paper money and incense sticks, are used and the same rites, such as making sacrifice at the gravesite, are performed. But one underlying principle of the ancestral cult remains the same, that is, the observance of filial piety to one's parents.

6.3 Ritual and Changed Women's Role

Another obvious change associated with the death rituals is the women's roles in the ritual performance (Chen 1996:51). According to my informants, women could not traditionally touch the soul tablet or the fan of the deceased. However, at the two funerals I participated, I noticed that female xiaozī (filial descendants) were allowed to carry both the soul tablet and the fan (see Photo 25). My informants told me that their participation was acceptable now in the village. Three factors lead to this change.

The first factor is the improved social status of women under the socialist rule. For centuries, Confucian tradition relegated women to an inferior position in Chinese family and society. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has strongly advocated the liberation of women and gender equality. After the CCP came to power in China in 1949, its government
took a series of steps to free women from the oppression of the patriarchal system in Chinese society. Its constitution acknowledges and emphasizes women's equal rights in participating in economic, educational, social, and political activities. The two marriage laws (1950, 1980) further protect women's rights in marriage, divorce, family relations and family property ownership, which women were never entitled to in traditional Chinese society. The CCP encouraged women to join the labor force and it pursued the policy of equal work and equal pay for women and eventually incorporated 90% of adult Chinese women into the labor force (Zuo and Tang 1994:124).
As the result of the CCP's efforts, the status of women in Chinese society has greatly improved. The most dramatic change has been the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. In traditional Chinese society, the mother-in-law typically controlled the daughter-in-law and tended to abuse her (Fei 1985:8-9). Today, the roles have been reversed. The mother-in-law, weak and old, is usually in an inferior position in the family. Fei Xiaotong (ibid) mentioned that a daughter-in-law beat her mother-in-law in public because of the resentment that ensued when the mother-in-law gave a very respectable dowry to her daughter. My own informants also told me such stories.

The relationship between husband and wife has also changed since 1949. The wife used to be submissive to her husband and was not expected to make significant decisions in family affairs. Today, apart from agricultural production, the wife and husband together make most of decisions on family consumption, children's education, family expenses, and other affairs. The father-son axis in traditional Chinese society as Hsu (1965) described is changing toward the husband-wife axis in family life. Cooperation and communication between husband and wife has been increasing (Zhongguo Nongcun Jiating Diaochazu 1993:15-16).

The second factor leading to women's playing important roles at a funeral is the birth control program imposed by the government. It may ultimately change or even weaken the traditional peasant family (Huang 1998:9). The program allows a couple to have only one child, regardless
of its sex. If a family has only a daughter or two daughters in the case that the husband is the only son in his family, the family line will be terminated, because the daughter will eventually marry and move to live with her husband. Thus, the continuity of the family line, one of the four features of Chinese family and kinship outlined by Francis Hsu (1965:642-44), is in danger. After the parents die, they and their previous ancestors might be unattended and unfed and became wandering ghosts because they have no descendants under the family surname to offer them sacrifice. The acceptance of women to carry the soul tablet or *fan* at a funeral, a duty traditionally done by males, is therefore a strategy to challenge this threat. Culture adapts to new social circumstances.

The third factor that affects the women's role during the performance of funerary rites is the migration of adult male villagers to cities looking for temporary or long-term jobs. In case of an accidental or sudden death, sons can hardly return home in time. The warm subtropical weather in Sanyuan Village makes it impossible for a bereaved family to preserve the corpse for a long period of time. Women are the only alternative relatives to take over men's traditional positions at a funeral. Women are also in charge of making sacrifices to ancestors in front of their tombs on special occasions such as Chinese New Year's Day and the Qingming Festival in April.

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1 However, ethnic minority families or non-Han descent are allowed more than one child. When I was in the village in 1997, a man who was the only son in a family could have a second child.
6.4 Ritual and Changed Peasant-State Relationship

The relationship between the state or party-state and the rural masses has undergone tremendous change since the decollectivization in the early 1980s. This change is shown clearly in the very fact that the traditional mortuary ritual has gone through official ban and revival. The nature of the state-society relations in rural China since 1949 has been categorized into six models by social scientists:

1. the patron-client model, in which the state, through its agents (local patrons) control the access to all essential goods (Jean C. Oi 1989, Helen F. Siu 1989);

2. the center-periphery model, in which local and regional cadres pursue the interests of their areas against the demands of the state center (Vivienne Shu 1988);

3. the moral political model, in which ideological positions are used by peasants to struggle for power, and to respond to the state policies (Richard Madsen 1984);

4. the participation model, in which peasants through active political participation influence the implementation of state's policies (John Burns 1988);

5. the single lineage village model, in which a group of patrilineally related men collectively own and manage property and have autonomy from the state (Anita Chan, Richard Madsen and Jonathan Unger 1984, Sulamith Potter and Jack Potter 1990);
6. the state hegemony model, in which the state, through its monopolistic control of the national bureaucracy, law enforcement, education and mass media, is capable of instilling its values and tenets upon the peasants, and placing general but not complete compliance among the peasantry (Shu-min Huang 1993).

According to my informants, the performance of traditional death rituals had been banned by the government until the late 1970s. The government regarded it as feudal superstition that would pollute the spirit of the people. The ban was strictly carried out by the government through its local agents, that is, cadres at the production team and brigade levels, and by minbing (militiamen) controlled by the cadres. Temples were destroyed or confiscated. Priests were forced to resume secular life. Practitioners were punished. Most families abided by the government policy. A simple funeral without priests' performance of funerary rites was practiced. A few families illegally hired one priest to perform xiao kaifang secretly at home. The priest dared not play loud music or read scripts aloud. A bereaved family even dared not make sacrifice of food, mock paper money and incense at the tomb during the day. They did it at night without firecrackers. In the early 1970s, one villager, who was a cadre at the brigade level, held a traditional funeral for his mother. He hired six priests from a neighboring county to perform funerary rites. When the news came out, he lost his job as the cadre and was branded as a
bad example of practicing a feudal superstition. He was deprived of the access to political power and economic resources. His social status dropped to the bottom in the village. He was ranked together with landlords, rich peasants, reactionaries, and bad elements. He became an outcast. The state hegemony model proposed by Huang (1993) and the patron-client model proposed by Oi (1989) explain the state-society relationship in those years. Cadres, as local patrons, through their monopoly of resources and law enforcement, successfully controlled the life of their clients (i.e. local peasants) according to the government's policies.

The commune system was dismantled and replaced by the household responsibility system in the village in 1982. With it, the local cadres lost their monopoly over many resources. Politically, the state government has completed one political reform in rural China. It has set up cunmin weiyuanhui (villagers' committee) and cunmin daibiao huiyi (villagers' representative assembly) at the grassroots level. It has started direct free election for director, deputy director and members of the villagers' committee by villagers (Lin 1995; O'Brian 1994). The power of the elected cadres in Sanyuan Village was greatly restricted. They had only few resources at their disposal since the village had no industry and the land had been contracted to the villagers for 30 years. During my stay in the village, local cadres did not sponsor any meetings or distribute any resources. The villagers did not consult local cadres in their production or
other activities. They sent cadres to the township government to pursue interests for the villagers, such as getting funds from the government to repair the irrigation system and helping villagers apply for loans to build houses. The patron-client model gave way to the center-periphery model proposed by Vivienne Shu (1988). Local cadres were expected to represent villagers and protect their interests, not vice-versa.

Though traditional death rituals have revived in Sanyuan Village and many young villagers participate in ritual practice, they do not cherish religious beliefs associated with the death rituals. They believe that to die is like a candle's flame being blown out. There is no otherworld and no afterlife. Their behaviors can be explained by Huang's model. The state, through its monopoly of education and mass media, has changed the young villagers' worldviews. They have accepted the government point of view that regards traditional mortuary ritual practice as mixin huodong (superstitious activity). But the government cannot force them to completely abandon traditional death rituals. They still participate in the ritual performance because they try to follow a local custom and to please their surviving parents.

The young villagers at Sanyuan Village are better educated than their parents. They have experiences of working in cities and have tasted urban life. Politically, they are more active than their parents. As my young informants told me, they took active part in the free election for cunzhang (village director). Their active political participation may
influence the implementation of state's policies. The relationship between the young villagers and the state fits the participation model put forward by John Burns (1988).

To summarize, both the patron-client model and state hegemony model highlight the relationship between the state and peasants during the collective years in Sanyuan Village. The center-periphery model reveals the changed relationship between the state and peasants after the decollectivization in the early 1980s. The participation model and the state hegemony model illustrate the relationship between the state and the young peasants in the village who are more politically active and more apt to the state's influence through education and mass media.
CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This dissertation started with a diachronic analysis of death rituals in China from Paleolithic times to the present. I documented the major changes of the death rituals and offered some explanation for such changes. I have shown that mortuary practices contained elements from both the Chinese great tradition (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism) and the little tradition (folk beliefs and practices). Then, I have discussed different theories and approaches in anthropological study of death and death ritual.

In the dissertation, I have adopted the "thick description" approach and described the system of mortuary rituals in Sanyuan Village. I have analyzed many important symbols involved in death rituals, such as soul tablets, money, numbers, mourning clothes, time, and space. I have presented both emic and etic interpretations of those symbols. Examining the death rituals in the contemporary sociocultural, economic and political context, I have tried to illustrate the villagers' worldview, the new social hierarchy in the village, the relationships between individuals, family and community, and social changes that have occurred in the village in the last three decades. This last chapter will discuss social implications of death rituals in contemporary rural China and the present-day sociocultural formations at the village level.
7.1 Death Rituals and Group Cohesion

In anthropology, it is commonly accepted that ritual can reinforce group cohesion (e.g., see Durkheim 1912, Malinowski 1954, Levi-Strauss 1963, Berger and Luckmann 1967, Turner 1969, Rodabough 1981). C. K. Yang (1961:37) in his study of Chinese religion pointed out that one of the most important social functions of the traditional Chinese death rituals is reaffirming the cohesion and solidarity of the family group. Lin Yaohua (1947:132), another Chinese anthropologist, observed that at funeral ceremonies, the mourners and visitors renew the old ties of relationship and the ritual serves as an integrative force, rebuilding emotional bonds between the mourners and visitors after the disturbance caused by the death.

A full-scale funeral in Sanyuan Village involves two family groups and their close kins: one on the deceased's side and the other on the spouse's side. The *xiaodan* as discussed in Section 5.1 includes all the relatives of junior generations from these two family groups though they may not be present at the funeral. The get-together of the two kin groups at the funeral reaffirms kinship ties in the face of losing a member. The *xiaofu* distinguishes family members from outsiders, who have to cooperate with each other so that all funerary rites will be performed properly. This reinforces family unity at a time of crisis. The funeral, according to my informants, settles or puts aside old conflicts and grudges
between kinsmen. Thus solidifying the kin group at least for a brief period in time. Participation in performing funerary rites enhances the sense of kin group identity despite any conflicts among the group members.

Death in one family involves the whole village community as well. Other families in the village, though not related to the deceased by kinship, offer all kinds of help, from dressing the corpse to piling up the tomb, or lending their dining tables. Their participation in the funeral and donation of gifts to the bereaved family will be reciprocated in proper time. Death rituals provide a channel for non-kins in the village to build, renew, and strengthen good relationships. Therefore, the death rituals contribute to foster harmony and cooperation in the community, which is crucial to the success of wet rice farming after the decollectivization in 1982. Individual households have to cooperate with each other in allocating irrigation water and in exchanging labor during peak seasons such as rice transplanting and harvesting. The "modes of production" in the village has heightened the role of funerary rituals in maintaining harmony and cooperation in the village community.

Death rituals can also create tension and conflict if not properly handled. I was told that there were disputes among siblings on how the cost of a funeral should be shared and how the gifts received should be divided. There were competitions for the affections and blessings of the deceased among bereaved family members. A priest even told me that a fengshui master might be bribed to make the orientation of the coffin in
the grave favorable to a particular family member. The rivalry between daughter and daughter-in-law is well displayed in the rite that after the burial they should hurry home and sweep the floor, with the daughter-in-law sweeping from outside to inside and the daughter from inside to outside, activities that suggest competition for good fortune to flow either in or out of the home.

Tong (1987:348-49) suggested that Chinese death rituals should be viewed on two levels: "the formal, public level, and the private, familial level." On the public level, death rituals specify family and kinship relations and emphasize the unity of the kin group. Within the private world, death rituals could reveal conflicting material interests of individuals and groups, and therefore ritual process is punctuated by incidences of disputes and competition. This dual dimension of the death rituals predisposes conflict and competition at a funeral. However, conflicts are often resolved within the confines of the family (Tong 1987:351). My informants told me that conflicts at a funeral were never intense enough or allowed to be intensified to the extent that it would jeopardize family unity and disgrace the family in front of the public.

### 7.2 Grief, Fear and Death Rituals

The second important function of death rituals is that it facilitates normal grieving documented by many anthropologists cross-culturally (e.g., see Doty 1986, Rodabough 1981). H. L. Jernign asserted in his
article "Some Reflection on Chinese Patterns of Grief and Mourning" that through the centuries, traditional Chinese society has developed rich resources in the individual, the family, and the community to help people cope with the crises of death and bereavement. These resources have the following features:

1. Acceptance of death as a natural and inevitable part of life and of man's participation in nature.
2. Preparation of the individual and the family for death long before it occurs (except when sudden illness or accident makes it impossible).
3. Participation of the family as a unit in the experience of death, mourning, and grief work.
4. Ritualization and symbolization of death, separation, and continuing but changed relationship between the living and the dead.
5. The recognition of the need of individuals and the families for an acute period of grief and a prolonged period of mourning and family reorganization.
6. Support for those most affected by the loss from relatives and friends--various patterns for the socialization of the experience of bereavement.
7. A framework of beliefs and relationships which gives meaning to death and significance to the ongoing relationships between the living and the dead.
8. The family (or clan) as a community of memory which provides a kind of social immortality for its members.
9. The family (clan) as a resources for reorganization of life and reconstruction of meaning following the loss of a significant member. (Jernign 1973:45-46)

Death rituals help people to overcome fear and dismay caused by the loss of a beloved one (Malinowski 1954:52-53, Radcliffe-Brown 1933:285). At a funeral in Sanyuan Village I observed, priests kept emphasizing that death was a natural phenomenon, like a candle being blown out. So there was nothing to be afraid of. They also proclaimed repeatedly in their chanting of scripts that birth and death were decided
by fate. This reduced the fear and sense of guilt that members of the bereaved family might have in blaming themselves for the death.

Ancestral worship, geomancy, and divination—important elements of death rituals—even help people adjust to a fast-changing modern society. In the last two decades, Sanyuan Village, like many rural villages in China, has experienced tremendous economic and political change. The commune system was dismantled and replaced by the household responsibility system in agricultural production. The family has been put back into the center of villagers' social life. Many adult persons have left the village seeking temporary jobs in cities. Most of those who stay in the village are women, old men, and children. They are more subject to frustration or lacking mental or spiritual ballast, which causes anxiety and fear. They, like the people in Taiwan, tend to resort to traditional ideology to remove the anxiety and fear, and gain confidence (Li 1985, Chen 1999).

Death rituals provide some villagers an explanation why a few families in the village are richer and politically more powerful than other families. An informant told me that it was because the ancestors of those families were buried at places with good fengshui. Therefore, they could not compete with those families no matter how hard they worked. They could only accept it as a reality and hoped that after they died, they would be buried at a spot with good fengshui so that their descendants could prosper.
More than two thousand years ago, Confucius and his followers realized the importance of ritual in regulating human behaviors. They believed that rituals, such as funerary and wedding rituals, could maintain an orderly human society. *Li Ji* (Books of Rites) says: "The *li*, following human feelings, act as regulators and refiners of them so as to keep the people within bounds." (cited from Fung 1952:338) It also points out that *li* are like dikes that keep people from impulses toward lawlessness and licentiousness (Ebrey 1991a:27). *Li*, for Confucius, include all formal conduct, from table manners to weddings and funerals, from gestures of deference to worshipping of ancestors, gods and spirits. *Li* are "social grammar" that gives each member a defined place and status within the family, community, and polity. They are the ways of life that have been transmitted from generation to generation "as repositories of meaning, enabling the youth to appropriate persisting values and to make them appropriate to their own situations." (Ames and Rosemont 1998:51)

In other words, according to Confucian doctrine, *li* are a set of social norms, which consist of general rules of propriety (ceremonial) intended to guide the conduct of all human beings towards an ultimate aim of a well-ordered and harmonious society. Therefore, rituals could be a tool of government. Rituals were seen as supplementary to coercion in imperial China. People who performed rituals regularly were expected to internalize their social and ethical obligations and act accordingly.
Death rituals in Sanyuan Village require full participation of all descendants of the deceased who are reminded to observe filial piety to their parents, as Confucius said in *Lun Yu* (Analects). "While they are living, serve them according to the *li* (rites). When they are dead, bury them and sacrifice to them according to the *li.*" Death rituals also teach parents to show love and compassion for children and to accomplish the task of raising children if the parents expect the children to offer them sacrifice (Luo 1988:133-134).

The leading priest at a funeral I attended told me that the purpose of death rituals was to educate children to observe filial piety to their parents. Many of the scripts they chanted at the funeral contained this message. One script says that parents' love, as deep as the sea, can hardly be repaid, and that parents have suffered all kinds of hardships in giving birth and bringing up children. Another script advises descendants to observe filial piety while the parents are still alive because after they die, the descendants can only meet them in dreams. It points out that if one does not observe filial piety while one's parents are alive, it would be futile to make sacrifice or to wail after they die. Besides the scripts, an eulogy for the deceased conveys the same message that children owe their lives to their parents and should observe filial piety in return. My

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1. <論語：為政篇>："生，事之以禮；死，葬之以禮，祭之以禮。"
2. <三獻禮全部>："父母恩，深似海，報恩難能。生爾男，育爾女，艱苦苦受盡。幼扶養，長嫁女，費盡千辛。"
3. <孝父母>："父母去世難見面，除非夢里假團圓。生前不孝死枉然，哭干眼淚也枉然。"
informants compared observing filial piety to returning money they had borrowed from other people. They were obliged to do so.

7.4 Social and Economic Dimensions of Death Ritual

The performance of death rituals can be regarded as a measure of the socio-economic status of the deceased and the bereaved family. C.K. Yang (1961:37) pointed out that the cult of ancestral worship affirms relationship with the wider social circle beyond the immediate family and reasserts the status of the family in the community. Status is extremely important in Chinese society. It can bring or deny prestige to a family. This prestige is readily convertible into economic gains through gift exchange. It is probably the most important form of capital accumulation.

Several features of the funeral at Sanyuan Village we have described can be used as indicators of the socio-economic status of the bereaved family. An important one is the coffin in which the deceased is placed and buried. The quality of the coffin is a sign of the wealth of the deceased and his/her family. A coffin made of inexpensive wood is said to rot fast, thus exposing the body to bad elements such as worms. It is an unfortunate event that should be avoided if possible. An expensive and well-constructed coffin ensures comfort of the deceased and manifests the prosperity of the bereaved family.

The number and quality of burial clothes that the deceased wear is another sign of the wealth of the family. Three layers of clothes are
considered to be the minimum. Wealthy families dress the deceased in seven or nine layers. The number of funeral specialists employed at the funeral is also a marker of status. In Sanyuan Village, a funeral for an adult usually involves six Daoist priests, a fengshui master, a funeral band, a craftsman who makes paper articles to be burned, and an eulogy writer. They must all be paid. James Watson (1988:14) notices that payment of money to specialists is more than a simple monetary exchange. It is a required feature of funerary rituals. Low payment might not only lead to specialists' poor performance, but also bring bad reputation to the family as being poor and stingy, thus affecting the social status of the family in the village.

An elaborate funeral is also an indication of the ability of the family to mobilize social connections. There must be large crowds at the funeral. A quiet funeral suggests that the deceased is an insignificant person and the family has no social status in the community and no connections outside the community. Descendants and close relatives of the deceased are expected to attend the funeral. The attendance of important persons is most desired as it enhances the prestige and status of the family in the community.

Economically, the presence of a large crowd at a funeral brings in financial support in the form of gifts that the bereaved family might need. Common gifts include cash, pieces of cloth, grain, meat and wine or liquor. For some families, such gifts are an important financial source to
defray the funeral expenses. An account book I collected at a funeral lists all gifts received. The bereaved family received 789 yuan in cash, accounting for 58% of the total cash expense, which was 1,370 yuan. They also received 70-kilogram rice, 93-kilogram wheat, 23-kilogram corn, 2.5-kilogram soy beans, 54 packs of firecrackers, 308 bundles of mock paper money, and 74 jizhang (piece of cloth). All the gifts greatly reduced the financial pressure on the bereaved family.

Death rituals reveal the contemporary sociocultural structure in Sanyuan Village. It consists of three distinctive components: traditional practices and beliefs, the newly introduced ideology and values by the party-state, and the synthesis of the two. The basic structure of the death rituals has survived in spite of the great efforts the government has made to eliminate traditional mortuary practices and beliefs as parts of feudalistic superstitions. Very clearly, the Daoist priests' performance of rites to transform the dead into an ancestor, and the performance of a fengshui master to secure auspicious burial site demonstrate the persisting traditional Chinese cosmology in the village social life.

The second component of the sociocultural structure in the village derives from the ideology that the government has tried to impose on the rural masses. Through its monopolistic control of the national bureaucracy, legislation, military, and law enforcement, the government had the power to ban traditional mortuary practices and introduced new ones, such as memorial meetings and cremations. For about 30 years, the
villagers had to comply with the government's policy and had to modify their traditional sociocultural structure. Elaborate traditional funerals were not practiced in Sanyuan Village until the rural reform was launched in 1978. Through its control of the mass media, education, literature, arts and other propagandistic instruments, the government tried to terminate traditional beliefs by labeling them as feudal superstition and to instill moral tenets sanctioned by the government upon the rural masses. The young villagers had accepted the government's tenets. They did not believe in the afterlife and the supernatural power of their ancestors. They regarded traditional mortuary ritual and belief as superstitious. They participated in the ritual practice just because it was a "local custom."

The last component of Xiejia Village's sociocultural structure is demonstrated in the simplification and modification of traditional death rituals to accommodate the new social reality in rural China. According to my informants, a traditional funeral would last at least two or three days before 1949. But today, a funeral lasts only one night. Nowadays, the deceased is usually buried the morning following the death. My informants explained that it was impossible now to hold participants at a funeral for three days because many of them had to go back to work in cities. So many rites were either cut short or abandoned.

Another example of the modification of the traditional mortuary ritual is that women are allowed to carry soul tablets, a task which was strictly forbidden in the past. This change results from the rising social
status of women since 1949. the government birth control policy that has created families with only daughters, and the migration of male villagers to cities for jobs in recent years. This simplification and modification of the death rituals manifest their creative and adaptive nature in rural China.

7.5 Conclusion

What makes the surge of popularity of traditional death rituals in rural China? For Sulamith Heins Potter and Jack Potter, two American anthropologists, the answer is:

The return to pre-Liberation expressive culture is not simply a matter of the persistence or "survival" of tradition. Traditional culture is reappearing because the economic base and the social structures that were expressed by these symbolic forms are once again important. Relationships with relatives are increasing in importance in the absence of collective support, and these relationships are also symbolically affirmed by ceremonial means. (Potter and Potter 1990:337)

In other words, Sulamith Heins Potter and Jack Potter believe that when the economic base and social structures of a society remain unchanged, its superstructure, of which death rituals are one part, will not be changed. Their argument coincides with Marxist theory that productivity determines modes of production, and economic infrastructure determines superstructure.

The decollectivization in rural China in the early 1980s changed the collective modes of production back to family unit or private modes.
Family was restored as the center of peasants’ social and economic life. Traditional mortuary ritual was revived and became popular at the same time. This seems to support Potter and Potter’s argument. However, by their theory, we should be able to see that as rural China goes toward modernization, traditional mortuary ritual will be changed or even vanish in the future. This has not happened in highly modernized Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, where traditional death rituals are still popular.

Our study has shown that traditional death rituals have some important social functions. They reinforce family and kin group cohesion. They enhance cooperation and harmony in a community. They facilitate grieving and help reduce fear and anxiety. They teach villagers to observe filial piety to the elders and to take good care of their children. Chinese death rituals provide principles to regulate human behaviors, interpersonal relationship, and human-nature relationship. They display economic and social resources that a bereaved family can utilize at a time of crisis.

What is more, many adults in Sanyuan Village are working in cities today. For the villagers, the urban life is attractive but uncertain. Jobs are not easy to find especially when unemployment rate among city inhabitants is rising due to the government efforts to reform large state-run enterprises. Elder villagers who usually stay home farming often worry about their children working in cities. Under such circumstances, many elders turn to supernatural beings for help. Unfortunately, the
village temple was destroyed. During my stay at the village, some
villagers went to visit a temple in a neighboring county to seek advice and
protection from the deities honored in that temple. Some other villagers
made sacrifices at their ancestors' tombs for the protection and blessings
for their children working in cities far away. They often promised the
deities or their ancestors that they would make even greater sacrifices to
them if their children would return home safely or would make a fortune.
It had become a common practice that villagers returning home after a
long absence would set off firecrackers and burn paper money and incense
sticks at the tombs of their close ancestors on the very first day of the
arrival at the village. One of my elder informants told me that making
sacrifices to ancestors at tombs instilled on her children a sense of their
roots so they would come back home to visit her. Her opinion was echoed
by other elders in the village. It is another example of how ritual
solidifies the family in a modern context.

I observed the use of ancestors' tombs in solving conflicts in the
village. Two brothers had a fight. One blamed the other for borrowing his
money, but the other denied it. They ended their hour-long quarrel and
fight by visiting their father's tomb. They both knelt down in front of the
tomb and made oaths to their father that they were telling the truth,
otherwise they would die accidentally. Their action reflected one political
reality in the village. The decollectivization had greatly weakened the
authority of village leaders who used to interfere with villagers' daily life,
including mediating quarrels in a family. Now some villagers resorted to supernatural beings in solving conflicts.

To summarize, we see death rituals continue to fulfill many social and psychological functions in rural China. Economic reform in rural China has improved peasants' material circumstances and provided resources for the villagers to elaborate traditional death rituals. Politically, Chinese government has reduced its rigid control over the peasants' lives and showed tolerance toward their religious activities. Technically, there are survived priests available who have the skills to perform funerary rituals. All these have facilitated the quick revival and the surge of popularity of traditional death rituals in rural China.

Meanwhile, China has witnessed religious revitalization. Though the economic reform has led to rapid economic growth since 1978, it has also created many social problems. The rising unemployment and crime rates have caused great stress and anxiety among Chinese. Besides, the loss of faith in Communist ideology among many Chinese has resulted in a nation-wide spiritual crisis. Under such circumstances, there occurred in China a revival of many religious activities and a return of many traditional values such as Confucian filial piety into Chinese lives. New temples have been built and old ones have been refurnished across China, and worshippers are flooding those temples, and spending on religious activities has increased significantly in recent time. The rise of Falun Gong is an example of this religious revitalization. Falun Gong, a
synthetic religious cult that combines qigong exercises and doctrines from Buddhism and Daoism, had drawn millions of followers all over China before it was cracked down in 1999 as a heretical religion. The religious revitalization has also contributed to the revival of many traditional rituals.

Will this popularity last long? Can it survive modernization and urbanization in rural China? The relationship between modernization and traditional folk religious beliefs and practices needs more detailed research. However, what has happened in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore foreshadows what might happen in rural China in the future. Since 1960, Taiwan has become industrialized and experienced high economic growth. It has raised the people's material standard of living. But it has also generated greater psychological stress and uncertainty. Demographic shifts from rural areas to cities have added to a sense of personal estrangement. This sense of isolation revitalized many traditional folk religions and rituals (Li 1991:113-114; Chen 1999:22-23). Yih-yuan Li (1985:75) found a correlation between the high economic growth and the surge of popularity of folk religious beliefs and practices in Taiwan. Chung-min Chen (1999:11-12), in his study on what makes spirit medium popular in Taiwan, argued that modernization and economic development do not necessarily replace traditional beliefs with secularism and scientific materialism. Chee-kiong Tong (1988:361-62) came to the same conclusion in his study of death rituals among Chinese in Singapore that
modernization has not resulted in the displacement of traditional Chinese belief systems. He pointed out that death rituals still occupy a central place to most Chinese in Singapore and have maintained most their structural features.

The impact of Buddhism on traditional Chinese death rituals might give us a model for addressing these questions. After Buddhism was introduced into China from India in the first century A.D., it adapted itself to Chinese family and political institutions (de Bary 1988:25). It went through a process of Sinicization that resulted in a religion different from the Indian original. At the same time, Buddhism "not only yielded to certain Chinese cultural imperatives, but it spread into that Chinese culture and colored it." (Mather 1973:77) It left an obvious mark on Chinese mortuary practices. Buddhist ideas of hell and reincarnation were fully incorporated into traditional Chinese death rituals. Buddhist monks' reading scripture to facilitate the reincarnation process was an indispensable part of Chinese funerals. However, Buddhist transformation of Chinese mortuary rituals was not a total displacement. For example, the Buddhist cremation did not replace traditional Chinese burial.

Since 1949, the party-state has imposed another imported ideology (communism) on the Chinese scene. Will the Communist ideology follow the same pattern as Buddhism in China? In Chapter Six, I discussed Communist impacts on traditional death rituals and changes it has caused in the mortuary practices and beliefs in Sanyuan Village. Popular culture
or little tradition in China, of which death rituals is an important component, is dynamic and adaptive. In response to changing social milieu, certain traditional beliefs and practices have been abandoned, modified or simplified. New symbols and meaning have been invented for the mortuary ritual. The contemporary death rituals have absorbed some of the party-state's new ideology and values. But as in the case of Chinese encounter with Buddhism, elaborate traditional funeral has not been replaced by memorial meeting advocated by the party-state.

Contemporary death rituals in rural China have managed to keep most of their traditional structural features and underlying principles. What has happened to traditional Chinese death rituals in the past four decades supports Bell (1997:252) arguments that ritual can change as the conditions of the community change; ritualized activities can be taken as traditional but they can also be very flexibly appropriated so that they might be practiced more or less faithfully; and "effective ritual need not be uncontested or invulnerable to political manipulation and trendy commercialization."

Death ritual is a distinct element of traditional Chinese culture that has endured the tremendous changes that Chinese society has experienced through the ages. Studying the mortuary rituals teaches us about Chinese culture and the values of the people who practice them. It is a significant contribution to understanding an emerging world economic power and one-fifth of the world's humanity.
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Zhou, Suping 周蘇平

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GLOSSARY

[A]
ai
aishui
anwei

[B]
baba
bagua
bai
bai xishi
baichan
biaojie
biaojiege
biaomei
biaomeifu
biaosao
biaoshu
biaoshuniang
biaowaizhi
biaowaizhinu
biaozhi
biaozhinu

[C]
changming deng
Changshou
Cheng Yi
Chenghuang
chensun
chensunnu
吃清明会
重慶
初级農業生產合作社
出喪
辭靈
村民代表會議
村民小组
村民小组长
村长

大公
da gong
Da Honghe
da kaifang
damiji
da niang
da po
da ye
daizi
daoting
daotou fuzi
de
di
di
dixi
diyu

兒
er
erxi

法輪功
Falun Gong
fan
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fengguan
fengjian minxin

法輪功
信徒
費孝通
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封建迷信

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liang ge wenming
Lin Yaohua
lingpai
Longshan
Lun Yu

[M]
Majiabin
mama
mei
meifu
menke
mianzi
minbing
Ming
mixin huodong
mohan
mu
muyu
Naiheqiao

[N]
nei
neizhi
neizhimenke
neizhina
neizhisa
neizhisun
neizhisunnu
neizhixifu
niang
niangniang
Nu Huo
nuer

禮記
李亦圓
兩個文明
林耀華
靈牌
龍山
論語

馬家演
媽媽
妹
妹夫
門客
面子
民兵
明
迷信活動
抹汗
歴
木魚
奈河橋

內
內侄
內侄門客
內侄女
內侄孫
內侄孫女
內侄媳婦
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媳娘
女禍
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[P]

pingqiao  
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pobai  
popo

平橋  
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破白  
婆婆

[Q]

qi  
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清水  
屈家嶺

[R]

ren  
ruguan

仁  
入棺

[S]

san qing liu qi  
sanqian  
Sanyuan  
saozi  
Shaanxi  
shang pingqiao  
Shanxi  
shao huotang  
shao qiyue ban  
shaoqi  
shaqi  
shenshui  
shi

三親六戚  
散紙  
三元  
嫂子  
陝西  
上平橋  
山西  
燒火塘  
燒七月半  
燒七  
殺紙  
神水  
士

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shi
Shi Erxifu Bu Xiao Niang
Shi Yue Huaitai
Shier Dian
Shi Jing
shoubei
shouyi
Shu Yi
Shu Jing
si shu hu
Sichuan
Sima Guang
siqin
Song
songzhong
sun
sun menke
sunnu
sunxi

[T]

Tang
tangwu
tian
tian
tiangan dizhi
tuanfu
Tudi
tuoguji

[W]

wai
waichensun
waichensunnu
waigong
waipo
waisun
waisun menke
waisun xifu
waisunnu  外孫女
waizhi   外侄
waizhimenke  外侄門客
waizhinu   外侄女
waizhisun  外侄孫
waizhisunnu  外侄孫女
waizhixi   外侄媳
Wang Sung-hsing  王崧興
Wanshun  萬順
wei  位
wu  五
wufu  五服
Wuxing  五行
wuzhi wenming  物質文明

[x]

taxingqiao  下平橋
xiao  孝
Xiao Fumu  孝父母
Xiao Gongpo  孝公婆
xiao kaifang  小開方
xiaodan  孝單
xiaofu  孝服
xiaoan  孝男
xionan  孝女
xiaonu  孝女婿
xiaonuxu  孝婿
xiaopa  孝帕
xiaosun  孝孫
xiaoxi  孝媳
xiaozhi  孝婿
xiaozhinu  孝姪女
xiaozhong  孝子
Xie  謝
Xie Daihua  謝代華
Xie Xingtang  謝興堂
Xiejiawan  謝家彥
Xin Qingnian  新青年
Xinan  漢南
Xiongdì Heqi  兄弟和氣

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喜事
喜子
訓子成人

[y]

yamen
Yan Hui
yang
yangjian
Yangshao
Yangyu zhi En
ye
Yi Li
yidie
Yi Jing
yin
yingwang anwei
yiniang
yinjian
yinyang xiansheng
yisao
yiwaizhi
yiwaizhinu
yixiong
yizhi
yizhimenke
yizhinu
yizhisun
yizhisunnu
yizhixifu
Yu Guang-hong
yuan
yue

[z]

zaisheng dao
Zaiwo
Zang Jjing
Zhang Xiaojun
zhaohun
zhen
zheng xiaozzi
zhimenke
zhinu
zhisun
zhisunnu
zhixi
zhizi
zhong
zhong pingqiao
Zhongguo Nongcun Jiating Diaochazu Zhou
Zhouli Heqi
Zhu Xi
Zhuang Zi
zuzu

张小军
招魂
镇
正孝子
椪门客
侄女
侄孙
侄孙女
侄媳
侄子
侄
中平橋
中国農村家庭調查組
周
妯娌和気
朱熹
莊子
祖祖