

A contemporary Christian response  
to ancestor practice in China

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I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work  
and constitute the results in the subject.

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## Abstract

The objective of this thesis is to discover if it is possible to develop a Biblically-based solution to the pastoral and missiological problem associated with ancestor practice. There are three parts in the thesis.

The aim of Part I is to trace the origin and development of ancestor practice up to the present. I propose that: (1) ancestor practice has its socio-political, religious and cultural dimensions, (2) its origin lies in the ancestor quest, and (3) it has undergone three historical developments: an orientation period, a de-orientation period and a re-orientation period. From this study, it is better to hold a holistic approach to ancestor practice and avoid any reductionism.

The purpose of Part II is to describe missionaries in China and their encounter with ancestor practice. Their entries are explained as three encounters: with the Nestorians a religious encounter, with the Catholics a cultural encounter and with the Protestants a socio-political encounter. I conclude that from the experience of these historical encounters the best possible way to tackle the issue of the acceptability of ancestor practices for Christians is to approach the problem from a 'both/and' perspective.

The plan of Part III is to apply some Biblical principles to the issue of ancestor practice and work out a theological model (with Chinese characteristics) to tackle it. Three suggestions are proposed: (1) a biblical-theological perspective towards its socio-political dimension, (2) a pastoral perspective towards its religious dimension, and finally (3) a missiological perspective towards its cultural dimension.

I argue for the potential acceptability of the veneration of the ancestors for Christians but I also discuss the 'fallen' state of the traditional rites. In transforming

traditional ancestor practice, a ritual transcendence is proposed to demythologise the beliefs of ancestor veneration and transform its traditional practices into modern social and civil practices in accordance with both the Christian faith and Chinese tradition.

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## Introduction

Ancestor practice is found in all the five continents and is more widespread than many westerners realise. Perhaps, there are more people who engage in ancestor practice than people who live the Christian faith.<sup>1</sup> Ancestor practice, wherever it occurs, comprises customary beliefs and rituals directed towards dead predecessors. This is taken for granted by all students of the subject whether they are drawn from anthropology, sociology or religious studies. Yet it has been a matter of controversy whether the beliefs and rituals constitute 'worship' in the strict sense. From a Christian perspective if a person performs an ancestor rite and we call it ancestor worship, and because ancestors are worshipped we declare that the act is thus 'idolatry', we are simply begging the question. Nor can the problem be settled simply by discussing the various meanings of the Chinese word *bai*, which means not just 'worship' in the fullest sense but also 'visit', 'reverence', 'pay respect to' and 'make obeisance to'. In the past, both eastern and western Christian missionaries saw ancestor practice as a crucial issue on the mission field and in mission strategy, and which was, in addition, crucial to their understanding of Chinese Christians.

When I was a minister in Hong Kong, I was often asked whether ancestor practice was an act of worship or an act of respect. For the Chinese, it is relatively easy to give up worship of the various popular gods, but to give up ancestor practice means ostracism from the family and the clan. Before 1911, it even meant disloyalty to the Emperor and the state.<sup>2</sup> In this dissertation, it is my wish to discover if it is

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<sup>1</sup> For details, see Hwang, 1977:340-3.

<sup>2</sup> Mineo said that it would be better to pay more attention to the custom of ancestor practice as an effective measure to apprehend the differences in the style of cultures of East and West. Shibata, 1985:247-8.

possible to develop a Biblically-based solution to the pastoral and missiological problem associated with ancestor practice in China.

## 1. Scope

When we think of ancestor practice, certain determinants are indispensable. Firstly, death is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for attaining ancestorhood. This explains why ancestor practice is often subsumed under the category of the cults of the dead.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, ancestor practice (whether worship or respect) takes the form of rituals such as prayer, libation and sacrifice.<sup>4</sup> This explains why ancestor practice is usually studied under the discipline of Religious Studies.

This leads us to a question. Is ancestor practice primarily a system of religious beliefs and rituals? Or, rather are the concepts and doctrines of death and afterlife, soul and spiritual powers, and prayer and offerings the determining features of ancestor practice, or is it primarily an aspect of the social structure of the society which extends from the domestic to the national levels and further to the supernatural realm?

It has been too readily taken for granted that: (1) The Chinese mentality has developed from the most ancient times without any modification of its beliefs and principles. (2) The religious ideas of the Chinese have been handed down in a line of

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<sup>3</sup> In his study of African ancestor worship, Gluckman established the distinction between ancestor worship and the cult of the dead. Ancestors represent positive moral forces who can cause or prevent misfortune and who require that their descendants observe a moral code. On the contrary, the cult of the dead is not exclusive to deceased kinsmen but to the spirits of the dead in general. Spirits are prayed to for the achievement of amoral or anti-social ends whereas ancestors can be petitioned only for ends in accordance with basic social principles. Hardacre, 1987:265.

<sup>4</sup> For details, see Fortes, 1976:2-3.

unbroken continuity. (3) The form and content of ancestor practice have remained the same throughout different dynasties. (4) The sense and meaning of ancestor practice have been identical for people throughout the ages, whatever their social rank or profession.<sup>5</sup>

I shall propose in my thesis that ancestor practice has: (1) undergone three periods of development for which I suggest the following titles: an orientation period, a de-orientation period and a re-orientation period; (2) established three traditions: a state tradition, an elite tradition and a tradition of the masses; (3) involved three levels: a national level, a clan level and a household level. These three periods, traditions and levels were influenced by Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. Finally, different strands of ancestor rituals merged and mixed together with each other. Ancestor practice became a complex Chinese ideological phenomenon.

The title of the present thesis is 'A contemporary Christian response to ancestor practice in China'. This implies a threefold question and response from a contemporary Christian to ancestor practice in China. The first and basic question is *how a contemporary Christian views Chinese ancestor practice*. Is it a civil rite or a religious rite? It is only when we have a proper understanding of what ancestor practice really is that we can make an appropriate response to the final question 'does

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<sup>5</sup> John Ross argued that Chinese ancestor practice did not receive the attention it merited because no other religious system could be traced back continuously in its completeness to so great an age as that of China. Of the Babylonian and Egyptian religions we had fragmentary portions of a date equally ancient with our documentary knowledge of China. Chinese ancestor practice can be traced in its entirety for four thousand years.

Ross wrote, 'We discover it to be even then an ancient religious practice, well-developed, systematic, intelligently set forth, and universally known to and accepted by the people of the land. We find its state of development, indeed, to be at that period virtually similar to what it appears at any subsequent stage. We find also that whatever further development emerged in the course of ages, they cannot be said to have raised it to a platform in any way superior to its most ancient known form. If anything we see rather a gradual deterioration and a materialisation from the spirituality of the ancient character.' Ross, 1909:17-8.

it break the First Commandment?’ The second and mediate question is *how a contemporary Chinese Christian deals with the results of how the foreign missionaries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries tackled Chinese ancestor practice*. There must be some good points we can learn and some grave mistakes we must avoid. With the pre-understanding of the first response and the lesson we have learnt from missionaries, we now come to the third and ultimate question: *how should the church in China today deal with ancestor practice and the question is it idolatry?* As China is now dis-united, the situation of ancestor practice in the mainland of China and Taiwan may be different. The response a contemporary Christian makes must be aware of such difference and takes it into consideration.

## 2. Objectives

What particularly restricts the scope of ancestor practice and at the same time gives it a distinctive stamp is its primary location primarily in the familial domain of social life.<sup>6</sup> Some missionaries in the past saw ancestor practice purely as a form of religion and condemned it. Some missionaries saw it as an extension of the social structure and accepted it.

Bernard Hwang summarised three attitudes towards ancestor practice: (1) open hostility and absolute rejection, (2) hasty adaptation and total acceptance, and (3) indifference, a leave-it-alone attitude.<sup>7</sup> He proposed that they should be replaced by confrontation-with-dialogue, accommodation through study and research, and

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<sup>6</sup> Fortes, 1976:3.

<sup>7</sup> Hwang’s classification must be seen as ‘provisional’. As we shall see in Part II, missionaries such as Alouben, Matteo Ricci and Timothy Richard cannot be classified as making judgements that can be characterised as ‘hasty adaptation and total acceptance’ on the issue of ancestor practice. Hwang, 1977:339-65.

transformation through grace and faith. He proposed the methodology but did not answer the problem.

The main objective of the present research is to find out a possible Christian solution to the problem for Christians which ancestor practice presents in today's China. There are threefold objectives in this dissertation. Firstly, I shall find out the nature of ancestor practice. Is it a religion, an extension of the social structure, or both, or an even more complex phenomenon.<sup>8</sup> The aim of Part I is to trace the origin and development of ancestor practice up to the present. I shall propose: (1) ancestor practice has its religious, cultural and socio-political dimensions, (2) its origin lies in the ancestor quest, and (3) it has developed through three historical epochs namely the orientation period, the de-orientation period, and the re-orientation period.

Secondly, I shall study how missionaries dealt with ancestor practice. What were their views and how did the Chinese react to their views. A Chinese proverb says that we must learn a lesson from history before we go any further. The aim of Part II is to describe the work of the missionaries in China and their reaction to ancestor practice. The missionary encounter with ancestor practice had three forms. In the Nestorian period it was primarily a religious interaction, in the seventeenth century Roman Catholic encounter, ancestor practice was seen primarily as a cultural

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<sup>8</sup> A contemporary anthropologist Stevan Harrell reported that the study of Chinese ancestor practice had been concentrated in farming communities with lineage organizations. He listed some major findings: (1) Ancestor practice is two separate cults, using Freedman's terminology, 'hall cult' and 'domestic cult'. (2) The practice is intimately connected with property inheritance. An ancestor tablet is erected only to an ancestor who has transmitted property to the descendant. (3) The Chinese seek to exclude those who were members of lines of descent other than those represented in the principal tablets. Their erection came when their omission might cause some deceased persons to go unworshipped altogether. They were placed in a subordinate or unnoticed position. Harrell, 1976:373-4.

phenomenon, though this was challenged. The nineteenth century Protestant reaction to ancestor practice took the form of a socio-political confrontation.

Lastly, I attempt to apply some Biblical principles to the issue of ancestor practice and work out a Chinese theological model to tackle it. My thesis has three elements: (1) the setting out of a biblical-theological understanding of the socio-political dimension of ancestor practice, (2) the outline of a pastoral approach to the religious dimension of ancestor practice, and finally (3) a missiological approach to ancestor practice as a dimension of Chinese culture. I shall apply Confucian ideas and dialogue theology to tackle the issue. For I have a conviction that it is only through dialogue theology that we can yield a promising result and that Confucian ideas and Christian faith are supplementary to each other.

### 3. Methodology

There are two approaches to the religion of a people. One is to seek directly the fountains from which they sprang. This is the study of historic sources.<sup>9</sup> The other is to examine the living river into which the spring has flowed. This is the field-work study of the present day situation.<sup>10</sup>

Both methods carry with them a certain danger. A study of 'book' religion which limits itself to the teachings of the early founders, and ignores the latter developments and the present situation, will give an imperfect presentation of the religion as a whole. On the other hand, a study which is limited to the present

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<sup>9</sup> A Scottish missionary J. Legge adopted this approach. He translated seven volumes *The Chinese Classics* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1960. Reprinted) and wrote *The Religions of China* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1880).

<sup>10</sup> A Dutch missionary J. de Groot adopted this approach. He published six large volumes *The Religious System of China* (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1892-1910).

expression, without doing justice to the ideals of the founders, equally fails to do justice to the religion as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

The present writer feels it his duty in order to cover both methods to avoid any theological or scientific reductionism.<sup>12</sup> Thus the origin of ancestor practice is traced not just from the Chinese classics but also from oral traditions.<sup>13</sup> In such a study, one is really seeking the fountain from which the tradition sprang. Secondly, the development of ancestor practice is traced throughout different dynasties to see how the three teachings (Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism) influenced it. In such a way, we can examine the channel whereby the water runs into the sea.

The main methodology the present writer would use is the phenomenological approach.<sup>14</sup> It consists of two parts. The first is to describe the phenomenon of ancestor practice as far as possible. I shall draw materials from legends and myths, archaeological findings and historical records. The second is to seek to describe and understand the phenomenon as it exists in China today. I shall draw different

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<sup>11</sup> The religious ideals of a people may be written in their hearts and conscience. They often find very imperfect expressions in their lives especially if they are illiterate. Mere observation of external acts is not the best guide to the secret aspirations of the soul.

<sup>12</sup> Theological reductionism is an attempt to evaluate every religion in accordance with one's own criteria (the 'true religion' of one's own). Scientific reductionism is the tendency to reduce religious experience to social scientific explanations (which are prevalent in one's own day). For details of these two reductionisms, see Cox, 1996:46-57.

<sup>13</sup> As we shall see in the next section, the pre-Qin texts are full of problems. Due to the burning of books in the Qin dynasty, few documents survived into the Han dynasty. Most of them were restored by Han scholars who spoke their minds through the ancients. Their great concern was to project the dynastic system as far as possible into the past. A corrective to this fictitious correction of the past is to be obtained by sifting the numerous allusions to heroes and worthies which have survived in folk literature such as *The Book of Mountains and Seas* and *The Poetry of the State of Chu*. We need to evaluate and demythologize such allusive and often cryptic texts. Watson, 1966:11-2.

<sup>14</sup> There are five characteristics of philosophical phenomenology which have particular relevance for the phenomenology of religion: (1) its descriptive nature: avoid reductionism and adopt phenomenological *epoché*, describe the diversity, complexity and richness of experience, (2) its opposition to reduction: attack various forms of reductionism such as psychologism, (3) its intentionality: all acts of consciousness are directed toward the experience of something, the intended object, (4) its bracketing: suspension of judgement, and (5) its eidetic vision: the intuition of essence. Allen, 1987:274-5. See also Cox, 1996:26-43.

interpretations from different perspectives including those of foreign missionaries and contemporary scholars, local Chinese and Christian pastors.

#### 4. Sources

The period around 1920 is a turning point in the study of ancient China. The history of China before the Three Dynasties only became history in the modern sense as a result of new archaeological finds, previously it had been a record of myths and legends.<sup>15</sup> Thus historical data can be divided into two kinds: relics and records. Relics will be our main sources for the study of prehistory. We must rely exclusively on archaeology. Yet we need to interpret what archaeologists have found.<sup>16</sup>

For the study of history, records will then be our main sources. This includes different forms of records such as the *jiagu* scripts,<sup>17</sup> the *jinwen* scripts<sup>18</sup> and the

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<sup>15</sup> The history of the Three Dynasties had been a legendary account of the sage-kings. Scholarly scepticism towards the legends stemmed partly from the May Fourth Movement in 1919. After 1920, there developed a growing historical understanding of China's cultural development from the Stone Age to early Chinese civilisation. Chang, 1968:121.

<sup>16</sup> Archaeologist K. C. Chang wrote, 'There is much in ancient Chinese studies that require the collaboration of historians, palaeographers, linguists, and ethnologists. I need merely mention the following topics as examples of the kind of research in which the unaided archaeologist is handicapped: ... the sociological interpretation of the Shang and Chou cities, temples and graves;... the interpretation of Eastern Chou mythology, art, and society; the ethnic identity and subdivisions of the ancient social classes;... and the use of ethnological and folklore data in archaeological interpretation.' Chang, 1968:449.

<sup>17</sup> With the study of the emergence of the Shang dynasty in north China, Chinese archaeology advances into a new phase. The Shang were the builders of the first verifiable civilisation in China. In the royal court of the Shang there were archivists and scribes who recorded important events of state. Some significant written records of the Shang that have been preserved intact to this day are: (1) *jiagu* scripts: records of divination incised on the shoulder-blades of animals and turtle shells, and (2) *jinwen* scripts: signs of possession and offering cast on bronze vessels. The study of each kind of script is a highly specialised field of learning. Chang, 1968:185-7.

<sup>18</sup> The successors to the Shang were the Zhou. The custom of bone and turtle-shell divination was not much practised. The *jiagu* scripts were no longer a source of textual information for the Zhou. The bronze script became a major source of the Zhou textual information, often recording the political and ritual contexts in which the vessels were made and offered. Chang, 1968:187-9.

pre-Qin texts.<sup>19</sup> We need to rely on specialists such as jiaguologists, jinwenologists and pre-Qin text specialists. Also, the Chinese classics and *The History of Twenty-four Dynasties* provide us with a good source to identify how and why ancestor practice developed as dynasties changed.

Last but not least, we cannot ignore the various religious texts. From the Han dynasty onwards, scholars and priests of the three teachings produced a lot of written sources. In the past few centuries too, missionaries and anthropologists wrote records and reports about Chinese religions and ancestor practice. We will attempt to use these resources as fully as we can. In doing so, a balanced and comprehensive perspective on ancestor practice may be achieved through the views of both insider and outsider. With such an effort, any theological and scientific reductionism will be minimized and avoided. On this basis, the development of a fair and contemporary Christian response to Chinese ancestor practice will be attempted.

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<sup>19</sup> With brush and ink, the scribes transcribed characters onto slips of bamboo or wood and bound them together into book form. This was called *jian*.

## Part I

### A Historical Development of Ancestor Practice

If we want to answer the question ‘is ancestor practice an idol worship?’, we need to make one thing clear beforehand. What is the nature of ancestor practice? Is it a civil rite or a religious rite? Unless we have a thorough and accurate understanding of what traditional Chinese ancestor practice is can we make an appropriate and proper response to the question ‘is ancestor practice idol worship?’

In the traditional Chinese worldview, there is no clear and meaningful distinction between religion, politics and ethics. Traditional Chinese ancestor practice always comprises these three elements: religious, ethical and socio-political. The emperor had the divine right to sanction any religious and ethical teachings for he was the Son of Heaven. The authority of the emperor could not exist without the sanction of religious qualifications claimed and acknowledged.

The aim of Part I is to find out the nature of ancestor practice in order that a proper and appropriate response to the question ‘is ancestor practice idol worship?’ can be made. The origin and development of ancestor practice up to the present will be studied. I shall propose: (1) ancestor practice has its religious, ethical and socio-political dimensions; (2) its origin lies in an ancestor quest; (3) it has undergone three periods of development: an orientation period, a de-orientation period and a re-orientation period; (4) it established three traditions: a state tradition, an elite tradition and a tradition of the masses; and (5) it involved three levels: a national level, a clan level and a household level. These three dimensions and periods, and three traditions and levels were influenced by Three Teachings. Finally, different strands of ancestor rituals merged and mixed together with each other. Ancestor practice became a complex Chinese ideological phenomenon and it is this ideological complex that has been reduced to and understood as ancestor worship or ancestor respect.

# Chapter 1

## A general survey of ancestor practice

To understand ancestor practice, it is necessary to ask three basic questions: (1) Who are our ancestors? (2) Where do ancestors go after death? (3) What is the ritual and what is its purpose? The first question is related with the origin of life (or beings) and the second question concerns the view of afterlife (or spiritual beings). The answers to these two questions determine the practice and purpose of the ritual.<sup>1</sup>

In macroscopic perspective, the orientation period (c. 4000 -- 221 BC) focussed ancestor practice on the question of 'origin' (of humankind and society) and leads to a socio-political model; the de-orientation period (221 BC -- 960 AD) moves to the question of afterlife (of ancestors) and leads to a religious model; and the re-orientation period ( 960 AD -- ) shifts to the rituals (of cultural superiority) and thus becomes a cultural model. In this chapter, the socio-political and the religious models of ancestor practice will be studied.

### a. A socio-political dimension of ancestor practice

In *The Book of Rites*, *zu* refers to the one who has contributions and *zong* to the one who has virtues. When translated into English, *zu* and *zong* become the word of 'ancestor'. But in Chinese, *zu* and *zong* refer to two different kinds of ancestors: progenitors of contributions and progenitors of virtues respectively. Yao represents

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Zhuangzi (369-286 BC), a Daoist philosopher, sang songs and played drums when his wife died. Such a practice would be seen as inappropriate according to the Confucian tradition.

the former and Shun the latter. Huang-di is regarded as the prime ancestor of both types.<sup>2</sup>

The primal people perceived Heaven and earth, beast and hybrid, and woman and man as their ancestors.<sup>3</sup> When civilization began, the rulers and literate conceived heroes and sages as their national and cultural ancestors. Mythical and cultural lineages co-existed with matriarchal and patriarchal lineages.

The first inferential evidences of the human species known as *Sinanthropus pekinensis* were found at Zhoukoudian. It dated perhaps some 500,000 years ago. Historians said that Peking Man was probably one who could light fires and who lived by hunting and nut gathering.<sup>4</sup> These pre-agricultural people possibly moved from place to place and they were cannibalistic.<sup>5</sup>

The invention of food production (the cultivation of plants and the domestication of animals) was a crucial point in Chinese history. It indicated a cultural transformation from forest hunting and food gathering into village farming communities.<sup>6</sup> During the neolithic period, ancestor practice may be examined in two stages: the Yang-shao culture and the Lung-shan culture.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Chinese tradition, Huang-di, Yao and Shun were the historic sage kings. For details, see Christine, 1968:90; Walls, 1984: 82, 84-90.

<sup>3</sup> Pan-gu is described as the ancestor of heaven and earth. When he died, his body became a number of different natural objects. Nu-wa is said to be the ancestor of the Chinese people and Fu-xi is generally regarded as the first sovereign. As a pair, Fu-xi and Nu-wa are first represented in Han times as beings with human bodies and serpent tails, which were intertwined to link them. See Christine, 1987:59; Feng, 1994:15, 18; Loewe, 1978:97-117; Walls, 1984:1-2, 9-10,

<sup>4</sup> For details, see Chang, 1968:46-50; Tung, 1979:8-9.

<sup>5</sup> Chang, 1968:78.

<sup>6</sup> Chang, 1968:86-7.

The Yang-shao society was groups of shifting cultivators who lived in small self-contained and autonomous villages.<sup>7</sup> Each of the villages was a self-sufficient little community. The presence of a fertility cult is indicated by designs of the female vagina on ceramic decoration as well as painted designs suggesting the head of a shaman who was in charge of the fishing ritual. The fertility rites were for the sake of crop harvests and fishing and hunting gains.<sup>8</sup> There is also evidence of a cult of the soil and of ancestors.<sup>9</sup>

During the Lung-shan period, there is definite evidence of an institutionalized ancestor practice. This appears among a farming people in which there is a sharply differentiated status-and-role based on a kinship structure which stressed the coherence of the lineage group.<sup>10</sup> Evidence further indicates that the cult centered around the more privileged of the village dwellers and involved phallic images, ceremonial vessels and oracle bones.<sup>11</sup> The importance hitherto given to fertility cults which were performed for the community appears to be overshadowed in this period by the ancestor cult.

The next cultural horizon is that of the Shang, considered by many scholars to be the beginning of what we now recognize as Chinese civilization. Shang society was characterized by a complex of urban-peasant cultures. Individual villages were organized into inter-village networks in economy, administration and religion.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The shifting and repetitive settlement patterns probably resulted from the slash-and-burn technique of cultivation. Chang, 1968:92-6.

<sup>8</sup> Chang, 1968:103.

<sup>9</sup> For details, see Chang, 1968:102-3.

<sup>10</sup> Chang made a table of fifteen cultural contrasts between Yang-shao and Lung-shan. See Chang, 1968:128-9.

<sup>11</sup> Gates, 1979:27.

<sup>12</sup> Chang, 1968:240.

Society was made up of three social strata: the aristocracy, the craftsmen and the farmers. The religious system appeared to have two distinct parts: official worship and popular worship.<sup>13</sup>

At the level of the royal house, a pattern of organized (ancestor veneration) ceremonies were carried out.<sup>14</sup> Shamans divined and foretold the future and served the royal court.<sup>15</sup> Elaborate ceremonial bronze vessels were used in performing rituals of ancestor practice.<sup>16</sup> Large-scale human and animal sacrifice was offered to ancestral spirits for the royal family.<sup>17</sup> A ritual calendar was developed.<sup>18</sup> Ancestor practice functioned to re-affirm and enforce rules of inheritance and lines of kinship.<sup>19</sup> In all of these ceremonials, the king acting as the universal kingship and royal priesthood was the focus of attention for all rituals.

The rest of Shang society was made up of craftsmen and farmers. Economically and religiously these groups had much in common. The dwellings of the craftsmen were distributed among the farming villages.<sup>20</sup> Farmers planted millet, rice and wheat and supplemented their living by hunting and fishing. Their popular religion was centered in ancestor practice. Prayers were made to the ancestors for rain, health, good harvests and many children. They also worshipped gods of nature and fertility,

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<sup>13</sup> Gates, 1967:29.

<sup>14</sup> See Creel, 1964:178, 185-96; Walls, 1984:108.

<sup>15</sup> Creel, 1964:203-4.

<sup>16</sup> Fairbank, 1994:37.

<sup>17</sup> Chang, 1968:245.

<sup>18</sup> The Shang calendar used ten stems to mark the cyclical *xun*; each *xun* consisted of ten days. Ancestral sacrifices were offered day after day, *xun* after *xun*, and year after year. How the sacrifices were offered cyclically, see Chang, 1987.

<sup>19</sup> Chang, 1968:245.

<sup>20</sup> Chang, 1968:246.

such as sun, moon, earth, mountains, rivers and four directions.<sup>21</sup> Above all was Shang-di, the high god.<sup>22</sup> He presided over a court consisting usually of five ministers. He was all-powerful and controlled human affairs large and small. However, he was never directly sacrificed to or specifically located.<sup>23</sup>

The first Shang ancestor that the Shang kings enumerated in their ritual calendar was Shang-jia.<sup>24</sup> The ruler of the Shangs was called *wang* (king), which was originally merely a name for a territorial chieftain.<sup>25</sup> Later the word denoted a mediator between Heaven and Earth.<sup>26</sup> After death, the deceased king ascended to heaven and was at the left and right of Shang-di or Di. He was then given the title *di* (emperor).

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<sup>21</sup> Sacrifices made to the local deities often became popular festivals and these gods or their successors were saved from oblivion. Gates, 1967:30.

<sup>22</sup> This Shang-di is an important but puzzling deity. He is referred to either as Di or Shang-di. The word *shang* simply means 'upper' or 'superior' and Shang-di is sometimes translated as 'the high god', 'the ruler above' or 'the supreme sovereign'. Many explanations have been given for the origin of the word *di*. The word was written as 采 in oracle script. They represent the calyx, the seed capsule and the anther. In other words, *di* denotes the power of fertility. Later it was used as a title given to the ruler who had the power of might. The idea of mightiness is added to the word. Whoever had power over fertility had might, and whoever had might had the power over fertility. All rulers of the Shang dynasty after death were entitled as Di, sitting beside Shang-di. For further discussion about the word *di*, see Wang, 1994:113-7; Creel, 1964:181-3.

<sup>23</sup> Chang, 1968:251.

<sup>24</sup> Shang-jia was one of the most revered high ancestors in the Shang dynasty. For he was the first one to use a rod to measure time. It was a ten-day week. The ten day-names were known as ten stems. The day was divided into twelve hours, and they were called twelve branches. The ten stems and the twelve branches were combined to make a sixty-day cycle. Likewise, a sixty-year cycle was formed. The first such cycle began theoretically in 2679 BC. This kind of calendar was called the lunar calendar. It was used for sacrificial purposes.

The lunar calendar was not so accurate. Another kind of calendar was made. It was more accurate and was called the farmer's calendar. It was widely used in rural communities. An important historical point is that the Shang rulers all bore titles that included one of the ten stems. When a new ruler was enthroned, one of the foremost things he had to do was to make a new calendar. It served two purposes, sacrifices and farming. See Wang, 1994:112-3; Walters, 1992:25-6, 154.

<sup>25</sup> Creel, 1964:343.

<sup>26</sup> The word is written as 王. The three horizontal strokes represent Heaven, Earth and Man. Heaven represents the mighty power and earth depicts the fertility power. Moreover, heaven denotes masculine and earth feminine. The word denotes the man who can mediate heaven and earth and is to be called a king. All the rulers in the Zhou dynasty were enthroned as *wang*.

The rulers of the Zhou dynasty (c.1122-256 BC) entitled themselves ‘Son of Heaven’. They tolerated use of the title *wang* by certain of their loyal vassals. But this was not the case with the title ‘Son of Heaven’.<sup>27</sup> The ancient Chinese word *tian* (heaven) 天, was clearly the figure of a man. The original meaning of this word was simply ‘a great man’. He was a man of power, prestige and importance. After death, he became still greater. He dwelt in heaven and became a ‘great spirit’ (*shen*). Here then, the idea of Heaven became a vague symbol of the vast power of the great spirits and the place where they dwelt.<sup>28</sup>

From the Xia dynasty (c.2207-1766 BC) onwards, the succession to the throne was hereditary. During the Shang dynasty (c.1766-1122 BC), the hereditary succession was either by brothers or sons. In practice, it was by brothers first. When each of the sons of the deceased king died, then it came in turn to each of the grandsons.<sup>29</sup>

In the Zhou dynasty, a system of kinship called *zong-fa* was established. It was only the eldest son who could succeed to the throne in each generation. This line of descent was called the *da-zong* (the main line of descent). All other brothers were knighted as feudal princes and sent away. Land and people were given to them.<sup>30</sup> They set up their own lines of descent. Their lines of descent were called the *xian-zong* (the lesser line of descent).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Creel, 1964:343-4.

<sup>28</sup> For fuller and detailed argument about the meaning of ‘Heaven’ and ‘Son of Heaven’, see Creel, 1964:342-4.

<sup>29</sup> The fraternal succession from elder brother to next younger brother is evidenced in eight generations of Shang rulers. In the last three generations of the dynasty, the succession was from father to son, perhaps because the ruler had only one son. Dubs, 1958:226.

<sup>30</sup> How land and people were given to feudal princes, see Fan, 1:137.

<sup>31</sup> For detailed discussion about *da-zong* and *xiao-zong*, see Qian, 1994:112-21.

The feudal princes sent away were allowed to establish vassal states and build their own ancestral temples. They became the founding ancestor in their line of descent. They were entitled as *zu*. Those who succeeded in this line were called *zong*. The general meaning of such a lineage of *zu* and *zong* became clan ancestor practice. From another perspective, only the founding ancestor of the *da-zong* lineage was truly honoured as *zu* and all the other founding ancestors of various *xian-zong* lineages belonged to *zong*. This strict meaning of *zu* and *zong* became the national ancestor practice.<sup>32</sup>

Such a system of kinship settled the explosive question of the succession to power.<sup>33</sup> Every one had a status in his family group. Lineages had relationships of superiority and inferiority among themselves, all the way up to the emperor. The whole kingdom was ruled under one roof: one *zu* (the king) and many *zong* (feudal princes).

Under the hierarchical *zong-fa* system, the king would have seven ancestral temples, therefore his district was called the capital. The feudal princes had five ancestral temples, high officials three and officials one.<sup>34</sup> The lower rank of officials and the common people had none. They could present their offerings in their principal apartment.<sup>35</sup> This formed the household ancestor practice.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> For further discussion about these two perspectives, the general sense and the strict sense of *zu* and *zong*, see Qian, 1994:121-31.

<sup>33</sup> In the Shang's system of royal succession, it was quite difficult for the sons of the eldest brother to succeed to the throne. Theoretically speaking, the father-king wanted to be fair to each of his sons. Each one of them had a turn to be ruler before it came to the third generation. If the father-king had too many sons, the youngest son would never have such a chance. If there were disputes among the brothers and if the brother who succeeded to the throne wanted to pass the rule to his own son and not to his brother, grave problems arose.

<sup>34</sup> Legge, 1885a:223.

<sup>35</sup> In the living room (*ming-tang*) of an ancient family house, a wooden tablet was placed in the center. Five Chinese characters were written: heaven, earth, ruler, ancestor and teacher. This was the sacred place where different rites of passage took place. It was also the place where different kinds of

The ancestral temple (*Ming Tang*) was more than a family centre in the narrow sense of the word. The king's ancestral temple was in fact the centre of all state affairs. It was in this temple that the king held his audience with feudal princes and great officials, issued orders concerning both civil and military matters, heard news of victory in battle, and dispensed rewards to meritorious officials.<sup>37</sup> The business of diplomacy and state banquets also took place there.<sup>38</sup>

The ancestral temple symbolized the state in so far as the state was conceived as the estate of its ruling family. The state was also considered as a territorial entity and was symbolized by the altar of the land and grain. The importance of the ancestral temple and the altar of the land and grain as twin centres of the spiritual influences guarding the state was shown by the fact that when a state or a dynasty was extinguished, it was considered necessary to destroy them.<sup>39</sup>

The political, social and economic structures of the Zhou dynasty divided the people in general into those who worked the land and those who governed them.<sup>40</sup> The production of books was almost entirely the work of officials. Teachers and

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ceremonial and sacrifice were performed: a place to worship heaven and earth, a place to receive and announce the king's decree, a place to honor the ancestors and respect the teachers. Wang, 1994:147.

<sup>36</sup> The living room (*ming tang*) was also called the ancestral hall. It was the center of life and affairs of family. For instance, the proposal of marriage was received by a girl's father in the ancestral hall. After marriage, she was not fully wed until the time when, three months after she entered her husband's family, she was introduced to its ancestors and took part in ancestral sacrifices. Creel, 1964:336.

<sup>37</sup> This aspect of its usage led Legge to translate the *Ming Tang* as the Hall of Distinction. Soothill, 1951:79.

<sup>38</sup> Creel, 1964:336.

<sup>39</sup> Creel, 1964:336-7.

<sup>40</sup> Creel, 1964:314.

scholars were the dependants of nobles. They had a place in the political hierarchy. Most of them discharged state ceremonies and assisted ancestral sacrifices.<sup>41</sup>

There were many different sorts of sacrifices at many different times.<sup>42</sup> In addition to the ancestral temple and the altar of the land and grain, other offerings were made in the suburbs of the capital and at various places in the open air, according to the nature of the deities being honoured and their rites.<sup>43</sup>

An important figure in the ancestral sacrifice was the 'impersonator' of the ancestor.<sup>44</sup> The ancestral spirits did not dwell in the temple at all times, but were summoned to it on ceremonial occasions.<sup>45</sup> The impersonator was considered for the time being to be possessed by the spirit honoured in the ceremony.<sup>46</sup> He ate and drank of the food and liquor offered. Then he announced that the offerings were accepted and pronounced a blessing upon the descendants.<sup>47</sup>

Before Confucius (551 – 479 BC) the support of the ancestors was seen as essential to the success of the ruler. They not only gave him legitimate title (royal

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<sup>41</sup> There were officials, retainers and servants who specialized in these rites and sacrifices. They had charge of keeping up the ancestral temples, they composed and recited prayers, and they were skilled in ritual and often assisted and even guided their lords in performing the prescribed ceremonies. Yet they were not a priesthood in our sense of the word. Creel, 1964:338.

<sup>42</sup> Legge, 1885a:224-6.

<sup>43</sup> The Son of Heaven sacrificed to Heaven and Earth and the feudal princes to the land and grain. High officials offered the five sacrifices of the house. The king sacrificed to the five famous mountains and the four great rivers. The princes sacrificed to the famous hills and great streams which were in their own territories. Legge, 1885a:225.

<sup>44</sup> For the impersonator, see p.171-2.

<sup>45</sup> There was a dark apartment called the sleeping chamber (*qin*) at the back of each ancestral temple. It was where the ancestor tablet was kept during the intervals between the sacrifices. When the sacrifices were offered, the tablet was brought out and placed in the center of the temple. Legge, 1885a:224-5.

<sup>46</sup> There was a class of persons who claimed to be in direct communication with spirits, even to be possessed by them. They were called shamans (*wu*). They called up spirits, communicated with them, performed magic and even prophesied. Occasionally by gaining influence over some ruler, they came to great power. But they were generally regarded as of questionable respectability during the Zhou dynasty. Creel, 1964:338.

<sup>47</sup> Creel, 1964:336.

lineage) to rule but also provided him divine help (ancestral spirits) for success in peace and victory in war.<sup>48</sup> However, Confucius ignored such interpretation of the significance of ancestor veneration and declared that it was not heredity but the qualities of the man himself that were important.<sup>49</sup> A ruler should be a sage king. The people were subject to his rule owing to his moral conduct and not to his military power (or the supernatural power). This was called the way of the ruler.<sup>50</sup> Morality was might and might was morality. How to observe an ancestor rite was the first lesson in learning ethics, and how to participate in ancestor rites was the first step to practice morality.<sup>51</sup> The aim of ancestor veneration was its ethical meaning and educational purpose, which reinforced the socio-political system of kingship and kinship.

Mozi (470-391 BC) studied Confucian teachings. However, he disagreed with Confucius about the existence of gods and ghosts. He attacked Confucian extravagant spending on ancestor practices. Mozi preached a doctrine of universal love.<sup>52</sup> He wanted to create a new society based on a sense of mutual aid and common good.<sup>53</sup> His utilitarian standards were coupled with an authoritarian concept of social organization. People should be in total obedience to their rulers, and rulers in turn

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<sup>48</sup> Creel, 1951:129.

<sup>49</sup> Confucius did not bother to talk about death or spirits. The disciple Zi-lu asked how the spirits of the dead and the other spirits should be served. The master said, 'If you fail to serve men alive, how can you serve their spirits? Zi-lu asked about death, and the master replied, 'If you do not understand life, how can you understand death?' Chinnery, 1996a:101.

<sup>50</sup> See Fairbank, 1994:52; Hucker, 1995:79.

<sup>51</sup> Confucius says, 'Offer sacrifices (to the dead) as if they were living.' For it is unkind to offer sacrifices to the dead as if they are dead. This would become legalism or formalism. Whereas it is unwise to offer sacrifices to the dead as if they are still alive. This would lead to idolatry and superstition. See also Fung, 1948:57.

<sup>52</sup> Creel, 1951:135; Chinnery, 1996a:109; Fung, 1948:53-55.

<sup>53</sup> Gernet, 1996:88.

should be totally obedient to Heaven and the spirits.<sup>54</sup> He further preached that every one had the right to worship ghosts and spirits, heaven and earth. Such a right should not just be confined to the ruling class.<sup>55</sup>

In spite of their differences, both Confucius and Mozi agreed about the significance of the establishment of propriety (i.e. the socio-political dimension of ancestor practice). Confucius taught aristocratic humanism while Mozi preached about the universal human rights. In short, the reality of the lineage organization in Chinese society was confirmed by the performance of ancestor rites. The careful maintenance of the genealogies reinforced the family and social solidarity. This became the foundation stone on which the hierarchical structure of Chinese society was built.




## **b. A religious dimension of ancestor practice**

The Chinese character for ancestor *zu* consists of two radicals. One denotes deity (*shen*) and the other fertility.<sup>56</sup> After death, ancestors become spiritual beings (*shen*)<sup>57</sup> and the ritual to ancestors is called *ji*. The word *ji* is made up of two elements: god (*shen*) and a hand holding meat. It denotes the offering of food to a god.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Hucker, 1995:86.

<sup>55</sup> To Mozi, the existence and worship of ghosts and gods could safeguard the principle of justice and fairness. The good would receive reward and the evil would be punished at the end of the day. This applied to the ruling class as well. In Zhou's feudalistic society, the rite did not apply to the common people and the punishment did not apply to the noble class.

<sup>56</sup> *Zu* was rendered as  and  on oracle bones and bronze vessels. It is very similar to the shape of a penis. Later, this symbol was combined with the word *shen* to form the character *zu*. *Shen* on oracle bones and bronze vessels was rendered as . It denotes the deity of sun, moon and stars.

<sup>57</sup> Ancestors would also become *gui* but both *shen* and *gui* refer to the same spiritual being and the two words could be used interchangeably during the orination period until the rise of the *yin-yang* school.

<sup>58</sup> It is to be noted that both words for *zu* and *ji* consist of the basic radical *shen*.

In China the first hints of some form of religious beliefs are to be found in the burial places of the Peking Man at Zhoukoudian.<sup>59</sup> At the rear of the dwelling cave were found three complete skulls and several bones. They were surrounded by red powder, flints, stone beads, perforated teeth and shells.<sup>60</sup> Archaeological finds suggest: (1) the deceased were buried in close proximity to the living, (2) a finely ground reddish mineral powder was scattered over the body, and (3) these people already believed in life after death.<sup>61</sup>

For most of the Bronze Age (c. 2000-221 BC), the wish to treat the dead as if they were alive entailed large scale human sacrifice. This provided the deceased with attendants.<sup>62</sup> The practice was inextricably bound up with the tomb and an all important ancestor cult in which the spirits of the deceased exerted an active influence on the lives of their descendants. Around the fifth century BC, reaction against the cruelty and wastefulness of such a system led to the gradual use of substitute human figurines. By the Warring States period (475-221 BC) substitutes were in general use.<sup>63</sup>

In the fourth century BC, the theory about the nature of the soul and the way to communicate with the other world underwent a fundamental change. The oldest terms referring to that which survives after death are *shen* and *gui*, followed later by the terms *hun* and *po*. *Hun* (heavenly soul) consists of two radicals, cloud and ghost

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<sup>59</sup> Chen, 1996:269; Lei, 1996:219.

<sup>60</sup> Chen, 1996:269.

<sup>61</sup> It is because jewellery and objects of everyday use were placed by the sides of the deceased. Lei, 1996:219.

<sup>62</sup> Mozi recalled these sumptuary customs and human sacrifices which had not entirely disappeared by his time. See Gernet, 1968:67.

<sup>63</sup> Gernet, 1968:67.

whereas the radicals of *po* (earthly soul) are white and ghost. White here refers to white bones.<sup>64</sup>

When a man died, the soul was thought to split into two: a *hun* and a *po*. *Hun* was an emanation of the *yang*. It was responsible for thought, creativity and morality. After death, it ascended to heaven and was called *shen*. The original meaning of *shen* means extension. It later extends its meaning to refer to gods, deities or good spirits. The earthier and more material *po* derived from the *yin*. It remained with the body and was responsible for life, senses and movement. After death, *po* descended to earth and was called *gui*. *Gui* originally means return (a neutral term), but later it is used to denote (good and evil) ghosts, demons or evil spirits.

Contact with the other world was through sacrifices and family ancestors. If the spirit of the deceased was happy, it would intercede in the spirit world on behalf of its descendants and they would prosper. If they were neglected, it would take revenge. The whole family would suffer.

The *hun* was provided with talismans and nourishment from sacrifices for its journey into heaven.<sup>65</sup> Life in the underground world of the *po* was conceived as a continuation of life in this world.<sup>66</sup> The *po* had therefore to be provided with all the luxuries to which it had been accustomed during life. It is against this background that the First Emperor of Qin dynasty (221-206 BC) built his tomb. His army of

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<sup>64</sup> Campbell, 1973:456-7.

<sup>65</sup> There is an apparent depiction of the journey of the *hun* to heaven on an extraordinary T-shaped painted banner. It was found in a tomb at Mawangdui containing the perfectly preserved body of a woman who died sometime after 168 BC. See Loewe, 1982:115-126; Seidel, 1982:81-7.

<sup>66</sup> Jade suits were intended to give their owners immortality of the body, transformed by contact with jade. Both China's ancient wealth and belief in an afterlife fostered magnificent tombs.

7,000 life-sized clay warriors was part of a grandiose attempt to recreate the known world below ground.<sup>67</sup>

According to the traditional Chinese worldview, there were three forms of existence, Heaven (representing heavenly beings), Earth (representing earthly beings) and Man (representing living beings). Man was the greatest among the three because he existed as a harmonious combination of the two forces, *yin* and *yang*.<sup>68</sup> Yet he was perishable compared to Heaven and Earth. Hence there were two ways of seeking the imperishable: (1) conforming to the way of Heaven, or (2) conforming to the way of Earth. The former led to spiritual immortality whereas the latter led to physical immortality.

From a functional point of view, the state religion of Han Confucianism fulfilled two purposes: (1) a religious purpose: the emperor acted as a mediator between Heaven and man, and (2) a political purpose: temples, rituals and investitures were means to consolidate the ruling hierarchy.<sup>69</sup> The *Monthly Observances*, a guidebook of ancestor practice, are divided into twelve chapters. Each of these set forth the ritual duties of the ruler during the year. The Son of Heaven was to maintain the cosmic order because he was considered to be the medium between Heaven and Earth. He was able by his ritual to influence and unite both, and maintain them in harmony. This was the essential thought of the book.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> The practice of sacrificing slaves was abolished in 384 BC, the first year of the reign of Qin emperor Xiangong. Such an innovative measure liberated the productive capacity of the society and raised the level of the culture. The transformation of society prompted the evolution of funerary rituals and provided the social conditions for the development of the art of ceramic tomb figures. Wang, 1987:41.

<sup>68</sup> Ware, 1966:263.

<sup>69</sup> Thompson, 1989:75.

<sup>70</sup> Soothill, 1951:22; Fung, 1948:133-5.

Each and every month the emperor should be dressed in colours that accorded with the seasons. The food and the vessels for his food were also in agreement with the seasons. Four times a year the Son of Heaven made a special fast and prepared himself 'to meet the seasons' -- the emperor (*Di*) or spirit ruler of each season.<sup>71</sup> He also went in person at the beginning of the year to plough the Sacred Earth.<sup>72</sup> Each month ended with the constantly repeated warning that failure to observe the right ritual would bring calamity upon nature as well as man.<sup>73</sup>

The harmony of Heaven, Earth and Man would assuredly be set in discord by a wrong ritual of the Son of Heaven as representative of mankind and the nation. And his potency would likewise suffer. Such correspondence theory of Han Confucianism is the backbone of geomancy and of the almanac, which is closely related with the rites of burial sites and burial times of the deceased.<sup>74</sup> Through such a correspondence theory, emperors on earth were mythologised as emperors in heaven after death.<sup>75</sup>

The spirits of rulers found a haven in heaven, but what about those of lesser status, the common people and the slaves? In the period following the Shang, there began to appear references to the Yellow Springs which was an underground abode for the spirits of the dead. The earliest reference is contained in an anecdote in the *Zuozhuan*, a chronicle of the period 721 to 463 BC.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Soothill, 1951:26.

<sup>72</sup> He was accompanied by his nobles, ministers and officers. It was also he who took the first risk of opening the icy waters, of overseeing the capturing of the first fish, of eating the first-fruits, etc. Soothill, 1951:26.

<sup>73</sup> Soothill, 1951:50.

<sup>74</sup> For details, see p.146-8.

<sup>75</sup> See p.202.

<sup>76</sup> *Classics*, 17:15-8; Dien, 1987:3.

According to Chinese tradition, there were ten courts and eighteen hells (also called 'underground prisons'). Each court was governed by a yama-king and specialized in the punishment of specific sins.<sup>77</sup> The entire establishment was under the rule of the Jade Emperor.

The yama-king of the first court performed the initial evaluation of the dead souls. His status was higher than that of the other nine kings. The first and foremost assessment was to see if the deceased died properly and in accordance with his or her destiny.<sup>78</sup> If he should not have died, he would immediately been sent back to the human world. He would be called back in his due time. If he had committed suicide or died violently, he would be sent back to the world. He needed to find a substitute before he could be further assessed. The second assessment was to decide which one should pass the next nine courts.<sup>79</sup> Those who had already done good deeds and earned well-recognized reputations in earthly life were directly reborn into the next world without undergoing any punishment. The rest had to be assessed. They were then rewarded or punished in accordance with the particular deeds they had done on earth.<sup>80</sup>

In the next eight courts, some souls were condemned to remain in hells forever, but the souls of those who had completed their course of punishment were sent to the tenth court where they waited to be reborn.<sup>81</sup> There were altogether eighteen underground prisons to which yama-kings could sentence the soul.

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<sup>77</sup> For details, see p.156 n.64, 162-3.

<sup>78</sup> Dien, 1987:9.

<sup>79</sup> Dien, 1987:9.

<sup>80</sup> The type of misconduct ranged from lying to adultery, theft to murder and unfilialty to impiety. The punishments included dogs gnawing on limbs and nails driven into heads. Dien, 1987:9.

<sup>81</sup> Dien, 1987:9.

The yama-king of the tenth court assigned to souls their next place of birth in the world. He determined whether it would be in the celestial realm, human realm or underground realm and what rank and degree of happiness would be enjoyed.<sup>82</sup> There were six forms of existence: god-in-heaven, spirit, man, animal, hungry ghost, and ghost-in-hell.<sup>83</sup> All were judged on the basis of past actions. Each soul had to drink a broth that wiped out the memory of what it had undergone. Afterwards, it was thrown into a river of crimson water which carried it to its new birth.

The system of hells and judgment of souls was strongly influenced by Buddhism.<sup>84</sup> For those who considered themselves real Buddhists, there was an alternative. Through intercession, either to the Buddha himself or to the Bodhisattva Guan-shi-yin (Avalokitesvara), the soul could be extricated from this cycle of transmigration and reborn in the Western Paradise of Amitabha Buddha. Besides seeking help from the Otherness (the Buddha or the Bodhisattva), the Chinese would seek salvation and eternal bliss through one's own self-effort.

The Daoists, on the other hand, taught the transformation of man to god (*shen*)<sup>85</sup> and sought longevity and immortality through sacrifices, alchemy, virtue and contributions.

During the Han dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD), alchemists aimed to produce gold from base metals. It was believed that gold, if absorbed into the body, could render

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<sup>82</sup> Hsu, 1971:146.

<sup>83</sup> These six forms of existence can be divided into three realms, each realm having higher and lower forms.

	<i>celestial realm</i>	<i>human realm</i>	<i>underground realm</i>
higher form	god-in-heaven	man	hungry ghost
lower form	spirit	animal	ghost-in-hell

<sup>84</sup> In Indian Buddhism, there are five states of existence. Ch'en, 1973:5. For details, see Sadakata, 1997:41-54.

<sup>85</sup> Chang, 1963:135-51; Wong, 1997:178-83.

the human form incorruptible. This was called ‘external alchemy’. They also indulged in ‘internal alchemy’ in order to discover an elixir of life within the body. This involved breathing exercises, meditation and sexual exercise.<sup>86</sup> In addition, they ate rare plants and fungi which they believed could help them to live longer.

Dao, Heaven and Earth formed a trinity in early Daoism. As religious Daoism developed, the three life-giving spirits of *qi*, *jing*, and *shen* were personified and called the ‘three pure ones’.<sup>87</sup> The planets and major stars, mountains and hills, seas and rivers were also personified.<sup>88</sup> Other Daoist divinities included ancient culture heroes such as the creator goddess Nu-wa and the Queen Mother of the West, who presided over the abode of the immortals.<sup>89</sup> The deification process of ancestors was mainly due to the Daoist tradition.

During the Tang dynasty (618 – 906), Daoism came to a prominent place and became a state religion. The ruling emperors claimed to be descendants from Laozi because they shared with him the surname Li.<sup>90</sup> The Jade Emperor became accepted as the head of the state pantheon in the 11th century after an emperor claimed to have seen him in a dream. He became the senior member of a new Daoist trinity.<sup>91</sup> Together with his ministers and assistants (immortals and spirits), he controlled the spiritual world just as the emperor controlled the physical world.

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<sup>86</sup> For the detail, see Palmer, 1993:98-9, 129.

<sup>87</sup> Robinet, 1997:91-5; Wong, 1997:115-6.

<sup>88</sup> Ware, 1966:115-6.

<sup>89</sup> Robinet, 1997:93-4.

<sup>90</sup> Laozi was a Daoist philosopher and an elder contemporary of Confucius.

<sup>91</sup> For details, see Chinnery, 1996b:138; Palmer, 1993:114; Walters, 1992:187.

## Summary

In this chapter, the origin of ancestor practice is described as an ancestor quest. The quest is formulated in the question 'where do I come from?' The answer is either from nature or from man. The socio-political model of ancestor practice took its shape during the orientation period. The kings made use of myths (divine ancestors) and genealogy (royal blood) to justify their divine rule. Three levels of ancestor practice were established: national level, clan level and household level. The right to own an ancestor temple and the privilege to offer ancestor sacrifices reflected one's status and role in the feudal society.

The development and establishment of a religious model of ancestor practice during the de-orientation period has also been studied in this chapter. The three main factors in this development are: (1) the correspondence theory of Confucianism, which transmuted earthly emperors to heavenly emperors; (2) the transformation theory of Daoism, which immortalized men to gods; and finally (3) the incarnation theory of Buddhism, which demonized ancestor spirits to ghosts and demons.

With the fall of Buddhism and the rise of neo-Confucianism, a cultural model of ancestor practice was developed and established during the re-orientation period. In the next chapter, I shall describe the triad elements of the cultural model: filialty in the clan level, sincerity in the household level, and loyalty in the national level.

## Chapter 2

### A cultural model of ancestor practice

In 1276 AD, the Mongols occupied the capital of the Southern Song dynasty and three years later suppressed the last trace of loyalist resistance in the southern and eastern provinces. This was the first time in history, that the whole of China was subjected to alien rule.

The ruling Mongols did not alter the basic social structure of any country they conquered. They observed Chinese mourning rituals and fulfilled Confucian ritual roles, offering sacrifices to Heaven, Earth, and the Temple of the Ancestors. After the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279 – 1368), the Chinese elite believed that in spite of ‘alien’ conquest, normative Confucian cultural tradition was a universally valid ‘civilization’ and that the tradition was an unbroken thread dating back to the ancient sage king.<sup>1</sup> It is against this ‘cultural imperialism’ that we now come to another paradigmatic shift of ancestor practice: a cultural model. The re-orientation of ancestor practice is from the Song dynasty (960 – 1279) till the present.

#### a. Filialty and ancestor respect

According to Confucianism the core of the ancestor practice was filial piety (*xiao*).<sup>2</sup> The Confucian scholars often linked filial piety with benevolence. There are two weighty reasons for this. First, benevolence as a paramount and

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Chinese culturalism then meant that the transmission of the tradition through time was ultimately of greater importance than the maintenance of ephemeral polities based upon the predominance of one ethnic group over another.’ Langlois, 1980:356-7.

<sup>2</sup> The Chinese character *xiao* is made up of two elements. One signifies ‘an old man’ and beneath it another signifies ‘a son’. That is the son supporting his parent. Legge, 1879:449.

comprehensive virtue must have its roots. Second, benevolence must have its application in human society.<sup>3</sup>

The Confucianists declared that the inherent and unconditional love-and-respect toward parents was the feeling of filial piety.<sup>4</sup> And this was the fountainhead of benevolence. It was the germination or starting point of the gradually expanding virtues, the universal love of mankind. If one could not even love one's own parents, then, how could one love the man in the street?

*The Book of Filial Piety* thus warns us, 'Therefore to be without love of parents and to love other men (in their place) means to be a "rebel against virtue", to be without reverence for parents and to reverence other men means to be a "rebel against sacred custom (*li*, propriety)".'<sup>5</sup> This explains why the intellectual Chinese often emphasized the doctrine of filial piety as the fountain of all good conduct and that ancestor practice was the way of expressing filial piety.<sup>6</sup>

As a matter of fact, filial piety was merely the starting point, not the final goal, of moral practice. *Mencius* pointed out 'treat with reverence the elders in your family, so that the elders in other families shall be similarly treated; treat with kindness the young in your own family so that the young in other families shall be similarly treated.'<sup>7</sup> *The Great Learning* similarly advocated that

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<sup>3</sup> Hsieh, 1974:170.

<sup>4</sup> There are twenty-four classical stories of filial piety. For instance, Wang Xiang reclined on ice without clothing so that his bodily warmth would melt a hole. In such a way, he could then catch fish for his mother. The eight-year-old Wu Meng slept naked in order to draw the mosquitoes away from his parents.

<sup>5</sup> Hsieh, 1974:171-2.

<sup>6</sup> How filial piety extends to family life, socio-political life and religious life, see Hsieh, 1974:175-83.

<sup>7</sup> Hsieh, 1974:173.

the ancients who wished to manifest illustrious virtue throughout the world, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their own states, they first regulated their own families. Wishing to regulate their own families well they first cultivated their own selves. Wishing to cultivate their own selves, they first rectified their own minds. Wishing to rectify their own minds, they first sought for absolute sincerity in their thought. Wishing for absolute sincerity in their thoughts, they first extended their knowledge. This extension of knowledge consists in the investigation of things.<sup>8</sup>

Filial piety was the best and basic way to cultivate oneself.<sup>9</sup> It was practiced through propriety and rites for living and deceased ancestors. Confucius defined filial piety as ‘when your parents are alive, comply with the rites in serving them; when they die, comply with the rites in burying them; comply with the rites in sacrificing to them.’<sup>10</sup> Or, as *The Book of Rites* puts it, ‘Therefore, in three ways is a filial son’s service of his parents shown: when they are alive, by nourishing them; when they are dead, by all the rites of mourning; and when the mourning is over by sacrificing to them;... in his sacrifices we see his reverence and observance of the (proper) seasons.’<sup>11</sup>

To Confucius, sincerity was the most important thing in offering sacrifices in ancestor practice. Propriety and rites were the only outward expression of inward sincerity. Therefore, when a disciple said, ‘How shocking to be a poor man! When his parents are alive he has no means of feeding them properly; and when they die he has no means of carrying out the proper rites.’ Confucius replied, ‘(Merely) to suck

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<sup>8</sup> Fung, 1948:181-2.

<sup>9</sup> All of the human virtues should be born through observance of filial piety. With genuine and comprehensive love towards one’s own parents, one may gradually learn to be benevolent to living creatures, affectionate toward mankind, loyal to one’s country and to the duties of a free citizen, faithful in keeping obligations, righteous in action, peaceful in behaviour, and just in all dealings. All these virtues emanate from filial piety through its expansion. Hsieh, 1974:173-4.

<sup>10</sup> Lau, 1979:63.

<sup>11</sup> See *Classics*, 1:86-8; Dien, 1987:1; Legge, 1885b:237-8.

up bean soup and water can please a man's parents completely, and so this can be called filial service. Just wrapping the body from head to foot and burying it without a coffin, if this is in keeping with a man's means may be called propriety.<sup>12</sup>

Hence, Confucian understanding of filial piety consisted of: (1) supporting and caring for parents, (2) reverence and obedience, (3) continuing the ancestral line, (4) glorifying the family name, and (5) mourning and ancestral remembrance.<sup>13</sup>

When Buddhism first entered China, it was attacked by the Chinese as being unfilial. In *The Book of Great Peace*, four types of wicked conduct that defile the divine way were described: (1) unfilial conduct, abandoning parents, (2) leaving wife and children, not caring for life, not having descendants, (3) eating faeces and drinking urine as medicine, and (4) begging.<sup>14</sup> It is obvious that the Buddhists were the object of this attack since they were guilty of all the practices enumerated.<sup>15</sup>

The Buddhists were quick to realize that instead of merely refuting the Chinese charges, they must adopt a positive approach and gain a favorable hearing from the Chinese. The Buddhist monks declared that Buddhism did teach filial piety.

The story of Mulian is told in *The Sutra of Yu-lan-pen*. The monk Mulian saved his mother from her deserved punishment in the deepest of Buddhist hells, the Avici Hell. All the food he sent to her was either robbed by hungry ghosts or turned into flames as soon it reached her mouth. The Buddha told Mulian that his mother's offense was indeed serious. It could only be released through the corporate power of all the monks in the ten quarters. He had to feed the hungry ghosts and give alms to

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<sup>12</sup> Legge, 1885a:182.

<sup>13</sup> Yu, 1990:317-8.

<sup>14</sup> Beck, 1980:150.

<sup>15</sup> Ch'en, 1968:82.

the monks. Moreover, the food had to be blessed first by monks at the full moon of the seventh month. Through the power of such virtue, present parents and relatives would escape from the three evil modes of existence. If parents were still living, they would live up to a hundred years, and deceased ancestors for seven generations back would be reborn as deities in heaven.<sup>16</sup>

With the legend of Mulian, the Buddhists argued that their conception of filial piety was superior to that of the Confucianists. Firstly, the filial son did not just attend and serve his parents, but also converted the parents to Buddhism, so that they could enjoy all the benefits of becoming followers of the Buddha.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, by joining the monastic order, the monk would not just convert his own parents but also help them to escape repeated misery in the endless cycle of transmigration. Finally, Buddhist monks aimed not merely at salvation of their parents but at universal salvation for all living creatures.<sup>18</sup> This role was designated as the great filial piety (*da-xiao*). It was by far superior to Confucian piety.<sup>19</sup>

Owing to the Buddhist teaching and promotion of the ‘transfer of merits’, there was a wide spread and acceptance of Buddhism among the masses. The Daoist and the neo-Confucianists followed the suit and developed the record of merits and the accumulation of merits respectively in combating the populace of Buddhism among the Chinese people.

The first true ledger of merit and demerit, *The Ledger of Merit and Demerit of the Immortal Tai-wen*, was produced in 1171 by a Daoist sect. The immortal Tai-wen

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<sup>16</sup> Ch'en, 1968:90.

<sup>17</sup> Ch'en, 1968:94.

<sup>18</sup> Ch'en, 1968:95.

<sup>19</sup> The Confucian filial piety was confined to one family and limited to serving only one's parents. It was ‘family-based’ and not ‘cosmos-based’.

provided a list of almost three hundred different deeds, worth from one to one hundred merit or demerit points to guide his followers.<sup>20</sup> The whole goal of the ledger was to attain immortality. With the appearance of the ledger, a man for the first time was given a list of deeds to follow or avoid, with merits and demerits attached, so that he could keep his own precise account and numerically monitor his progress toward immortality.<sup>21</sup>

It is not until the sixteenth century that a new form of ledger was produced by a Zen monk Fa-hui (1500 – 1579). Yet it was one of his students, Yuan Huang, who was responsible for popularizing the ledgers of merit and demerit. He was a neo-Confucian scholar and he re-interpreted them in such a way that they suited the personal social and moral needs of his contemporaries. Yuan Huang attributed his success in the civil state examination and even the birth of his first son to his use of the ledger.<sup>22</sup> These achievements were all rewards bestowed on him by the gods of his accumulation of merits. His success was entirely based on the merit accumulation of his ancestors.<sup>23</sup>

In sum, the sense and meaning of the ancestor practice is filial piety. Yet, the reference of filialty varies in accordance with different teachings. Its foremost and basic meaning is sincerity in offering sacrifices. However, the meaning of the transfer of merits is added in the Buddhist teaching. In the Daoist and the neo-Confucian teachings, it refers to the record of merits and the accumulation of merits respectively.

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<sup>20</sup> Brokaw, 1987:148.

<sup>21</sup> Brokaw, 1987:149.

<sup>22</sup> For details, see Brokaw, 1987:164-173.

<sup>23</sup> See Brokaw, 1987:153.

## **b. Sincerity and ancestor worship**

The rites of mourning and sacrifices to the ancestors are the fundamental manifestation of ancestor practice. In this section, I shall describe the mourning observances and the continuing rituals to the spirits of the deceased. For the latter, it includes the erection of an ancestor altar, the pilgrimage to a graveyard and the celebration of the Ancestor Festival. The most important thing required in performing these rites is the attitude of sincerity.

Death was the event which marked the passage of an individual from the world of men to the world of spirits. The rites in funerals aimed at several things: (1) guiding the spirit's safe entry into that world, (2) providing the spirit's comfort in that world, (3) expressing the sorrowful feelings of the living, (4) ensuring that death did not create future disaster for the living or the dead, and (5) renewing a good relationship with relatives and friends.<sup>24</sup>

The elaboration of a funeral was in direct proportion to the economic condition of the family and the social status of the dead. Poor families usually had the coffin removed from the house within three days after death.

As soon as death had occurred, an elderly woman of the household had to report to the local earth-god or city-god at the nearest temple. This was to ensure the good will of the first major god which the spirit of the dead would encounter. Three days after death, the spirit would have reached the Nai-ho Bridge. To ensure the spirit's safe passage, it was customary to invite (Buddhist or Daoist) priests to recite sutras on the third night after death. If the family could afford it, another sutra reading by priests took place on the thirty-fifth day after death. At about this time, the spirit had

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<sup>24</sup> Hsu, 1971:154, 163.

reached the fifth court.<sup>25</sup> The yama-king of that court was popularly known for being more severe and harsh in punishment than other judges. The function of the priests on this occasion was to make an appeal for a lesser punishment. On the second or the third New Year day after the death, the mourning was completed.<sup>26</sup> On this occasion, another scripture reading would take place.

Death calls forth sorrow and sad feelings. The closer the kinship relationship, the greater is the expression of sorrow. This was expressed in mourning dress<sup>27</sup>, wailing and a total disregard for personal comfort and appearance.<sup>28</sup> All relatives, clan members and friends had the mutual duty of comforting each other during the mourning period. The way one performed and the way one attended the funeral rite followed a pattern one needed to observe.<sup>29</sup>

The centre of the household ancestor practice was the altar. All domestic altars held ancestor tablets with their incense pot. Various acts of ancestor practice

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<sup>25</sup> There were two platforms, one called the mirror-of-evil-deeds platform and the other the looking-over-home-village platform. The former was in the first court and it would reveal how the deceased committed their sins and crimes. The latter was in the fifth court and it would make the spirit very homesick and dejected. As a rule, only spirits of sinful persons were made to mount this platform. Hsu, 1971:138-9.

<sup>26</sup> According to *The Book of Rites*, the mourning period should last three years. Usually, it ended at twenty-fifth month after the death. See *Classics*, 11:165-73.

<sup>27</sup> The five grades of mourning dress were defined in terms of duration and appeared as follows:

grade 1	27 months	coarse hempen garments (unhemmed)
grade 2	12 months	finer hempen garments (hemmed)
grade 3	9 months	dress of coarse cloth
grade 4	5 months	dress of fine cloth
grade 5	3 months	dress of silky cloth

Hence, mourning dress shows explicitly who owes a debt of filial piety and who thus has a claim to inherit. See *Classics*, 11:173-7; Shih, 1982; Weller, 1987:28-29.

<sup>28</sup> For forty-nine days after a parent's death, sons may not shave their beard or hair or take a bath. During the succeeding two or three years, sons and daughters may not marry. Officials had to suspend their offices and resume their post after the mourning period was completed.

<sup>29</sup> A chapter entitled 'Filial piety in mourning for parents' was found in the *Book of Filial Piety*. It listed what should do and what should not do. See Legge. 1879:487-8.

reaffirmed familial solidarity and filial piety.<sup>30</sup> Rites at the domestic altar took place every day for most families. A representative of the family, usually one of the older woman, burned three sticks of incense. One stick went in the ancestor's incense pot, another was for the stove god, and the third went outside the door (the earth god). The daily act of ancestor practice reminded every member of the household of household solidarity and the need to ignore internal tensions.

People also commemorated the death days of their closer ancestors. The ancestors got more incense on these occasions. The descendants served them full meals, with bowls of rice and chopsticks, and some of their favourite dishes. In this context, people treated ancestors as if they were alive. The family ate food after the ancestors had been served. Ancestors also received sacrifices and offerings during major festivals, such as the Lunar New Year, and festivals to other gods.

Very often, a family made at least one ceremonial visit each year to its graveyard or graveyards. The visit was made on any bright (*ming*) and clear (*qing*) day of the third lunar month. This is called the Clear Bright Festival. The visitations were made to provide the dead with food, money and clothes as well to have a re-union with them.<sup>31</sup> People usually visit the graveyard again on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month. It is called the Double Bright Festival, which is closely related with Daoist belief.<sup>32</sup> This day becomes another popular day for the Chinese to have a graveyard pilgrimage and pay tribute to their ancestors.

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<sup>30</sup> Ancestor practice was always interpreted as a living sign of a united family. The united family was responsible to past generations and for creating future generations. Both ancestor practice and procreation were filial acts of gratitude towards parents and other forebears.

<sup>31</sup> The latter was comparable to a social call among the living, in which it was the custom for a junior member of the household and clan to ask about the health of senior ones, or otherwise pay them obeisance. Hsu, 1971:179-80.

<sup>32</sup> Nine is the highest *yang* (heavenly) number. Double nine would cause disaster to any living beings if they stay in the house. The only way to escape and avoid disaster is to go to high places or open areas.

Upon arrival at the graveyard, the women and helpers started to work, cleaned the graveyard and prepared the meal. When the meal was ready, the household or the clan head took some burning incense and wine and made a ceremonial offering, first before one tomb, then before the other. As he kowtowed before each, paper money was burnt. The other male members of the gathering followed suit, one by one. When the men had finished, the women followed.

With all offerings completed, everyone sat down to a hearty meal. The men sat in one group, the women in another. There was ample wine, meat and deliciously cooked vegetables. Such a visit was chiefly intended for members of the same lineage, particularly for those who were closely related.

In addition to the Clear Bright Festival and the Double Bright Festival, there are two other Buddhist ancestor festivals. Usually, only the Buddhists would observe these two festivals. During the seventh lunar month, all souls suffering in hell were released to enjoy a month of freedom. It is called the Hungry Ghost Festival. During a series of small rituals throughout the month, one climactic ritual was on the fifteenth of the month. It is called the Yu Lan Festival.<sup>33</sup> All descendants had to offer sacrifices for their ancestors.<sup>34</sup> The meetings had two main purposes. On the one hand, they would save all ancestral spirits from the misery of punishment in the underworld. On the other hand, the meetings uplifted and gave comfort to all

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<sup>33</sup> The same festival as the Yu-lan-pen Festival.

<sup>34</sup> No matter whether you were noble people or common people, rich or poor, literate or illiterate, three ceremonies to the ancestors had to be observed.

	<i>Heaven</i>	<i>Earth</i>	<i>Man</i>
national level (sacred place)	Altar of Heaven	Altar of Earth	Temple of Ancestors
household level (sacred time)	Double Bright Festival	Yu-Lan Festival	Clear Bright Festival

wandering spirits and hungry spirits. Otherwise, these unknown and dissatisfied spirits might create trouble for the living or the dead.<sup>35</sup>

The ceremony took place in the clan ancestral temple. Families who had no clan temples, would perform at their ancestor altars. If the household could afford it, one or more Buddhist priests were invited to read sutras and perform certain religious rituals before the altar during this period. The greater the number of priests and the longer they were utilized, the more beneficial it would be for the dead and for the living.

In sharp contrast to the lack of formality at household altars, the temple ceremony called for the wearing of one's best clothes. When the ceremony began, all male individuals present stood in rows, facing the main altar of the hall. The older men of the senior generation came first, followed by the younger ones of the same generation, and then the older men of the succeeding generation. The master of ceremonies would order them to kneel down and then read a general report about the clan and its prosperity. After the reading, the yellow document would be burnt. While it was being burnt, the master of ceremonies gave orders to the kneeling congregation to kowtow. After the completion of the ceremony, there would be a communal meal. The cooks for these events might be hired professionals compared to the volunteers in the graveyard pilgrimage.

In short, the continuing rituals to the spirits of the deceased include the erection of an ancestor altar, the pilgrimage to a graveyard and the celebration of the Ancestor Festival. The most important thing required in performing these rites is the attitude of sincerity.

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<sup>35</sup> Hsu, 1971:193.

### c. Loyalty and ancestor remembrance

Heaven and Earth were the emperor's symbolical parents, but he also had his real and human ancestors. To them (both symbolical and real parents), the emperor owed the same filialty and loyalty as every Chinese son owed his parents and the state. Heaven and Earth were naturally 'worshipped' in more elaborate style than imperial ancestors, but the rituals were essentially the same.<sup>36</sup> In this section, three types of state sacrifices will be described: great sacrifices, middle sacrifices and minor sacrifices. The most important thing demanded in performing these national ancestor practices is loyalty – loyalty to Heaven, sage kings and the state.

*Tian* (Heaven) was regarded as the High God or the place where the High God with other gods lived. Hence, the Altar of Heaven became one of the most important sites of state sacrifices. In *The Book of History*, we read that the Duke of Zhou raised an altar in the southern suburb where great sacrifice was performed to *Shangdi*. Since then, any dynasty had to obtain the blessings of peace and permission to rule from *Tian* or *Shangdi* by making proper sacrifices at the Altar of Heaven. Without this heavenly mandate, the dynasty was doomed to fall and the world would turn into chaos.<sup>37</sup>

The sacrifice took place on the night of the winter solstice. The altar was open to the sky. It was composed of three round marble terraces. On the upper terrace, a large tablet was placed in a shrine on the north side and it faced due south. It was inscribed 'Imperial Heaven, Supreme Emperor' (*Huangtian Shangdi*). In two rows, facing east and west, were shrines containing tablets of the ancestors of the emperor. They signified that the Son of Heaven worshipped Heaven as the oldest and the

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<sup>36</sup> Thompson, 1989:79.

<sup>37</sup> For details, see Wechsler, 1980:29-32.

original procreation of his house. On the second terrace were tablets for the deities of the sun, the moon, the great bear, the five planets, the twenty-eight principal constellations, the host of stars, and the gods of clouds, rain and thunder.<sup>38</sup>

On the longest night, the only qualified worshipper for the grand sacrifice was the emperor. He proceeded to the altar, escorted by princes and ministers. During this great sacrifice, the emperor had to prostrate himself before the tablets of *Shangdi* (and ancestors). This imperial great sacrifice was the most solemn one. It was attended by a large number of musicians and ceremonial dancers, performing at every important moment.<sup>39</sup>

The ceremonials for all other state sacrifices was similar to that for *Tian*. Next to *Tian* in the series of state sacrifices was *Di* (Earth). The Altar of Earth was a square, open altar of marble. It was built within a vast, walled square outside the northern side of the capital.<sup>40</sup> The tablets of the ancestors of the emperor were placed on the right and left of that of the Earth. On the second terrace, sacrifices were offered to the tablets of the principal components of the Earth such as the chief mountains, rivers and seas. The solemn great sacrifice was offered annually by the emperor on the day of the summer solstice. At the end of the ceremonies, all the offerings were buried in the ground so that they could go down to the living quarters of the earthly spirits.

From the beginning of recorded history, the Temple of Ancestors (*Ming Tang*) was the center of the state and symbolized a national mandate. Not only were

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<sup>38</sup> According to de Groot, the state religion of the Chinese (before 1911) was a mixture of nature worship and worship of the dead. de Groot, 1910:117.

<sup>39</sup> The Spirit of Heaven was invited by means of a hymn, accompanied by music, to descend into the tablet. For details of the ceremony, see de Groot, 1910:103-6.

<sup>40</sup> The architecture of the Altar of Heaven and the Altar of Earth has its symbolic meaning and religious significance. It relates to the Chinese view of cosmology, the *yin-yang* principle, and the theory of five elements. For details, see Chan, 1991:87-95; Liu, 1992:219-24; Yao, 1994b:178-9.

sacrifices to the ancestral spirits performed in it, but also various divinations were made.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, an enthronement of a new king, an imperial marriage and an engagement of war were announced here, too.<sup>42</sup> During the Three Dynasties, it was in this temple that the kings held their audience with feudal princes and great officials, issued orders concerning both civil and military matters, heard news of victory in battle, and dispensed rewards to meritorious officials.

All these ceremonies in the Temple of Ancestors, and all the practices of combining activities with the sacrificial offering were used to perform a symbolic function. It was to convey a belief that kingship was sacred. It was not only blessed by *Shangdi* or *Tian*, but was also protected by the ancestral spirits who were believed to have a great influence on *Shangdi's* mind. Sage kings were ancestors of virtue and contributions. Having inherited a cultural heritage and pioneered a new horizon, they symbolized a cultural mandate.

Sacrifices were presented by the emperor to those ancestors on various fixed days in the calendar as well as on special occasions. Whenever the emperor deemed it fit or useful to invoke their aid for himself and his house, they were celebrated in the ancestor temples within the palace grounds. And they were also celebrated in the ancestor temples erected in the imperial grave hills. Each ancestor or ancestress was represented in these buildings by a tablet.<sup>43</sup>

Sacrifices to Heaven, Earth and imperial ancestors are called great sacrifices. Next in rank are those of the second category, the middle sacrifices. These were presented on various altars or temples erected in or about the capital. The sun god

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<sup>41</sup> *Ming Tang* was not the name given to its most ancient form. Different names were given in different periods of time. For details, see Soothill, 1951:78-83.

<sup>42</sup> Yao, 1994b:180

<sup>43</sup> de Groot, 1910:108.

had his large walled park with a round and open altar terrace outside the imperial city on the east. The moon goddess had her square altar on the west, because the west is the region from which the new moon is born. The other state gods of this middle class were those famous figures of antiquity, who introduced the blessings of civilization, learning and ethics to the nation, such as the Five Emperors, Confucius, Taisui,<sup>44</sup> deities of the sky and gods of the earth.

The third category of state sacrifices were called minor sacrifices. These were offered by mandarins to gods such as the gods of fire, letter, war, ground, walls and moats, oceans and water, and certain palace doors. Many of these state sacrifices were also offered by the authorities throughout their provinces on altars or in temples which had been built for this purpose. Such altars, temples and images were very often erected with imperial permission.<sup>45</sup> These were formally requested in honour of mandarins after they departed from the region where they had gained the sympathy and support of a grateful people. Such worthies thus continued to protect these people.

The state sacrifices, performed by the Son of Heaven as high priest, and by ministers and mandarins all through the empire as his proxies, were thoroughly ritualistic. They were instituted to secure the good working of the *Dao* (the order of the universe) among men. The people were not allowed to take part, except by erecting state temples and altars, and keeping them in good repair at their own cost,

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<sup>44</sup> The Chinese word *Taisui* literally means 'the great year'. He is the god of astrology and the minister of time. See Walters, 1992:149-151.

<sup>45</sup> *The Book of Filial Piety* says, 'The filial piety with which the superior man serves his parents may be transferred as loyalty to the ruler; the fraternal duty with which he serves his elder brother may be transferred as submissive deference to elders; his regulation of his family may be transformed as good government in any official position. Therefore, when his conduct is thus successful in his inner (private) circle, his name will be established (and transmitted) to future generations.' Legge, 1879:483.

and by their own labour. The only sacrifice the state allowed to them was the offering to their own ancestors.<sup>46</sup>

In China, the emperor was seen to be the Son of Heaven and the people's ancestor. When the Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911) fell in 1911, China lost its 'ancestor' and underwent a great change in its socio-political structure. This disintegration of the feudal dynastic and ethical system is leading to a new model of ancestor practice as is happening in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the mainland of China. Such a change will be discussed in Part III: a reconstruction of ancestor practice in Chinese Christianity.

In short, the meaning of loyalty at the national level has been explored. It denotes loyalty to the heavenly mandate, the cultural mandate and the national mandate. Its basic and foremost meaning is loyalty towards the emperor.

## Summary

In this chapter, the development and establishment of a cultural model of ancestor practice has been studied. The triad elements of such a model are sincerity, filialty and loyalty. The national ancestor practice demands loyalty from the mandarins to the emperor, and the emperor to Heaven. The clan ancestor practice requires every clan member to be filial, which subsequently brings merits and blessings to their ancestors and offsprings. The household ancestor practice asks for sincerity in performing the rituals and offering the sacrifices.

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<sup>46</sup> It is restricted to five past generations but later amended to three generations. Only officials were allowed to pay offerings to their clan and/or lineage ancestors. Hence, there are three kinds of ancestor practice with respect to whom 'the ancestor' are offered: (1) offerings to a clan ancestor, (2) offerings to a lineage ancestor, and (3) offerings to a family ancestor, that is the ancestors of five past generations. Bearing this in mind, *zu* and *zong* denote different meanings in different context. For instance, *zu* and *zong* may refer to heaven and earth, major lineage and lesser lineage, virtue and contribution, clan ancestor and lineage ancestor, and ancestor practice at national level and household level.

## Summary of Part I

In Part I, I put forward a working hypothesis that the origin of ancestor practice is an ancestor quest. The primal people perceived nature and man as their ancestors. Heaven and earth, beast and hybrid, and woman and man became ancestors. When civilization began, the kings and the literati propagated heroes and sages as their national ancestors. Mythical and cultural lineages co-existed with matriarchal and patriarchal lineages.

In Chinese holistic worldview, there is no meaningful distinction between religion, ethics and politics. Hence, ancestor practice always comprises these three dimensions: a religious dimension, an ethical dimension and a socio-political dimension. Three models of ancestor practice are proposed in Part I as a working hypothesis to describe and explain the historical development of ancestor veneration in China. They are a religious model, a cultural model and a socio-political model.

During the orientation period of ancestor practice, the socio-political model was fully developed and well established to consolidate the aristocratic hierarchy of the time. The model comprised three levels of ancestor rituals: a national ancestor practice, a clan ancestor practice and a household ancestor practice. Its foci were family genealogy, ancestor temples and ancestor sacrifices.

With the emergence of religious Daoism and the entry of Buddhism, a religious model was formed during the de-orientation period of ancestor practice. The Three Teachings merged and mixed with each other. The Confucianists mystified earthly emperors as heavenly emperors. The Daoists sought immortality and deified ancestors. The Buddhists said masses to the deceased and demonized spirits and ghosts. Ancestor practice became a complex Chinese ideological phenomenon.

With the fall of Buddhism and the rise of neo-Confucianism, a cultural model of ancestor practice was propagated for cultural superiority and imperialism during the re-orientation period. The triad elements of the cultural model are filialty, loyalty and sincerity. The national ancestor practice demands loyalty from mandarins to the emperor, and the emperor to Heaven. The clan ancestor practice requires every clan member to be filial in order to bring merits and blessings upon ancestors and descendants. The household ancestor practice asks for sincerity in performing the rituals and offering the sacrifices daily.

These three dimensions and periods, and three traditions and levels of ancestor practice were influenced by Three Teachings. Different strands of ancestor rituals merged and mixed together with each other. Ancestor practice became a complex Chinese ideological phenomenon. And it is this ideological complex that has been reduced to and interpreted as ancestor worship or ancestor respect by many missionaries and scholars. Through such a study of the historical development of ancestor practice in Part I, we now have a holistic understanding of the nature of Chinese ancestor veneration. It is only through such a proper pre-understanding of ancestor practice that we can make an appropriate response to Chinese ancestor practice in a contemporary context.

## Part II

### Christian Faith and Ancestor Practice

Is ancestor practice idol worship? First of all, we need to know the nature of ancestor practice. In Part I, I have shown the historical development of ancestor practice in China. The veneration of ancestors has three dimensions: a socio-political dimension, a religious dimension and an ethical dimension. Hence, we should not reduce our understanding of ancestor practices to that of dealing simply with a religious phenomenon or, alternatively, simply a sociological phenomenon. We need to look at the complex Chinese ideological phenomenon of ancestor practice as a whole.

In Part II, I will describe the encounter of missionaries with ancestor practice. The encounter of Nestorian missionaries with ancestor practice will be described as a religious encounter for the religious model of ancestor practice was in the process of development in Chinese culture at that time. The encounter of Catholic missionaries with ancestor practice will be described as a cultural encounter when the cultural model of ancestor practice was well established. Two cultures collided and the rites controversy broke out in the east as well in the west. Finally, the encounter of Protestant missionaries with ancestor practice will be described as a socio-political encounter because it occurred when the socio-political model of ancestor practice was under threat of disintegration and collapse.

A study of these various missionaries towards ancestor practice brings out several points of a general nature about ancestor veneration: Is it (1) a religious idol-worship act or a moral ancestor-respect act, (2) the seeking of divine protection or of social solidarity, and (3) a ghost communion feast or an ancestor-memorial feast? Behind these issues lie related perspectives on mission strategy, mission targets and mission plan. Hence, when we come to the question: is ancestor practice idol worship? ---- the question may be simple, but the answer cannot be. We need to

know the theological and missiological presupposition of the inquirer who formulates such a clear and simple question.

When the complex Chinese ideological phenomenon of ancestor practice was reduced to the question of was it a religious act or a civil act, the result was disastrous. Those who interpreted it as a religious act, condemned it. Those who saw it as a civil act, tolerated it. In the end, there was a conflict between two opposing camps and this brought a disastrous impact in the mission field.

Through a study of their encounters, we come to know that a 'both... and' perspective is a better way to adopt in tackling the issue of ancestor practice. This is not this way or that way, it is a third way. In other words, we should deal with the issue with a 'both... and' perspective and not 'either... or' perspective.

## Chapter 3

### Nestorian Christianity: a religious encounter

The coming to power of the Sui in 581 ended the control of north China by non-Chinese rulers and eight years later, China was re-unified, an event seen by many as a key moment in Chinese history.<sup>1</sup> The subsequent foundation of the Tang dynasty in 618 marked the beginning of radical changes in China, changes in the area of the structure of society, of the organization of political leadership and of the understanding of tradition.<sup>2</sup>

The year 630 is seen by historians as the beginning of an expansionist era under the Tang dynasty when Chinese authority directly or indirectly expanded over many areas of Asia outside the Middle Kingdom. In particular the campaigns of 630 to 645 which saw the defeat of the Turkish tribes brought China into contact afresh with the countries of what is today known as the Middle East. In this period the Chinese people, the ruling classes in particular, were open to foreign influences. These included styles of clothing, cooking, games, music, art, even dance and were widely welcomed.

It was in this atmosphere of interest in and openness to outside culture that Nestorian Christianity entered the Middle Kingdom. In 635 the Emperor Taizong (627-650) welcomed into the capital, Changan, a Nestorian Christian missionary party led by a bishop known in Chinese as Alouben. The emperor would appear to have had already some knowledge of the Nestorians for he quickly offered his patronage to Alouben, who was allowed to work in the Imperial Library. The

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<sup>1</sup> Gernet, 1996:235.

<sup>2</sup> Gernet, 1996:237-60.

emperor then publicly commended the 'Luminous Religion of Daqin' and had a monastery erected in the city for the Nestorian monks.<sup>3</sup> It must be noted that Manichean and Muslim missionaries were also welcomed into the capital at that time.

Subsequently Nestorian monasteries expanded into many areas of the Middle Kingdom, and significant Nestorian Christian artifacts have been found at various places in the provinces of Sinkiang, Kansu, Jingsu and Beijing. At various times they were opposed by various Buddhist groups and from time to time they suffered from Imperial disfavour. They were favoured, however, by at least three prominent Tang Emperors in addition to Taizong, these were Xuanzang, Daizong and Jianzhong and in the first half of the ninth century Christianity achieved great influence under the patronage of Duke Guo Ziyi. This was a time when the Nestorian Church in China had its own Metropolitan and a number of bishops. It was a church whose life centred on the monastery and the monastic clergy. Their ideals are listed on the famous Sianfu stele as

*Do not keep male or female slaves, reckoning honourable and mean among men alike; they do not amass goods and wealth, displaying devotion and generosity among themselves.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jing Jiao, often translated Luminous Religion, was a title that could readily be confused with a similarly titled Buddhist sect. However the alternative title for Nestorian Christianity, used of their monasteries, Daqin, could not be so confused as it refers to the lands beyond Iraq, i.e. Syria/ Palestine, or the West in general.

<sup>4</sup> The Sianfu stele is a massive stone monument created in 781 whose inscriptions, mainly in Mandarin but with a few sentences in Syriac, detail the history of Nestorian Christianity in China up to that point.

From the time of the An Lushan rebellion in the middle of the eighth century the Tang dynasty became more and more defensive about foreign influences in China. Nestorian Christianity, however, was still protected by the prestige of Duke Guo Ziyi. Indeed the Duke's leading general was a Nestorian, Issu, who distinguished himself in An Lushan rebellion and in repelling a Tibetan invasion. Issu was a married monk and a notable leader of the church. He spent his fortune on church affairs and social welfare. He also assembled the monks from the local monasteries for a fifty day retreat every year. The Sianfu stele records that

*He bade the hungry come and fed them.*

*He bade the cold come and clothed them.*

*He healed the sick and raised them up.*

*He buried the dead and laid them to rest.*

With the accession of the Emperor Wuzong in 845 the religious situation changed. He began an attack upon all monastery based religions, in particular Buddhism. All monks and nuns were forced to return to lay life, engage in their former occupations and pay tax, if Chinese, or be deported if they were foreigners. A Buddhist authority around 825 asserted there were more Buddhist monasteries in one city than all the Manichean, Christian and Zoroastrian monasteries in the whole of China.<sup>5</sup> As a result of this disparity in numbers, the ferocious and efficient activity of the Imperial authorities destroyed most monasteries of the three minority religions, the sheer numbers of Buddhist monasteries helped Buddhism survive the ordeal. Because of their dependence on the monastery and the monastic clergy, Nestorian Christianity

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<sup>5</sup> Moule, 1930:69f.

was severely damaged and gradually disappeared from view in China by the end of the tenth century.<sup>6</sup>

The Syriac *Breviarum Chaldanicum* states that ‘St. Thomas has flown and gone to the Kingdom of the Height among the Chinese’.<sup>7</sup> This is one of a number of assertions about the early entry of Christians into China. The mission of Alouben is, however, the first we have attested in history and took place in patriarchate of Yeshuyab II (628-643). The main source of information is the Sianfu stele but there are a small number of references in the surviving Tang dynasty records and, in addition, there are a number of Chinese Nestorian documents of the period which were found in the twentieth century.

The Sianfu stele mentions three important figures in the history of the Church in China, Alouben, Adam and Issu. In this section I shall discuss the work and thought of these three Nestorian church leaders and how their teaching related to Chinese ancestor practice. I will also look at their possible influence on the Buddhist form of ancestor practice in China.

#### **a. Alouben the evangelist and translator**

In the Imperial Library at Changan Alouben began his work of translating Nestorian Christian texts into Chinese. When these translations were completed they gained the Emperor’s approval. Weng Shaojun has classified *The Jesus Messiah Sutra* and *The Monotheism Sutra* as written by Alouben documents and *The Sutra Proclaiming the Origin of Origins* and *The Sutra Aiming at Mysterious Rest and Joy*

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<sup>6</sup> Gillman & Klimkeit, 1999: 282-85.

<sup>7</sup> Atiya, 1968: 261.

documents written by Adam.<sup>8</sup> These documents were among the many texts, Buddhist, Manichean as well as Christian which were discovered in the caves of Tunhuang in 1908.

The Alouben documents are evangelistic in intention. In them Alouben, only recently arrived in China, struggles to find appropriate terms in Mandarin for Biblical names and terms. Because of its early date some of the terminology is very obscure indeed but the intention is clear and unambiguous, it is to express the Christian message in terms understandable to people of the indigenous culture. This pattern of inculturation was not new to the Nestorians who had already presented the Christian Gospel in cultural terms applicable to the various Turkic peoples of central Asia.

In *The Jesus Messiah Sutra* Alouben has not yet found truly useful translations of concepts like Messiah and Holy Spirit, it is clearly the work of someone who was, as yet, far from mastering Mandarin. Yet, P.Y. Saeki insists that it conveys what he calls 'a surprisingly complete outline of the fundamental doctrine of Christianity', intended to gain the Emperor's blessing.<sup>9</sup> The sutra consists of two parts. The first part is doctrinal, outlining God's qualities as source of life and listing his commandments. The second part is an outline of the life of Jesus, which follows the Gospel of Matthew closely, from the incarnation up to the crucifixion but is unfinished and breaks off before dealing with the resurrection and the ascension. In the first part Alouben boldly attempts to set Christianity firmly in a Chinese context. He makes clear that honouring the emperor and expressing filial loyalty to one's parents were Christian virtues. The Ten Commandments were called the Ten Vows and the first three were referred to as the Three-fold Loyalties: (1) to serve the Heavenly Worthy (the title of the supreme god in the Daoist pantheon), (2) to serve

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<sup>8</sup> Weng, 1995:21-23.

<sup>9</sup> Saeki, 1951:116f.

the Sainly Highness (a Confucian title for the Emperor) and (3) to serve father and mother.

*The Monotheism Sutra* was written a few years after *The Jesus Messiah Sutra*. It is made up of three parts, a discourse on monotheism, a discourse on the oneness of the Ruler of the Universe and the Lord of the Universe's discourse on alms-giving. The style is now clearer and many of the linguistic crudities of the first text have been remedied. In the first section the Buddhist concept of *sunyata*, emptiness is used to present the one uncreated God as being completely outside all human categories and definitions. The second section attempts to use Buddhist categories to show the nature of the Christian soul, indeed it could be said that Buddhist teaching on the human person is taken as given and then elements are added to teach what the human soul is in Christian thought. In addition Daoist and Buddhist teaching on cosmology are freely used to explain the Biblical cosmology. The third section on Almsgiving spends little time on almsgiving as such, but becomes a discourse on benevolence in general as a key Christian virtue referring extensively to the Sermon on the Mount, again making free use of Buddhist terminology but transforming it to fit Christian arguments. This document also outlines something of the history of the church universal for the information of its Chinese reader.

#### **b. Adam an inter-faith translator**

Adam, who was the son of Issu, the brilliant Christian priest and Chinese general, is also known by his Chinese name Ching-ching and was a bishop of the Nestorian church. He was well versed in the Confucian classics as well as in Daoist and Buddhist thought. Indeed his linguistic skills were such that a Buddhist monk

and scholar asked him to collaborate with him on the translation of the seven volumes of the *Satparamita Sutra*.<sup>10</sup>

The four major documents attributed to Adam, two are hymns, and two sutras. The two hymns are *The Nestorian Motwa Hymn Honouring the Majestic Three* (Trinity) and *The Hymn in Adoration of the Transfiguration of our Lord*. The two hymns draw freely on Buddhist language and imagery but these are used always to make clear orthodox Christian teaching in a striking fashion. The first hymn is an extended version of the classic *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, the second is similar in form to the *Gloria* and the text also insists that readings from the Psalms, an Epistle and a Gospel should follow it.

The other two texts attributed to Adam are *The Sutra Aiming at Mysterious Rest and Joy* and the fragmentary remains of *The Daqin Luminous Religion Sutra on the Origin of Origins*. In these two Sutras the effort at making the Christian message clearly communicable in Chinese is held to have gone too far by some writers.<sup>11</sup>

They hold that unlike the two hymns the use of Buddhist and Daoist imagery in the sutras does not help to communicate the Christian message but obscure it. This is the great problem that confronts all missionaries when attempting to contextualize the Christian message. Professor Moffett sums up the situation thus

... there is enough to suggest that the theology of the Nestorians in China may have been more orthodox,... Comparing the earlier with the later writings, though the style improves, the theology does in fact seem to weaken. However, even the later documents, including the monument inscription, do not quite justify the wholesale charges of heresy leveled against those early missionaries. Only in the two works,

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<sup>10</sup> This inter-faith collaboration is thought to have taken place after the erection of the Sianfu stele between 786 and 788. In *The Honoured Sutra* Adam is said to have translated more than thirty Daqin books. England, 1996:71; Jiang, 1982:38.

<sup>11</sup> England, 1996:134; Gillman & Klimkeit, 1999:280-81.

the “Sutra of Mysterious Rest and Joy” and the “Sutra on the Origin of Origins” are the touches of Christian language so few and so vague and the Taoist [Daoist] imagery so vivid that mixture is closer to syncretism than to missionary contextualization.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, Adam, under his Chinese name Ching-ching, is vigorously criticized by Buddhist sources for attempting to Christianize Buddhism.

### **c. The Nestorian Church and ancestor practice**

When one asks the question what was the attitude of the Nestorian missionaries to ancestor practice one has to be very careful. Particularly since ancestor practice was still developing. It was only what I have called the socio-political model of ancestor practice which was well established. The religious model was in the process of formation and the cultural model had not yet emerged. It is clear, however, that the missionaries had grasped from the beginning the importance of the classic Confucian ethical injunctions about behaviour towards others. We have seen this in the endorsement of the threefold loyalties in the translation of the first three of the Ten Commandments as injunctions to serve God, to serve the Emperor and to serve one’s parents. There is nowhere in the Nestorian literature any condemnation of Chinese practices which expressed honour to the Emperor or to parents.

To sum up it would appear that during the period that Nestorian Christianity flourished in China, what records we have show no indication of conflict over the practice of the ancestral rites of the time by Christians. Indeed the Nestorian emphasis on the invocation of the saints and of prayers for the dead would appear to have been an attractive feature of Christianity for Chinese people. A number of

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<sup>12</sup> Moffett, 1992:309.

authorities, in particular Saeki<sup>13</sup> and Reichelt<sup>14</sup> have emphasized this. It has been suggested, indeed, that the conjunction of these Nestorian practices with the contemporary ancestral practices was so popular as to provoke a radical response from one of the leading Buddhist teachers of the period, Amoghavajra (705-774). This teacher felt compelled to develop a radical new Buddhist teaching with regard to heaven and to the dead which developed into the Hungry Ghosts Festival.<sup>15</sup> Among the Chinese masses influenced by Buddhism this moved the honouring of parents and ancestors in the direction of what might be called the worship of ancestors.

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<sup>13</sup> Saeki, 1928:165-72.

<sup>14</sup> Reichelt, 1927:88.

<sup>15</sup> Reichelt, 1927:89-90.

## Chapter 4

### **Catholic Christianity: a cultural encounter**

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Chingis Khan effectively consolidated his authority over all the Mongol tribes of Central Asia. He then proceeded on a series of ruthless destructive campaigns which created an empire which stretched from Poland to the China Sea. For the first time in history, under the so-called 'Tatar Peace' a trader could travel from Europe to China unmolested. Despite their ferocity when on campaign, the Mongols were disciplined and offered generous hospitality to peaceful strangers within the territories they controlled.

In China they created a new capital at Beijing and administered China by means of the traditional civil service of the Confucian literati. The dynasty of Chingis Khan took the Chinese title of Yuan. It was in this period that traders from Western (or Latin) Europe visited China, notable the members of the Polo family. In addition the papacy sent both Franciscan and Dominican missionaries to the Middle Kingdom. We do not, however, have enough information on the nature of Catholic Christianity among the Chinese at that time to make a worthwhile discussion of the response of Christianity to ancestor practice under the tutelage of the Franciscans and Dominicans.

In 1368 the last remnants of Mongol power were removed from China and the Ming dynasty was inaugurated. Although initially under the Ming China continued to be open to the world and indeed sent out fleets that traded as far as the shores of Tanzania and Mozambique, gradually the dynasty changed China into a society closed to the outside world. So it came that foreigners were normally allowed to stay only temporarily in the Middle Kingdom.

It was during this period of suspicion of foreigner that Jesuit missionaries gained entry to China and went on to gain the acceptance by the scholar/administrators who ran the empire, an extraordinary achievement. I will therefore focus on the work of the Jesuits during the Ming and early Qing dynasties in this chapter.

**a. Jesuit and Confucian accommodation**

For nearly two hundred years there were no missionaries in China after the Franciscans had left at the close of the Yuan dynasty. Alessandro Valignano (1538-1606) sailed from Lisbon in 1574 with forty-one Jesuits for service as missionaries in the East.<sup>1</sup> In 1579 Valignano set Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607) to studying the Chinese language, insisting that he must learn to speak, read and write Chinese. He did this in order to fulfill Francis Xavier's dream of converting China.<sup>2</sup> Three years later Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) arrived at Macao. Ricci first worked in Goa and taught in the Jesuit College there. Later, Valignano ordered him to come to China and join Ruggieri. He was asked to prepare a comprehensive report on China for the Visitor and to study Chinese.<sup>3</sup> These two Jesuits became the pioneers of Roman Catholic Christianity in China.

When Ricci felt confident of the classical language of the scholars, he wrote his first Chinese book *A Treatise of Friendship*. The book was published many times and widely known throughout the empire. Many mandarins from all places came to see him in Nanchang. When Ricci became a legal resident of the capital, many more

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<sup>1</sup> Clark, 1970:26.

<sup>2</sup> For details, see Ross, 1994:118-20.

<sup>3</sup> Ross, 1994:121-2.

distinguished scholars and mandarins visited him. It was through this book that he was accepted as a Chinese scholar in the Confucian community.<sup>4</sup> His scientific knowledge also became something worthy of respect in the eyes of the literati. When Ricci was in Shaoshou, he displayed on the wall of his room a map of the world. The map which he had annotated in Chinese, attracted many visitors. One visitor copied, printed and published it without informing Ricci. The map became very popular and copies were spread far beyond Guangdong province. Ricci published his own version *Mappamondo* in 1602 and produced a final annotated version of a *Mappamondo* for the imperial palace in 1608.<sup>5</sup>

In 1601, Ricci was allowed to enter Beijing. He arrived there with two clocks as presents for the Emperor. Having been accepted as one of themselves by the literati, his knowledge of astronomy and mathematics now became of interest to them as something Ricci could contribute to the welfare of the Middle Kingdom. In Chinese learning, astronomy was a part of classics and a road to high-ranking mandarins. For the religio-political model of ancestor practice was still dominant during the Ming dynasty. Whoever can predict and ‘control’ the movements of heavenly bodies must be a messenger from Heaven. He was highly regarded by the Son of Heaven.<sup>6</sup> Li Zhizao and Xu Guanqi were Confucian mandarins and also Christians. With their help, Ricci produced a number of important books on western science in Chinese.

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<sup>4</sup> These included the Minister of Rites, Secretary of the Board of Personnel and even the Grand Secretary himself. Ross, 1994:132, 145.

<sup>5</sup> Ross, 1994:125.

<sup>6</sup> When Ricci died in 1610, he was buried in a villa next to the imperial city. ‘As Trigault pointed out, this granting of a special tomb by the Emperor was something reserved as an award only for outstanding mandarins and utterly unheard of for an ordinary Chinese let alone a foreigner.’ See Ross, 1994:153-4.

His work on astronomy was produced in full in the great Qing encyclopedia *The Complete Library of the Four Branches of Knowledge*.<sup>7</sup>

In 1603, he published his most important book *On the True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*. In his study of the Chinese classics, Ricci found that *Shangdi* and *Tian* in classical Confucianism referred to a personal transcendent God, one Creator God. He identified such a transcendent Lord of Heaven (*Tianzhu*) as the God of the Bible.<sup>8</sup> Ricci attempted to establish a ‘celestial learning’ in which Christianity was integrated with the Chinese organic worldview and did not replace it. He believed that the ancient Chinese culture retained traces of the primal revelation of God to his creation. This showed the compatibility of Confucian ethics with Christian faith. In Chinese learning, science, philosophy, ethics, religion and technology were interrelated to form a whole. They were not compartmentalized as Western learning was.<sup>9</sup>

After his careful study of ancestor practices and the Confucian rites and in the light of his knowledge of the Confucian Classics, Ricci felt that he understood the essential nature of these ancestor practices. He then concluded that participation in these rites was permissible to Christians. He knew that among the uneducated many did understand ancestor practice in a ‘superstitious’ way, expecting material rewards from the ancestors in return. However, he accepted ancestor practice as a personal and social act which reinforced filial piety and family solidarity. Ricci reported in his *Journals*,

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<sup>7</sup> It was compiled under Emperor Qianlong in the 1780s. Ross, 1994:152-3.

<sup>8</sup> For details, see Ricci, 1985:118-31; Ross, 1994:146-9.

<sup>9</sup> Ross, 1994:146.

The most common ceremony practiced by all the Literati, from the King down to the very lowest of them, is that of the annual funeral rites... they consider this ceremony as an honor bestowed upon their departed ancestors, just as they might honor them if they were living. They do not really believe that the dead actually need the victuals which are placed upon their graves, but they say that they observe the custom of placing them there because it seems to be the best way of testifying their love for their dear departed. Indeed, it is asserted by many that this particular rite was first instituted for the benefit of the living rather than for that of the dead. In this way it was hoped that children, and unlearned adults as well, might learn how to respect and to support their parents who were living, when they saw that parents departed were so highly honored by those who were educated and prominent. This practice of placing food upon the graves of the dead seems to be beyond any charge of sacrilege and perhaps also free from any taint of superstition, because they do not in any respect consider their ancestors to be gods, nor do they petition them for anything or hope for anything from them.<sup>10</sup>

With Valignano's agreement, Ricci decided in favour of Christian participation. He ruled that there would have to be some modifications. No paper money was to be burnt. Participants had to affirm that the dead did not need nourishment from the food, which was consumed by the participants.<sup>11</sup>

By showing the excellence and superiority of astronomical calculations and western science, the Jesuit missionary work seemed secure in Chinese society. Ricci thought that showing the excellence of western science was demonstrating the superiority of Christianity,<sup>12</sup> and that showing the relationship between classical Confucianism and classical Catholic teaching was proving the credibility of Christianity.<sup>13</sup> The Jesuits were now tolerated as if they were Chinese because they tried to conform to the ways of the literati.

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<sup>10</sup> Gallagher, 1953:96.

<sup>11</sup> Ross, 1994:151-2.

<sup>12</sup> Gernet, 1996:434.

<sup>13</sup> Ricci wrote in his letter to Pasio saying that through mastering the Chinese classics and western scientific knowledge, the Jesuits would be regarded both as Chinese and as intellectual equals. This was the way to convert the whole kingdom of China. He also wrote that Confucian morality, both

In 1623, Adam Schall (1592-1666) and Johann Terrenz (1576-1630) arrived. They had been chosen because of their mathematical skill. They had outstanding skill in astronomy and calculation of the calendar. They in turn were followed by the famous Belgian Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688), who also had great achievement in astronomy and became a high-ranked Confucian mandarin. He served as the director of the Calendrical Bureau for 20 years and helped many new missionaries entering China.

In dynastic China, the calendar of official sacrifices was determined by the Bureau of Astronomy and it was published by the Ministry of Rites. The ministry was one of the major organs of government. Its head was one of the great ministers of the administrative departments. He could also be described as a chief priest (advisor) in the government because he was in charge of the ceremonies in the great sacrifices.<sup>14</sup> The Jesuits were welcomed in the Chinese court because of their excellence in astronomical calculations, which could be used making more accurate the sacrificial and agricultural calendar for national sacrifices and ancestor practice. The failure to predict even a small partial eclipse of the sun or moon in the Imperial Calendar might be taken to mean that the dynasty had lost the Mandate of Heaven which was why the Calendar Office was so important and why the Jesuits in that office had such authority.

Schall predicted exactly a lunar eclipse which took place on 8 October 1623. This attracted a great deal of attention from the Confucian mandarins.<sup>15</sup> In 1629, a

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classical and contemporary, was compatible with Christian faith. Confucianism was seen as an ally against Buddhism. Classical Confucianism was given by God through the natural law. Ross, 1994:144-5.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson, 1989:81.

<sup>15</sup> For details, see Ross, 1994:164-5.

solar eclipse was expected. Two official boards of mathematicians, the Chinese and the Muslim, were told to forecast. Terrenz was also to make a forecast. The government mathematicians got it wrong and Terrenz got it right. As a result, the Jesuits were allowed to carry out the reform of the Calendar and work in the Bureau of Astronomy.<sup>16</sup>

In 1644, the Ming dynasty fell and the new Manchu Emperor Shunzhi entered Beijing. He wanted a new Calendar. Schall won the competition and was entrusted to prepare the Imperial Calendar for 1645. His official position became further secured when he exactly predicted a solar eclipse on 1 September 1644.<sup>17</sup> He finally became a mandarin of the first grade of the First Division, an intimate adviser of the emperor.<sup>18</sup>

From a Chinese perspective, the Jesuits' significance and contributions were mainly their excellent knowledge and master skill in astronomy which could be used in fixing the sacrificial and agricultural calendar. As intimated, the calendar played a pivotal role in ancestor practice for it was published as a guidebook to state sacrifices and ancestor veneration. In spite of its religious and superstitious elements, Ricci saw the nature of ancestor practice as a civil act which reinforced filial piety and family solidarity.

#### **b. The rites controversy**

There was no meaningful distinction between ethics, politics and religion in China. The authority of emperor could not exist without the sanction of religious

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<sup>16</sup> Ross, 1994:165-8.

<sup>17</sup> Ross, 1994:169-70.

<sup>18</sup> Ross, 1994:171-2.

qualifications claimed and acknowledged since he was the only Son of Heaven.<sup>19</sup> At the very beginning, the rites controversy was an ethico-religious issue between the Jesuits and the Friars. The Jesuits did not interpret ancestor practice as idol worship but the Friars did. Later, it became a religio-political encounter between the Pope and the Emperor, who had the divine right to rule over religious and ethical teachings in China.

In the early 1630's, the Franciscans and the Dominicans came to China from Formosa and the Philippines. They were in China illegally without government permission. Moreover, they preached publicly in the streets without magisterial permission. They displayed the crucifix in public. Local Christian communities were not so supportive as their very presence and their, in Chinese eyes, outrageous acts caused them trouble.<sup>20</sup> The Mendicants on the other hand thought that the hostility of Chinese Christians was a Jesuit plot to hinder their work.

The Dominicans began to challenge the Jesuits in 1639. They sent Juan Morales to Rome to complain about the actions of the Jesuits in China. One of the accusations was that the Jesuits allowed Christians to participate in ancestor practices and Confucian rites, which were idolatrous and superstitious.<sup>21</sup> In 1645, Pope Innocent X issued the edict. Chinese Christians were forbidden to take part in ancestor practices and Confucian rites in so far as their interpretation by the Dominicans was true.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Gernet, 1987:105.

<sup>20</sup> Clark, 1970:29-30; Rowbotham, 1942:133.

<sup>21</sup> When the Qing emperors came into power, Confucianism was still closely connected with the state religion. But it was passing into materialistic agnosticism. For the state religion of the Ming dynasty was the Three Teachings of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. In this system, it was difficult to divide religion from ethics or from social morality. At the same time, numerous sects of folk religions emerged. They were idolatrous and superstitious. Rowbotham, 1942:120.

<sup>22</sup> Ross, 1994:181.

The Jesuits in China were astonished when they received the Papal ruling. They sent Martino Martini to Rome to present their case. Martini argued that Morales had chosen improper Latin words to describe ancestor practices and Confucian rites. For instance, Morales used *templum* instead of *aula*. To the Chinese, *koutou* was not *genuflection* but a gesture used to honor the living. Again and again, Martini insisted that what was described as ‘altar’ in ancestor practices and Confucian rites would be properly called a table.<sup>23</sup> In 1656, Pope Alexander VII issued an edict. If all was as described by Martini, then Chinese Christians could participate in ancestor practices and Confucian rites.

As a result, the Dominicans in Manila made a last effort to challenge the Jesuits. They asked the Holy Office to make a judgement: which edict was binding, that of 1645 or 1656? The reply was given in 1669 by Pope Clement IX. He declared that both decrees were in force and both must be observed according to circumstances. The Pope and his advisors rightly saw that only people in China could decide whether Morales or Martini were correct in their interpretation of family and Confucian rites. In other words, the clergy on the spot decided which one was going to be binding. The final say was with the clergy in China. Eventually a majority of the Dominicans and Franciscans who were in China came to accept that the Jesuit way was acceptable. It was those outside who still complained.

By 1690 attitudes in Rome and Europe generally had changed. As a result in 1693, the Apostolic Vicar of Fugian Charles Maigrot with the backing of the Propaganda Fide published his Instruction in the hope of ending the rites controversy by condemning the whole way initiated by Ricci. He banned Christians from attending various ceremonies in honour of their own dead. He also banned Christian

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<sup>23</sup> Ross, 1994:182.

literati from attending ceremonies in honour of Confucius. The other bishops and Apostolic Vicars were divided over whether to accept his jurisdiction.<sup>24</sup> As a result, Maigrot sent Charmont to Rome to get Rome to overrule the opposition.

The key issues were essentially those of interpreting the meaning of Chinese words, concepts and actions. The rites controversy had two aspects: (1) the question of the term for God, and (2) the permission to participate in ancestor practices and Confucian rites.<sup>25</sup> The Jesuits in China asked Emperor Kangxi for a ruling over the meaning of these Chinese terms and the traditional understanding of ancestor practice. Emperor Kangxi issued his official declaration in 1700.<sup>26</sup> Paul Rule summarized as follows:

He [Emperor Kangxi] approved their statements that Confucius was honoured as a teacher; that 'performance of the ceremony of sacrifice to the dead is a means of showing sincere affection for members of the family and thankful devotion to ancestors of the clan'; that the tablets of deceased ancestors were honoured as a remembrance of the dead rather than as an actual residence of their souls; that *t'ien* [*tian*] and *shang-ti* [*shangdi*] are not identified with the physical sky but are 'the ruler and the lord of heaven and earth and all things'; and that *ching t'ien* [*jing tian*] in the inscription bestowed on the Jesuit Church meant 'revere Heaven' in this sense.<sup>27</sup>

Rowbotham wrote,

In a single phrase the [Jesuit's] petition may be summed up in the query: Are not the rites in question civil and political ceremonies? The Emperor's reply appears emphatically affirmative.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Rowbotham, 1942:139-41.

<sup>25</sup> For the details of this rites controversy, see Minamiki, 1985; Ross, 1994:190-9; Rowbotham, 1942:119-75.

<sup>26</sup> For the full texts of the Jesuits' petition to the throne and the Emperor's reply, see Rowbotham, 1942:145-6.

<sup>27</sup> Rule, 1986:132.

<sup>28</sup> Rowbotham, 1942:146.

In 1704, Pope Clement XI issued his decree regardless of what Emperor Kangxi had clarified. Christians were forbidden to take part in ancestor practices and Confucian rites. Ancestor tablets in any of the traditional forms were absolutely forbidden.<sup>29</sup> The Pope sent a special legate, headed by Charles de Tournon to China to ensure the implementation of the decree.

When Emperor Kangxi knew of the Papal decision from his Legate de Tournon, he regarded Christian faith no longer as a universal religion but a 'swashbuckling, narrow, prejudiced cult'.<sup>30</sup> He issued an order that all missionaries had to receive an official permit to stay in China. The permit would only be issued if the missionary would follow the way of Ricci.<sup>31</sup>

In 1715, Pope Clement XI issued the Bull *Ex illa die*. The Edict repeated in a clear and unambiguous detail what all previous condemnations were. The decree expressly forbade sacrifices to ancestors and Confucius. However, the decree tolerated the use of tablets that contained only the name of the deceased. It also permitted all ceremonies that were unquestionably civil or political in nature.<sup>32</sup> Finally, the decree required every missionary to make an oath that they would obey all the instructions exactly and completely.<sup>33</sup>

In 1742, Pope Benedict XIV issued the Bull *Ex quo singulari* to settle the rites controversy for all time. By supporting the *Ex illa die*, the Bull gave the final and

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<sup>29</sup> Ross, 1994:193-4.

<sup>30</sup> Davis, 1993:82.

<sup>31</sup> Ross, 1994:195.

<sup>32</sup> Rowbotham, 1942:165.

<sup>33</sup> The Bull said that 'there is not one among all the decrees of the Holy See so accurately and cautiously worded or so minutely guarded against possible exception and evasion.' See Ross, 1994:196.

irrevocable decision of the Church concerning the Rites. It also ended by prescribing an oath to be taken by all missionaries in the China field.<sup>34</sup>

**c. The Catholic Church and ancestor practice**

If one asks what lesson we can learn from the rites controversy, I shall probably say that we need a holistic approach to the issue of ancestor practice. We cannot look at the issue from one perspective: a religious perspective or a social perspective. Moreover, we should not reduce the problem into one simple question ‘is ancestor practice idol worship?’ and expect a simple and straight-forward answer yes or no. The grave mistake of such (theological or scientific) reductionism is like the story of an elephant and four blind men. Each and every blind man will only get a glimpse of what the elephant is. All of them will then have a distorted picture of a real elephant.

When Ricci first entered China, he identified with Buddhism (as the Nestorians did). It was only when he opened himself and had inter-faith dialogue with the Confucians that he realized that he could better identify with the Confucians and not the Buddhists. When he opened himself and studied the Chinese classics, he gained a deep knowledge of Confucian classics and had a better understanding of what ancestor practice really was. The rite had its religious elements but also its ethical and social values. However, Ricci identified with the classical Confucians and not the neo-Confucians. According to Ricci’s own understanding, neo-Confucians were agnostics or materialists.

Ricci and his successors knew that the mass of the common people saw ancestor practice in a way that was unacceptable as the Franciscans and Dominicans had seen. However, the Jesuits insisted that the understanding of the Confucian literati was the

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<sup>34</sup> For details, see Rowbotham, 1942:174-5.

true understanding and that the church should go on teaching that understanding to all Christians. They felt the church had to put up with much popular superstition about ancestor practice until the Chinese church grew to such size and confidence that Chinese bishops could work out what was to be done about these popular errors.

On the contrary, the Friars had a partial and somewhat distorted picture of what ancestor practice really was. They only got a glimpse of what ancestor practice superficially was. It was mainly due to their personal prejudices and cultural imperialism. They did not open themselves and study the Chinese classics. They interpreted what they saw without doing justice to the ideal pattern of ancestor practice. They saw the practice of popular religion which was like judging the nature of Christianity by popular piety.

However, we must remember that many of the Franciscans and Dominicans also agreed with the Jesuits that the church had to tolerate those religious and superstitious elements found in ancestor practice until the Chinese church grew strong enough to deal with it and correct its errors. A Dominican, Lo Wenzao the first Chinese to be a bishop of the Catholic Church, and an Augustinian, Alvaro Benevente, Apostolic Vicar of Kwangsi, defended the Jesuit position on ancestor practice at the time of the visit to China of Charles de Tournon.

When the complex Chinese ideological phenomenon of ancestor practice was reduced to the question of was it a religious act or a civil act, the result was disastrous. Those who interpreted it as a religious act condemned it. Those who saw it as a civil act tolerated it. The rites controversy continued in Protestant missionaries in the last decade of the nineteenth century. This was made clear in the heated debate between William Martin and Hudson Taylor at the Second Conference of Protestant Missionaries of China (1890) in Shanghai .

In the final chapter of Part II, we shall look into the dispute among Protestant missionaries over ancestor practice. Missionaries reduced the complex phenomenon of ancestor practice into either a religious act or a civil act. They formulated the question of as to whether ancestor practice was idol worship, expecting a simple answer 'yes' or 'no' from the proposition. The result was a separation between two opposing camps.

In contrast to the Nestorian religious encounter and the Catholic cultural encounter with ancestor practice, the Protestant encounter with ancestor practice was a socio-political encounter when the socio-political model of ancestor practice was under the threat of disintegration and collapse.

## Chapter 5

### Protestant Christianity: a socio-political encounter

In the eighteenth century under the rule of three great Qing emperors, Kangxi (1656-1722), Yongzheng (1678-1735) and Qianlong Emperor (1711-1799) China remained one of the world's great powers. It was still the Middle Kingdom which officially held all other governments to be inferior and so would not enter into relations with them as equals. This meant that there were no permanent embassies in Beijing as that would have implied equality.

In the nineteenth century this situation was to change rapidly and disastrously for China. The nineteenth century saw the industrial revolution and scientific change transform the powers of Western Europe and the United States so that, by the end of the century, they dominated the world. It was Britain which led the way in these changes. From the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 for the rest of the century, the British Navy controlled the world's oceans and British trade flourished. Britain brought enormous areas of the world under her direct control or indirect influence and the other Western European powers followed, as late in the nineteenth century did the United States with the taking of the Philippines from Spain and the forcing of trade concessions from the Chinese and Japanese governments.

The so-called Opium Wars with Britain, 1839-1842 and 1856-1858, led to the humiliation of the Imperial Government. After the second of these conflicts the British, German, French, Russian and United States governments all signed treaties with the Imperial government as equals, a revolutionary idea, but worse than that, these treaties went further and treated the Chinese government as less than equal. A large number of ports, including those far up the Yangtze River, were to be open to

foreign trade, and foreign nationals were to be free to live in and travel throughout the Empire. What was humiliating was that they were to be granted the right to be tried in their own consular courts by their own laws for any crime they might commit in China. For the history of Christianity in China, it is important to note that these treaties extorted from the Imperial government the promise of protection for foreign Chinese missionaries and their converts. This support of foreign force in this humiliating way branded Protestant Christianity particularly, since it was only in this period of foreign humiliation of China that Protestant mission began significantly widespread work in China. Of this situation Clark has written

The 'Opium War' was the most disgraceful event of all Western political in China. The Chinese never forgot it. Nothing else has so retarded the missionary movement in China as this phase of Western economic penetration in such an ignoble cause. It must in all fairness be noted that British public opinion remained in relative ignorance of the facts, and that Western missionaries were adamantly opposed to the opium traffic itself. Yet it is an historical fact that it was under the security of the 'unequal treaties' that missionary activity and residence became possible all over China.<sup>1</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church although greatly weakened after the rejection of the Riccian tradition by the papal Bulls *Ex illa die* of 1715 and *Ex quo singulari* in 1743 and by the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773, had maintained a continuous presence in China since the sixteenth century. Their presence though technically illegal, had survived despite martyrdoms of both European and Chinese priests and Chinese laity during sporadic periods of active persecution. In last decades of eighteenth century things were quiet until around 1800, when a severe persecution began, the last European priests were killed and the three main dioceses

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<sup>1</sup> Clark, 1970:37.

were vacant. It was understandable then that the Roman Catholic missionaries did take advantage of the new situation as well as the Protestant newcomers, but they were not associated with it in the same way.

**a. Conflict within the Protestant missions over ancestor practice**

The Protestant missionaries in the first seventy years of the nineteenth century, like the original Franciscans and Dominicans in the conflict with the Jesuits in the seventeenth century, dealt mainly with the poorer classes, most of whom were illiterate. Increasingly in the last thirty years of the century a group of well-educated Protestant missionaries began to work more closely with the people belonging to the higher ranks in Chinese society including members of the literati. This change relates to a growing division that built up between the Protestant missionaries. The vast majority of missionaries, until the end of the nineteenth century, belonged to what might be called the evangelical or conservative party. They became increasingly suspicious of the other smaller group who could be called the liberal or progressive wing of the movement.

The vast majority of nineteenth century Protestant missionaries, both evangelicals and progressive, were bitterly anti-catholic. Most Protestant missionaries of the time would not have been distressed by the words of the Protestant pioneer in China. Gützlaff, when he said that the Jesuits worked for a different Lord. He said this in his famous exhortation to Protestants that they should not be 'surprised by the wily Jesuits, who sent the flower of their body to conquer China for the Pope. We fight for a mightier prince and ought to be more zealous'.<sup>2</sup> They associated Catholicism with idolatry and also were horrified by Catholic

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<sup>2</sup> Covell, 1986:69.

invocation of the saints and their custom of saying prayers for the dead. So they were pre-disposed to be suspicious of ancestor practice before coming to China.

In spite of Western nationalism and colonialism, Protestant missionaries of various nations and denominations sought mutual co-operation and benefits in China. Four conferences of Protestant missionaries were held in China: 1877, 1890, 1907 and 1922. Ancestor veneration was one of the major issues for discussion at the First Conference of Protestant Missionaries of China held in Shanghai in 1877. William Martin represented the liberal viewpoint while Hudson Taylor represented the conservative viewpoint. This was a key moment in the differences that were to grow between the two groups of Protestant missionaries with Hudson Taylor representing what was the position of the majority of the missionaries at that time.

In the conference, M. T. Yates presented a paper on ‘ancestor worship’.<sup>3</sup> He was a missionary of the American Southern Baptist Convention. He arrived at China in 1847 and worked in Shanghai. He began the paper:

Ancestral worship, or the worship of the dead... as inculcated by the Confucian philosophy, we are told, consisted in reverence for, and devotion to, parents, and to superiors in age and position; but, it cannot be denied that as practiced in our day, it consists mainly, in devotion to the dead, expressed by offerings and prostrations before the ancestral tablets, the graves, and the *Sung Wong* [city-god], or Magisterial Deity, within whose jurisdiction the spirits of the departed are supposed to be incarcerated.<sup>4</sup>

Yates then examined the theory and practice of ancestor worship, and summarized the nine ‘dogmas’ the Chinese believed:

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<sup>3</sup> For the paper, see *Conference*, 1877:367-87.

<sup>4</sup> *Conference*, 1877:367.

1. They believed in the existence of two worlds: the living world and the spirit world.
2. The spirits were dependent upon living relatives for their daily supplies.
3. Except for food, all offerings must be burnt.
4. The spirits rewarded or punished the living according to their offerings.
5. The hungry and wandering spirits were dependent upon public charity which was performed in Clear Bright Festival, Lu Lan Festival and Double Bright Festival.
6. All physical illness and death were caused by spirits.
7. They believed in the immortality of the soul, and reward and punishment after death.
8. A man had three souls. At death, one remained with the corpse, one with the ancestor tablet, and the other was arrested and judged in the spirit world.
9. The spirits of deceased officials continued to govern and exercise their jurisdiction in the spirit world.<sup>5</sup>

Yates continued to report that when a family member fell seriously ill, the relatives presented offerings to their ancestor tablets and asked for healing. If the patient did not improve, they called in a medium to divine the cause of illness. If it was caused by one of their neglected ancestors or some wandering spirit, they would

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<sup>5</sup> The correlative of the government of the living and of the dead was :

*The living world*

1. governor of a province
2. prefect of a department
3. magistrate of a district
4. mayor of a city
5. administrator of a village

*The spirit world*

1. provincial-god
2. department-god
3. district-god
4. city-god
5. earth-god

burn a lot of paper money to satisfy the discontented spirit.<sup>6</sup> If this was ineffective, Daoist or Buddhist priests were employed to exorcise the spirits.

When a man died, his relatives had to do the following things to settle the deceased in the spirit world: (1) place a cup of cold water at the door for the deceased to take a last drink, (2) burn a suit of good clothes to make him presentable, (3) burn a quantity of paper money for him to bribe the runners of the court, (4) burn furniture and other personal articles, (5) dress the corpse with new clothes, (6) wail and lament on every seventh day for seven sevenths after the death, (7) entertain the spirit on the day the spirit of the deceased was supposed to return,<sup>7</sup> and (8) employ a *feng-shui* master to select a good place for his grave.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Yates concluded:

A careful study of the foregoing theories and practices of the Chinese, in connection with the worship of the dead, will reveal to us the secret of their opposition to Foreigners, and to foreign civilization. To meet our requirements, involves changes that may disturb the *status quo* between men and spirits, and thus prove fatal to the repose and prosperity both of the dead and of the living. The consequence is, they naturally oppose every aggressive movement proposed by foreigners. And when they are forced to yield a point, and sign a treaty granting new facilities for trade -- and consequently inducing new innovations -- they never cease to devise ways and means, to render the most objectionable part of the concession, nugatory. Hence the conservatism of the Chinese; and the systematic *straining* of all the treaties that have been made with China. And, so long as they retain their present views and convictions of their relations and obligations

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<sup>6</sup> The paper money would be burnt before ancestor tablets if the cause was the negligence of offerings to neglected ancestors. If the cause was due to wandering spirits, paper money would be burnt outside the house. *Conference*, 1877:374.

<sup>7</sup> The Chinese believed that the deceased would return home between the 9th and 17th day after death. The exact day depended on the day of the month on which the person died. The deceased returned home with other baneful spirits. Hence, the family would employ Daoism or Buddhist priests to perform the ceremony called *kung-de* (merits), which gratified the deceased spirit but frightened the accompanying spirits. This protected the family from any harm in encountering the spiritual world. For details, see *Conference*, 1877:376-7.

<sup>8</sup> *Feng-shui* was used with reference to the repose of the dead, or the influence of the dead upon the happiness and welfare of the living. *Feng* and *shui* literally mean wind and water respectively. These forces are believed to determine one's health, prosperity and good luck. Thus, selecting a good position for the grave was an important thing at the funeral service. *Conference*, 1877:376-8.

to the dead, we need not expect them to observe in good faith, compromising treaty stipulations, unless they are forced to do it.<sup>9</sup>

The conservative majority of Protestant missionaries up to the 1890's were uniformly against ancestor practice as idolatry. Many belonged to the China Inland Mission few of whom had any advanced formal education. It was only a small group of intellectually well-trained, or intellectually curious, and who had relations with the Chinese literati who were different. They studied Chinese Classical literature which marked them off from the rest. Their brightest star in many ways was W.A.P. Martin, but Samuel W. Williams, Gilbert Reid, James Legge and Timothy Richard, the English Baptist, were all important and supported him. Covell cites a Chinese source as saying that Martin had begun to think of himself as a modern Ricci.<sup>10</sup>

As China was under the threat of chaos and socio-political disintegration, liberal missionaries advocated social and political reform. They tolerated ancestor practice for they saw the social values of the practice in easing socio-political turmoil of the Chinese society. William Martin was their spokesman in the public debates on the issue of ancestor practices. Opposed to him was Hudson Taylor of the C.I.M. who represented the majority attitude among Protestant missionaries. Taylor had a clear cut understanding of the division between the sacred and the secular. He believed that the missionary task was a spiritual one, the conversion of individuals to a full acceptance of Christ as his or her personal Saviour, and ancestor practices were a barrier in the way of this task. Social progress was a subordinate good and not the primary concern of the Christian missionary. Martin's tolerant attitude towards ancestor practice led to a split from the evangelical missionaries. At the end of the

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<sup>9</sup> *Conference*, 1877:386.

<sup>10</sup> *Tung-zhi*, XVII:25-26.

First Conference of Protestant Missionaries, there was no resolution drawn on the issue of ancestor worship.

**b. William Martin and social reform**

William Martin (1827-1916) was a missionary of the American Presbyterian Mission. His interest in China was first awakened by the First Opium War. He came to Ningpo as a missionary in 1850. His attitude towards mission was not that generally characteristic of the Protestant missionaries of the time. Bringing the gospel to the Chinese was, of course, his task. However, he felt that the secular mind of the Chinese must be reshaped if China was to be totally renovated and converted. He respected certain elements of Chinese culture but regarded it as stagnant and inadequate.<sup>11</sup>

To him, God revealed his works in the Bible but also in nature. Hence, Martin set himself two goals: preaching the gospel to the Chinese and educating them in Western learning. He saw no conflict between salvation and science, between Christian faith and secular culture. Through translation efforts and institutions of learning, he sought to disseminate knowledge of 'God's work in nature' as well as the Christian spiritual and ethical message.<sup>12</sup>

In 1865, when the Imperial government wanted to employ him as instructor in English at the Tongwenguan (the Government Interpreters' School), he accepted the offer and stopped drawing a salary as a missionary.<sup>13</sup> He introduced the sciences of the West to the school's curriculum. He replaced the Chinese learning of geomancy,

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<sup>11</sup> Liu, 1970:3.

<sup>12</sup> Liu, 1970:3; Duss, 1970:32.

<sup>13</sup> Duss, 1970:25.

alchemy, and divination with Western learning namely international law, mathematics, physics, chemistry, physiology, medicine and astronomy. When he took over the presidency of the Tongwenguan, he reformed the traditional Chinese educational system along lines dictated by the Western educational system. The Chinese examination system emphasized the importance of the Chinese classics and did not do the Western sciences full justice. In 1868 he wrote,

In that country [China] letters are everything and science nothing. Men occupy themselves with words and not with things; the powers of acquisition are cultivated more than those of invention.<sup>14</sup>

Martin believed that an intellectual revolution could happen if scientific subjects were put into examinations, which conferred official rank on Chinese scholars. In 1887 such a reform was adopted. He was later honoured by the Chinese government as the first president of the Imperial University in Beijing.

In general, Martin's mission strategy is similar to that of Ricci. Firstly, he called for a flexible tolerance towards Chinese culture. Christianity could be introduced as the teaching of 'Confucius and Christ', and not as a challenge 'Confucius or Christ'.<sup>15</sup> This led him to a head-on collision with the majority of Protestant missionaries. Secondly, he called for an appeal to the rational in prospective converts.<sup>16</sup> He emphasized the importance of education, which could reshape the attitudes and values of the Chinese. Thirdly, he felt that the conversion of China would be effective if it began from top to bottom, winning the support of mandarins

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<sup>14</sup> Duss, 1970:26-31.

<sup>15</sup> Duss, 1970:33.

<sup>16</sup> One of his important writings *The Investigation of the Sources of Heavenly Doctrine or Evidences of Christianity* was widely used and highly praised by the Far Eastern missions. Duss, 1970:18, 27, 33-4.

before proceeding to the masses. There was a very important difference between the two men. Ricci saw China as different from but equal to the West, whereas Martin saw China as backward or dormant in spite of his respect for Chinese culture.<sup>17</sup>

During the Second Conference of Protestant Missionaries in 1890, Martin presented a paper entitled 'The worship of ancestors -- a plea for toleration'.<sup>18</sup> He re-confirmed the threefold advantages of ancestor worship:

1. Social and familial solidarity: Ancestor worship strengthened the bonds of family union and mutual support. He believed that ancestor worship tied the family together, so that no aged person would suffer hunger and die without burial.
2. Educational and moral values: Everyone who bore the family name, however poor he might be, still enjoyed the privilege of receiving education in the clan school and of receiving respect as the offspring of such a lineage. However, he would be excommunicated if he was guilty of infamous crimes.
3. Religious awareness and education: Ancestor worship kept faith in the spirit world alive. For the spirits of the departed were invited to partake in the ceremony and the feast. Martin quoted Confucius view towards spirits<sup>19</sup> and remarked

That ancestral worship, as commonly practiced, is liable to objection on this ground [construed as idolatry, a thing forbidden alike by the letter and by the spirit of our Christian Scriptures], I am far from denying, but I maintain that its objectionable features are its excess, not its essence. To prune off such excrescence, preserving the good and eliminating the evil, I believe to be altogether feasible; and if so,

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<sup>17</sup> See Duss, 1970:32-5.

<sup>18</sup> See *Conference*, 1890:619-31.

<sup>19</sup> 'If I [Confucius] should say the soul does survive, I fear that persons of pious temperament might forsake their living parents in order to serve their dead ancestors; if on the other hand I should say the soul does not survive, I fear the unfilial might throw away the bodies of their parents and leave them unburied.' See also p.21 n.51.

is that not preferable to the quixotic attempt to destroy the system root and branch?<sup>20</sup>

Martin then pointed out the three elements of ancestor worship -- posture (*bai*), invocation (*jing*), and offering (*ji*) -- contained very little idolatry. The posture was always kneeling and bowing, which was also employed to show respect to the living such as parents, seniors and the emperor.<sup>21</sup> Therefore it did not itself form an act of idolatry.<sup>22</sup> As far as invocation was concerned, it depended on the circumstances and intentional motives. If worshippers requested protection or prosperity, it should be considered as idolatry. If it was just for informing ancestors, it should not be regarded as such.<sup>23</sup> In regard to offerings, Martin believed that the key was not what was offered but to whom it was offered. He argued that if Westerners could offer flowers to the dead, the Chinese could surely offer fruits and meats to their ancestors.<sup>24</sup> In the end, he said

I do not object to ancestral worship as a system, but solely to those parts of it which ascribe divine attributes to the souls of the dead... In conclusion, I respectfully suggest that missionaries refrain from any interference with the native mode of honouring ancestors, and leave the reformation of the system to the influence of the divine truth, when it gets a firmer hold on the national mind.<sup>25</sup>

Martin's plea for tolerance, which he hoped would ease the promotion of Christianity in China, ignited fires of debate. He made a distinction between cultural

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<sup>20</sup> *Conference*, 1890:625.

<sup>21</sup> For details, See p.172-3.

<sup>22</sup> *Conference*, 1890:626.

<sup>23</sup> *Conference*, 1890:626-7.

<sup>24</sup> *Conference*, 1890:627

<sup>25</sup> *Conference*, 1890:630-1.

forms and religious content and suggested that kneeling and bowing before ancestors were not idolatrous acts. For he felt that God had already existed in Chinese culture in some primal ages as a single, supreme and provident being. Christianity could be introduced as an enrichment of classical orthodoxy.<sup>26</sup> He also believed that the teaching of Western learning could dispel the superstition and error of Chinese learning. After that, the truth of Christianity could best be spread through the Chinese.

Hudson Taylor and other CIM missionaries rejected Martin's viewpoint completely. They insisted that toleration of ancestor worship was treason to Christianity. They argued from scripture quoting text after text often without reference to context which they insisted made it mandatory for Christians to reject traditional ancestor practices. The outcome of these discussions at the Conference was an overwhelming victory for those opposed to any toleration of ancestor worship among Christians.

### **c. Hudson Taylor and soul winning**

Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) came to China in 1853 as a preacher for the Chinese Evangelization Society. He was a man of faith and optimism. He began his work with little money and less backing. Two Old Testament phrases became his watchwords: *Jehovah-jireh* (the Lord will provide) and *Eben-ezer* (hitherto hath the Lord helped us).<sup>27</sup> He was also a man of simplicity and purity. He believed that no one could be saved unless he had heard the true Gospel and accepted: (1) Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and (2) the Bible as the literal Word of God. Like other Protestant

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<sup>26</sup> Duss, 1970:33.

<sup>27</sup> Thiessen, 1970:85.

missionaries at that time, he thought that the Catholic Church was the 'scarlet woman' and idolatry.<sup>28</sup>

In 1865, while in Brighton recuperating from illness, Taylor felt deep spiritual agony over millions of Chinese perishing in China. His spiritual struggle led him to the formation of the China Inland Mission and an appeal for two dozen missionaries. In 1876, he made another appeal for eighteen and five years later for seventy. In 1886, he appealed for a hundred. All were provided. Taylor had a well-known wish, 'If I had a thousand lives', an appeal for a thousand missionaries to fill the ranks of the various Protestant missions in China. At his death in 1905 there were nearly a thousand missionaries of the organization CIM he had founded.<sup>29</sup>

The China Inland Mission was peculiar in its mission strategy: (1) It was non-denominational and a faith mission. Any Christian could join the missionary work if he/she accepted the doctrines of heaven and hell, the Trinity, the Fall, and redemption through Christ the Son of God. Most of all, the Bible was the only rule of faith.<sup>30</sup> (2) It emphasized pioneer missionary work. As soon as a Christian community was formed, the Mission withdrew and moved to a more remote and untouched areas.<sup>31</sup> (3) The missionaries wore Chinese costume. They spread the Gospel by word of mouth and by literature.<sup>32</sup>

Hudson Taylor strongly criticized Martin's plea for tolerance in the second missionary conference of 1890. He declared that Martin was totally wrong and that the evangelicals should not even discuss the toleration of ancestor worship. In the

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<sup>28</sup> See Cary-Elwes, 1957:217.

<sup>29</sup> Cary-Elwes, 1957:218.

<sup>30</sup> Cary-Elwes, 1957:218.

<sup>31</sup> Cary-Elwes, 1957:218.

<sup>32</sup> Cary-Elwes, 1957:218.

third missionary conference, the subject of ancestor worship was brought to discussion for one purpose: how to propagate the gospel effectively to intellectuals. At the fourth Protestant gathering of 1922, the subject of ancestor worship was not even raised.

The Centenary Missionary Conference of 1907 was the successor of the gatherings of 1877 and 1890.<sup>33</sup> It devoted much attention to the propagation of the faith.<sup>34</sup> In the conference, the evangelical missionary James Jackson presented a paper on ‘ancestor worship’, endeavoring to remove all unnecessary stumbling-blocks to the progress of Christianity while at the same time securing the purity of the Church. He said in his introductory section,

It is constantly repeated and we believe with much truth that Ancestral Worship still presents one of the greatest obstacles to the progress of Christianity, and that it is a real hindrance which stands in the way of many who are convinced of its truth and who are otherwise ready to embrace and confess faith in Jesus Christ... To the missionary working only among the poorer classes the pressure of this difficulty will be much less acute. Among such it does not assume any serious proportions. But hitherto among the learned, wealthy, and official classes it has proved to be all but an insuperable barrier to a public acceptance of Christianity. Such being the facts of the case it is fitting that this subject should be brought for the third time before the general body of missionaries assembled in this Centenary Conference.<sup>35</sup>

Wishing to make a counter-argument to what Martin had said in the last missionary conference, Jackson firstly traced the origin and idea of ancestor worship in his paper. Jackson based his work on the new science of comparative religion and

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<sup>33</sup> The original plan was to hold this gathering in 1900. Owing to the World Missionary Conference of that year, the time was postponed to 1901. However, the Boxer Uprising broke out and the date was changed to 1907 to celebrate the centenary coming of Morrison. Latourette, 1929:665.

<sup>34</sup> Latourette, 1929:620.

<sup>35</sup> *Conference*, 1907:215-6.

history of religions. This was in sharp contrast to what Martin believed. Here was a conservative missionary using these new academic disciplines to refute the arguments in favour of toleration of ancestor practices put forward by progressive and 'liberal' missionaries like Martin, Legge and Richard in the previous century.

Whether Ancestral Worship is in all forms and under all circumstances idolatrous or not, it is undoubtedly a rival to the worship of the one supreme God... The Ancient Chinese had no idea that their worship of the lesser divinities might offend the Lord of all the spirits. Such a conception belongs to another land and a later age. The Hebrew people took a long time to attain to a pure Monotheism, and the worship of Jehovah long went on along-side of the recognition and even worship of local and tribal gods.<sup>36</sup>

Jackson then analyzed the root cause of ancestor worship as affection and filial piety, a natural and spontaneous expression of grief and a desire for communion with the beloved departed.<sup>37</sup> Two other motives were later introduced to ancestor worship: the fear of ghosts,<sup>38</sup> and the solidarity of family. This analysis was quite different from Martin's paper and analysis. Jackson wrote

The fact that fear of ghosts ultimately comes to have a predominating influence in popular cults of the dead must not blind us to the fact that fear of the dead is not the root of Ancestral Worship. Affection and filial piety are even earlier motives. This is shown we think by two important considerations. Firstly, the ghost is from the beginning dependent upon the living for the supply of its needs in the spirit world... Secondly, affection is quite as capable of extravagant excess as fear, so that even human sacrifices offered to the dead are not necessarily prompted by fear.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Conference*, 1907:232.

<sup>37</sup> *Conference*, 1907:219-20.

<sup>38</sup> See *Conference*, 1907:220-1.

<sup>39</sup> The philosopher Zheng of the Song dynasty said, 'To collect and unite the hearts of men, nothing is so effectual as the grateful returns rendered with the heart in the services of the Ancestral Temple and in sacrifices. Thus it is that sacrifices to Ti [Di] and the erection of Ancestral Temples are things in

After that, Jackson attempted to explain the meaning and purpose of sacrifice through the theory of the soul. The dual principles of *yin* and *yang* produced everything that existed. In man, these two cosmological powers became two psychological entities called *gui* and *shen*, or *po* and *hun*.<sup>40</sup> At death, the *gui* returned to the earth and the *shen* ascended to the origin from which it sprang. During sacrifice, worshippers invoked the spirits to come and participate.<sup>41</sup> The communion feast became a feast between the living and the departed,<sup>42</sup> and the ancestor tablet (*shen-zhu pai*) was the place where the spirit abode (*shen zhu*).<sup>43</sup>

Finally, he dealt with the issue of prayer to the dead. Being told as such by a high-ranking mandarin (*daotai*), he concluded that ceremonies of sacrificial worship in the family and at the grave were purely formal and mechanical. No prayers were

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which the hearts of men find their objects of rest. There is no greater way than this to bind the hearts of men, and to remedy a state of dispersion.' *Conference*, 1907:222.

<sup>40</sup> For details, see *Conference*, 1907:222-5.

<sup>41</sup> The neo-Confucian philosopher Zhuzi (1130-1200) said, 'When men die although at the end they dissipate and revert to nothing, yet they are not all at once dispersed; thus it is that in sacrificing (to the manes of the departed) there is such a thing as affecting and inducing them to come. When first ancestors, however, are removed to a distant period, it is not known whether they exist or not; but those who offer the accustomed sacrifices being the descendants of the said progenitors, possess after all but one breath or energy with that which animated their ancestors, so that there is a possibility of influencing and causing them to pervade down to the latest generation. But after the breath, Ch'i [Qi] has once disappeared it never collects again.'

Zhuzi also said, 'Wherever the bodies of descendants are, the manes of ancestors are also present, one blood flowing through their veins. Thus it is that the spirits do not enjoy sacrifices that are not offered by persons of their own clans, and that the people must not present sacrifices to any but the manes of their family.' *Conference*, 1907:222, 226.

<sup>42</sup> Legge defined the meaning of sacrifice (*ji*) as 'an offering to spiritual beings, whereby communication with them is effected.' This is the meaning given in Kangxi's Imperial Dictionary. Legge commented, 'The sacrificial offerings at the worship of ancestors are simply the materials of a feast, at which the living and the dead are supposed to meet together.' *Conference*, 1907:226-7.

<sup>43</sup> *Shen zhu* is not properly translated 'divine lord' but the 'spirit's abode'. The use of tablets was twofold: (1) Having a longing for the departed, the living descendants erected a tablet to keep the beloved in constant remembrance. (2) The descendants feared that the departed would become wandering spirits, and they erected the tablet in which the spirits might abide.

Being aware that a mere piece of wood was but wood after all, a ceremony was employed. An honoured literati or mandarin was invited to dot the character *wang* ( 王 ) with a red pencil, which then became *zhu* ( 主 ), a living person. *Zhu* also meant 'dwell', in which *shen-zhu* meant the spirit dwells. *Conference*, 1907:227-8.

said and it was a mere outward form.<sup>44</sup> It was the general idea that when sacrifices were offered, the blessing and protection of the ancestors were bestowed upon families.<sup>45</sup> This was quite different from state ceremonies, held in the Temple of Heaven and in the ancestral temples, in which prayers were said according to regulations.

Owing to Jackson's new analysis and presentation, the Conference in the end held that 'the Worship of Ancestors as at present practised by the generality of the people is incompatible with an enlightened and spiritual conception of the Christian faith, and so cannot be tolerated as a practice in the Christian Church.'<sup>46</sup> The outcome of the three Protestant missionary conferences was the overwhelming victory of those who opposed ancestor practice as ancestor worship.

After 1911 ancestor veneration was no longer a hotly debated issue, it no longer appeared on Missionary Conference agendas. This was not simply because of the separation of the evangelical from the progressive groups among Protestant missionaries, but because the liberal and progressive groups had also by the first decade of the twentieth century come to reject toleration of ancestor practices. This was done because they accepted the approach that Jackson had expounded.

It was also done because of the emergence of new western educated elites among the Chinese people whom the progressive missionaries saw as the hope for the Christian Church and for the creating of a modern China. In the twentieth century the intellectual successors of Martin and Richard were not-concerned with the literati

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<sup>44</sup> *Conference*, 1907:228-9.

<sup>45</sup> Jackson collected some examples of prayers to the dead: (1) prayer used at the time of family sacrifice, (2) prayer offered at graveyards at the time of the New Year and Spring Festivals, and (3) prayer at a tomb. They were not taken from books, but supplied by scholars. However, most people still said nothing and wrote nothing. For details, see *Conference*, 1907:230-1.

<sup>46</sup> *Conference*, 1907:604.

but with the new western educated young men who would go on to create the Revolution of 1910. It was socially related problems that mattered, matters about which the progressive missionaries and the new elites were concerned.<sup>47</sup> Typical of the approach of the campaigns of Sherwood Eddy organised by the YMCA in 1910 and subsequent years where he preached Christian patriotism and 'Christ as the only hope of China' as a way of bringing China as modern state into the modern world. For the large number of progressive missionaries in the new century ancestor practices were irrelevant to their concerns for political and social change.

#### **d. The Protestant Church and ancestor practice**

As intimated, those who condemned ancestor worship consisted of the early missionaries who entered China and the missionaries of the China Inland Mission. Most of them had received neither higher education nor western theological training. They usually identified Christian beliefs with their Western social and cultural symbolism. They failed to understand or to appreciate Chinese social and cultural symbolism.<sup>48</sup> The conservative missionaries saw ancestor worship as the worship of the dead and hence idolatry.

Those few who tolerated ancestor veneration included such missionaries as William Martin, Young Allen and Timothy Richard. These missionaries had received a more formal and thorough education and training compared with those who

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<sup>47</sup> 'One missionary declared that the Church must address itself to the removal of opium, footbinding, gambling, concubinage and polygamy, official peculation, domestic slavery, vice, infanticide, the lack of respect for women, suicide, and the absence of individualism. Another held that the Church must concern itself with the relations of capital and labor and with interracial conflicts.' In the end, a Conference on the Social Application of Christianity was held in Shanghai in 1914. For details, see Latourette, 1929:656-62.

<sup>48</sup> Lin, 1985:153.

condemned ancestor worship.<sup>49</sup> They differentiated between Christian beliefs and Western culture. They had a greater respect and appreciation of Chinese culture. The liberal missionaries saw no contradiction between Christian faith and Confucian teaching. They considered Christian faith as superior and supplementary to Confucian teaching. Ancestor veneration had two major functions: (1) People expressed their feelings of grief and reverence toward the departed. This educated people to honour and respect parents. (2) As a nation, China maintained ancestor veneration as a form of education. In such a case, Confucian rites taught the importance of education. These missionaries believed that if they could properly adopt this symbolism, evangelism in China would be greatly helped. They further believed that if Christianity were to take root in China, Chinese Christians must have their own set of meaningful forms and symbols.<sup>50</sup> The perspectives of these two groups toward ancestor veneration can be summarized as following:

	<i>Evangelicals</i>	<i>Liberals</i>
The ritual	a religious act with superstitious beliefs (practised by the masses)	a moral act with educational purposes (described in the classics)
The meaning	divine protection and spiritual blessings	filial piety and family solidarity
The feast	a communion feast between living and deceased	a memorial feast among family members

Before 1900 the outstanding missionaries were almost always those who had broken new ground for evangelism territorially such as Robert Morrison, Karl

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<sup>49</sup> Lin, 1985:153.

<sup>50</sup> Lin, 1985:154.

Gützlaff and Hudson Taylor. After 1900 the most prominent missionaries were those who in administration, education and medicine were initiating or developing the old grounds.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, prominent Chinese Christian leaders were beginning to emerge.

Timothy Richard pointed out that there were two ways of regarding the gospel: (1) as a means of saving the soul of each individual, and (2) as a means of saving a nation through the collective efforts of regenerated souls. The evangelicals conceived the first one as their primary task while from the last decade of the nineteenth century, liberal wing of the Protestant missionary movement stressed the second one. By 1911, less than half of the missionaries engaged in direct evangelism. The proportion of such missionaries would have been still smaller if the China Inland Mission had not been engaged in evangelistic activities.<sup>52</sup> The mission strategies of evangelicals and liberals were:

	<i>Evangelicals</i>	<i>Liberals</i>
Group targets	the lower class and outcast: uneducated and poor	the middle and upper classes: literati and mandarins
Mission field	inland China	trade ports
Mission program	pioneer work: set up a Christian community and move to a new place and start again	pastoral work: train and equip the converted to become Christian leaders

A comparison of the liberal and the evangelical Protestant missionaries bring out several points of a general nature of ancestor practice: Is it (1) a religious

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<sup>51</sup> Latourette, 1929: 571.

<sup>52</sup> Latourette, 1929: 619.

idol-worship act or a moral ancestor-respect act, (2) divine protection or social solidarity, and (3) a ghost-communion feast or ancestor-memorial feast? Behind these issues lie related perspectives on mission strategy, mission targets and mission plans. Hence, when we come to the question: is ancestor practice idol worship? -- the question may be simple, but the answer cannot be. We need to know the theological and missiological presupposition of the inquirer who formulates such a clear and simple question.

Here, there would seem to be three options. The first option is a 'yes' approach. Those who take this standpoint are usually concerned with the question: how can we be saved?<sup>53</sup> Their appeal to the scripture is direct, simplistic and literal. This means that they tend to discount the gap between the times and culture of the Bible and our own times and culture, and the context in which the words they quote were uttered or written. Evangelical missionaries are the advocates of this first camp. The second option is a 'no' approach. Those who take this standpoint are more concerned with another question: how can we do justice to other religions?<sup>54</sup> In contrast to the first view, they emphasis the strangeness of the biblical tradition. The gap between the times and culture of the Bible and of our own is maximised. They also, however, tended, especially after 1900, to accept modern western culture uncritically and see its influence positively.

The third option 'yes and no' is an attempt to steer between the other two, while maintaining the essential elements of both. Any view which claims to be Christian must be based on the testimony of the scriptures. However, no view which tries to claim credibility today can afford to ignore the historical-critical method as applied

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<sup>53</sup> Hooker, 1986:51.

<sup>54</sup> Hooker, 1986:51.

to those scriptures and to other religions.<sup>55</sup> This third option most nearly expressed what I believe.

In the next final Part of the thesis, I, as a contemporary Christian, would like to make a response to ancestor practice in a holistic way. I would not reduce ancestor practice into a religious act or a civil act. Nor I would reduce the complex Chinese ideological issue into a simple question whether ancestor practice is idol worship. I will tackle the problem in a holistic manner: its religious dimension, its ethical dimension and its socio-political dimension. In addition, I will adopt the 'both... and' perspective and hold to the third option of a 'yes and no' approach to the issue of ancestor practice.

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<sup>55</sup> Hooker, 1986:51.

## Summary of Part II

In Part II, I have described missionaries and their encounter with ancestor practice. The encounter of Nestorian missionaries and ancestor practice is described as a religious encounter. For the religious model of ancestor practice was in the making. The missionaries re-vitalised the idea of Heaven as a personal God-on-high. They preached the threefold loyalties and accepted images in temples (churches). They said masses to the dead for 'seven times seven' days with the closing fiftieth day of feasting.

The encounter of Catholic missionaries with China is described as a cultural encounter when the cultural model of ancestor practice was well established. The rites controversy was originally an ethico-religious issue between the Friars and the Jesuits, but it later shifted into a religio-political issue between the Pope and the Chinese emperor. The key issues were those of interpreting Chinese words, concepts and actions. They were: (1) the words of Heaven, *sheng* and *miao*, and (2) the act of *koutou*, ancestor rite and the Confucian rite. In the end, the Pope forbade Christians to perform ancestor practice and the emperor forbade missionaries to work in China.

The encounter of Protestant missionaries with ancestor practice is described as a socio-political encounter when the socio-political model of ancestor practice was under the threat of disintegration and collapse. Evangelical missionaries saw saving the soul as their primary task and attacked ancestor practice as idol worship. Liberal missionaries saw the social and ethical values of ancestor practice and tolerated the veneration of ancestors. This attitude exemplified by Martin and Richard led to division between the liberal and evangelical wings of the Protestant missionary movement in China. After 1900, however, the liberal movement also ceased to deal with the problem of ancestor practices with their emphasis on the creation of a new

modern China which they thought somewhat simplistically would aid the missionary task.

A study of these various missionaries towards ancestor practice brings out several points of a general nature about ancestor veneration: Is it (1) a religious ancestor-worship act or a moral ancestor-respect act, (2) divine protection or social solidarity, and (3) a ghost communion feast or an ancestor-memorial feast? Behind these issues lie related perspectives on mission strategy, mission targets and mission plans. Hence, when we come to the question: is ancestor practice idol worship? – the question may be simple, but the answer cannot be. We need to know the theological and missiological presupposition of the inquirer who formulates such a clear and simple question.

Through a study of their encounters, we come to know that a ‘both...and’ perspective is a better way to adopt in tackling the issue of ancestor practice. This is not this way or that way. It is a third way. We should not reduce ancestor practice into a religious phenomenon or a social phenomenon. We need to look at the complex Chinese ideological phenomenon of ancestor practice as a whole. In other words, we should deal with the issue from a ‘both...and’ perspective and not from an ‘either...or’ perspective.

## Christian

## Chinese

## Encounter

### I. Nestorian missionaries

1. Alouben:  
ancestor practice as  
religio-political model

Buddhists:  
ancestor practice as  
religio-political model

Assimilation:  
mission as  
common witness

2. Adam:  
ancestor practice as  
religio-political model

Daoists:  
ancestor practice as  
religio-political model

Adaptation:  
mission as dialogue

### II. Catholic missionaries

3. Jesuits:  
ancestor practice as  
cultural model

Confucianists:  
ancestor practice as  
cultural model

Accommodation:  
mission as  
contextualization

4. Friars:  
ancestor practice as  
religious model

Mandarins:  
ancestor practice as  
cultural model

Confrontation:  
mission as  
mediating salvation

### III. Protestant missionaries

5. Evangelicals:  
ancestor practice as  
religious model

Gentry:  
ancestor practice as  
socio-political model

Confrontation:  
mission as evangelism

6. Liberals:  
ancestor practice as  
socio-political model

Reformers:  
ancestor practice as  
socio-political model

Inculturation:  
mission as liberation

## The encounter between Christian faith and ancestor practice

## Part III : A Reconstruction

### Ancestor Practice in Chinese Christianity

In Part I, we have suggested that the origin of ancestor practice is an ancestor quest and the nature of ancestor practice has socio-political, religious and ethical dimensions. In Part II, we have asserted that the better way to deal with ancestor practice is a holistic way and that the third ‘yes and no’ option is the best way to tackle the issue. In this final Part of the dissertation, I adopt a holistic approach and the ‘third way’ to reconstruct ancestor practice for Chinese Christianity today.

In chapter 6, the question whether ancestor practice is idol worship will be dealt with. Firstly, I will discuss what an idol is, using I Corinthians 8-10, and attempt to draw some biblical guiding principles from the passage. Secondly, I shall outline a theological model with Chinese characteristics as a tool with which to approach the problem of ancestor practice. Thirdly, I will provide my own personal view of the different kinds and different types of ancestor practice in today’s China.

In chapter 7, the nature of man-related ancestor practice will be analyzed. Three different forms of ancestor practice will be studied: the Confucian form, the Daoist form and the Buddhist form. In reforming and transforming traditional ancestor practice, a modernized civil form of ancestor practice will be proposed and a Christian form of ancestor practice will also be provided for reference.

In chapter 8, the nature of Heaven-related ancestor practice will be studied. I shall argue from the knowledge of Heaven and the knowledge of principle to the knowledge of monotheism. Sunday rest and the Lord’s Supper will be proposed to substitute for the rites of Heaven. Chinese ancestor practice will be transformed and transcended into Christian Ancestor Worship. It is my belief that it is only through such dialogue theology that the Chinese people can come to know God.

## Chapter 6

### **Ancestor practice in its biblical-theological perspective: situational ethics**

When I was a pastoral staff member in Hong Kong, new converts often came to me and asked me about ancestor practice. Was an ancestor tablet an idol? Could they eat the food sacrificed to ancestor tablets? Was ancestor practice a worship of ancestors? In this chapter, I would like to deal with all these questions. Firstly, I shall draw some guiding principles of eating idol-meat from First Corinthians 8-10. Secondly, I shall attempt to construct a theoretical model to tackle the issue of ancestor practice. Thirdly, I shall apply this model to life settings in modern China to see whether it is applicable.

#### **a. Guiding principles drawn from I Corinthians 8-10**

Paul's treatment of eating idol-meat is of perennial value because fundamental principles of being a Christian are involved: (1) the nature of idols, (2) the education of conscience, (3) the nature of Christian freedom, (4) the growth of Christian life, and (5) the place of the believer in a non-Christian society.<sup>1</sup> In this section, I will not concentrate on the original meaning of the biblical text, but on what the text means to contemporary Chinese Christians in tackling the issue of ancestor practice.<sup>2</sup> Four guiding principles will be drawn from the text namely the self-understanding

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Murphy-O'Connor, 1978:543.

<sup>2</sup> Scholars have different views towards who the 'strong' and the 'weak' stand for: (1) Both parties refer to Gentile Christians. (2) Both parties refer to Jewish Christians. (3) The strong represents the Gentile Christians and the weak represents the Jewish Christians. (4) There were no actual 'strong' and 'weak' parties in the church. Paul addressed the church as a whole. See Fee 1980:173-9; Horsley, 1980:32-3.

principle, the stumbling-block principle, the self-restraint principle and the self-transformation principle.

### 1. Self-understanding principle: ignorant vs enlightened

The traditional interpretation of I Corinthian 8-10 views the problem of eating idol-meat in terms of ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ Christians within the church. The former have no doubts about the legitimacy of eating idol-meat while the latter have serious reservations. Liberal Christians possess knowledge (*gnosis*) and are enlightened. Traditional Christians lack knowledge and are ignorant.<sup>3</sup>

The statements ‘we all have knowledge’, ‘idols do not have real existence’, and ‘there is no god but One’ are now generally recognized as Corinthian slogans.<sup>4</sup> The Corinthian knowledge of the One God and the nothingness of idols focus their critique of false gods and idols on an antithesis between ignorance of God and knowledge of God.<sup>5</sup> Fee summarized the argument of the strong:

Since we all know that there is only one God and therefore that an idol has no reality, and since food is a matter of indifference to God, it not only does not matter what we eat, but where we eat it. Besides, we are saved and protected by the sacraments. Why can't we then continue to join our friends at their meals even at the temples?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Conzelmann suggested three possibilities for the nature of the Corinthian's *gnosis*: (1) a popular philosophical enlightenment based on the nature of the gods, (2) an illumination of the pneumatic, and (3) a Gnostic insight into the depths of being. Horsley added a fourth possibility: a Hellenistic Jewish religion of enlightenment, i.e. a devotion to wisdom (*sophia*). In sum, both Corinthian *gnosis* and *sophia* were part of a whole pattern of religious self-understanding, in which *gnosis* and *sophia* were means and content of salvation. See Horsley, 1980:32, 48.

<sup>4</sup> I Corinthians 8:1, 4. See Horsley, 1980:32.

<sup>5</sup> Ignorance of God is synonymous with supposing that idols or heavenly bodies are gods. Knowledge of God means knowing that other gods do not exist, and that idols are mere foolishness. Horsley, 1980:39. For details, see Horsley, 1980:33-40.

<sup>6</sup> Fee, 1980:181.

The argumentation in I Corinthian 8 is designed to show the weak that they are illogical in refusing to eat idol-meat.<sup>7</sup> The weak are being inconsistent in drawing out the implications of the monotheistic principle that they have accepted.<sup>8</sup> It seemed natural to the strong that this discrepancy between theory and practice on the part of the weak should be corrected.<sup>9</sup> In pure reason, Paul is in basic agreement with the strong.

## 2. Stumbling-block principle: conscience vs love

Why do traditional Christians experience difficulty in accepting the legitimacy of eating idol-food? Probably, it is due to a time-lag between intellectual and emotional acceptances of monotheism.<sup>10</sup> The weak are those who 'up to now have been accustomed to idols'.<sup>11</sup> As a result of this conditioning, the weak see such

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<sup>7</sup> The strong claimed: (1) the eating of idol-meat was morally neutral, (2) the eating of idol-meat would not bring them before the judgement seat of God, (3) motives were what counted, not actions. For details, see Murphy-O'Connor, 1978:547-8.

<sup>8</sup> Within Judaism there were two different traditions against idols or false gods. The first one was represented by Deutero-Isaiah, which declared the heathen gods as nothingness and their worship as foolishness. The idol-gods were merely the lifeless products of human craftsmanship. The second one was represented by Deuteronomy, which held to the election of the Israelites by the living God and the subordination of other peoples to cosmic powers. Heathen polytheism was more or less God-ordained. For details, see Horsley, 1980:38.

<sup>9</sup> Paul counsels not eating for the sake of the conscience of the weak, then continues by asking: 'For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?' I Corinthians 10:29-30.

<sup>10</sup> The food law of the Old Testament concerning clean and unclean foods was dropped by Jesus (Mark 7:19). However, the early Christians had emotional difficulties in accepting it. Peter's vision in Acts 10 makes it more of a psychological rather than a theological problem. Gooch, 1987:106.

<sup>11</sup> 'It is more probable, therefore, that the Weak were Gentile Christians whose intellectual conviction that there was only one God had not been fully assimilated emotionally. Having been conditioned from their youth to think of idols as enjoying a real existence, it was inevitable that there should be a time-lag between intellectual and emotional acceptance of monotheism. The intellectual arguments of the Strong simply repeated what the Weak already knew theoretically. In themselves they were unlikely to force the Weak to override their instinctive objection to the eating of idol-meats, a practice which, on the emotional level, seemed to be a reversion to a way of life which they (perhaps at some cost) abandoned.' Murphy-O'Connor, 1978:554-5.

meat as having been offered to an idol (i.e. a god) which they had been accustomed to treating as having some sort of spiritual reality.<sup>12</sup>

At Corinth, marriages and funerals normally involved meals in the temples. Participation would inevitably involve the eating of sacrificial food, and such participation was a matter of family and/or social solidarity.<sup>13</sup> The weak Christians found themselves on the horns of a dilemma. They were forced to choose between following their instinctive objection to eating idol-food and gratuitously insulting those who loved them.<sup>14</sup>

With the intellectual arguments of the strong and social pressure, the weak person would be tempted to imitate the strong's action. Hence, he was not merely offended by what he saw the strong doing, but he was encouraged to eat idol-food to his own destruction. The fall of such a Christian with a 'weak conscience' rested in his seeing and his imitation.<sup>15</sup>

In one sense, such a weak brother was eager to learn and ready to grow up. The question of eating idol-meat must have been raised by the weak since the strong were prepared to eat in a pagan temple. Paul's answer has the practical effect of prohibition. If my eating would cause the fall of a brother, then love surely prohibits such eating. After all, the basis of Christian ethical behaviour is not predicated on

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<sup>12</sup> In other words, it is a question of habitual attitude towards idols. The continuance of this attitude is what makes a Christian 'weak'. It is not good in itself. A newly converted Christian should have already abandoned such a 'weak conscience'. Murphy-O'Connor, 1978:552.

<sup>13</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, 1978:554.

<sup>14</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, 1978:554.

<sup>15</sup> How the strong's action destroys his weak brother, see Fee, 1980:189-91.

knowledge (*gnosis*), but on love (*agape*).<sup>16</sup> For this practical reason, Paul prohibited the eating of idol-food in the temple.

### 3. Self-restraint principle: liberty vs discipline

If the weak person has a discrepancy between theory and practice on the idea of monotheism, Paul probably has a parallel discrepancy between theory and praxis on eating sacrificial food.<sup>17</sup> Theoretically he agreed that eating such meat was acceptable but practically he prohibited it. Moreover, the strong and the weak seemed to be more logical and consistent in their own attitude towards eating idol-meat:

	<i>The Strong</i>	<i>The Weak</i>	<i>Paul</i>
meat at market place	yes	no	yes
meat of a guest home	yes	no	yes/no
meat at pagan temple	yes	no	no

Paul explains his apparent ‘ambiguity’. Firstly, his great concern is not the food or the attendance in itself but rather the attitude and the consequence which it carries.

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<sup>16</sup> Paul states: ‘Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.... food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience see you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.’ I Corinthians 8:1, 8-13.

<sup>17</sup> Conzelmann has put it: ‘Paul’s argument appears to vacillate. In chapters 8 and 10:23-11:1 he adopts in principle the standpoint of the “strong”: sacrificial meat is not dangerous and can accordingly be eaten. The restriction on freedom is imposed not by the meat, but by the conscience, by the bond with the “weak” brother. The *strong* are *admonished*. In 10:1-22, on the other hand, Paul appears to vote in favor of the weak. Eating is dangerous. *All* are *warned*...

Now both forms of argumentation are Pauline in content. The question is, however, whether Paul can argue both ways in the same breath.’ From Fee, 1980:174.

Secondly, to eat or not to eat depends on the context: namely the context of meaning, the context of discipline and the context of love-acts.

Paul is convinced that idols and false gods have no real existence, but he is too experienced to 'confuse' theory with reality. For Paul, the spiritual and demonic power is real. He knows that the non-existent and false 'gods' have power. The idols and the 'gods' can become the dwelling places of demons.<sup>18</sup> Since the demonic power is real, to eat in a pagan temple is to expose oneself to fellowship with demons. This is to test the Lord. Therefore, Paul prohibits eating meals in the temple.

Paul's next concern was the meaning of freedom and the right to exercise one's freedom. 'Freedom' does not mean *necessity*; but *freedom*, which includes both the eating and the not-eating of sacrificial food.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, freedom means both 'freedom *from* something' and 'freedom *towards* something'.<sup>20</sup> Paul argues that the right of liberty should be exercised in a context of discipline. Since we are none the worse for not eating and we are none the better for eating, the guiding principle for such a free act is a love-act. An act that is towards the care of another on the one hand and the glory of God on the other. Thus, to eat or not to eat, everything must be done according to context, God's glory and concern for others.

#### 4. Self-transformation principle: the strong vs the weak

If the weak had a discrepancy between theory and practice, there is also a discrepancy between theory and practice on the part of the strong. The former are concerned with the idea of monotheism and the latter are concerned with the art of

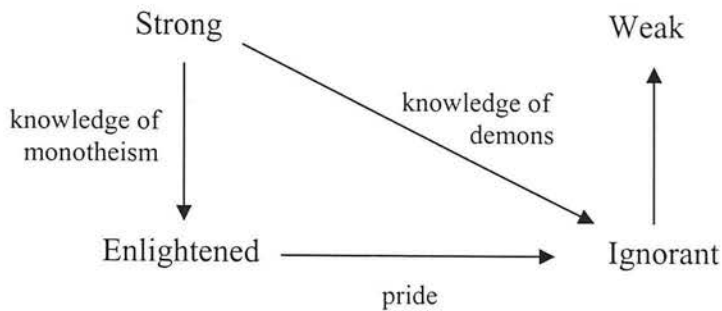
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<sup>18</sup> Fee, 1980:194.

<sup>19</sup> See Fee, 1980:192.

<sup>20</sup> See Murphy-O'Connor, 1978:565.

teaching. Both of them need to be educated, corrected and re-modeled. Otherwise the weak remains weak<sup>21</sup> and the strong becomes the weak:



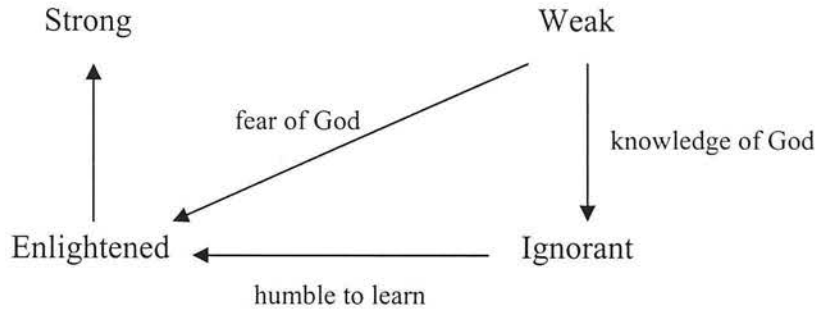
The strong held the view that the motives were what counted, not actions. When the weak saw and imitated the strong's action, their motives were different from those of the strong. The strong believed that idols were nothingness while the weak still believed that idols were real. In such a case, both the strong and the weak were in real danger of 'falling away'. The weak had bad faith and the strong had become 'false' teachers and had given 'bad' examples which led the weak to destruction. The strong had to bear the responsibility.

Under such a circumstance, the weak seemed to be better than the strong since they were eager to learn and imitate. The weak grow stronger in the faith if they have an enlightened-and-wise teacher and loving-and-care model to teach them and guide them. Unfortunately, the weak had a 'false' teacher and a 'bad' example to follow. This explains why 'true' knowledge and 'good' example were discussed in I Corinthians. Paul attempted to show himself as a true enlightened-and-wise Christian, who could teach the strong through intellectual argumentation. Paul also

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<sup>21</sup> Firstly the weak still lack full appreciation of Christian monotheism: 'idols have no real existence' and 'there is one God'. Secondly, their conscience may be defiled or contaminated. They cannot bring themselves to feel that the meat has been disinfected in Christ. Thirdly, they have no strong sense of self-identity. They are easily led to imitate the behaviour of those with a more secure knowledge. Gooch, 1987:115.

set himself as a good loving-and-care model, whom the weak could see and imitate. What Paul had done was to save both ‘liberal’ and ‘traditional’ believers from destruction<sup>22</sup> and teach them how to behave in a non-Christian society.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Paul showed them how to enrich their spiritual knowledge and grow up in their spiritual life:



In sum, Paul tries to move both the strong and the weak beyond their present situations. The strong have to move from their ‘enlightened knowledge’ to ‘true knowledge’, and to transform themselves from head (*gnosis*) to heart (*agape*).<sup>24</sup> On the other side, the weak have to educate their ‘weak conscience’ into a ‘clear conscience’, and to transform themselves from heart (emotional) to head

<sup>22</sup> Paul states: Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. I Corinthians 9:19-23.

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that eating practice can be seen as table manners and social customs. If a Christian decided to accept a dinner invitation from an unbeliever, Paul advised believers to eat whatever was set before them (even if it was idol meat). However, if the host told you that the meat had been offered in sacrifice, then one should not eat it. When a Christian was invited to eat at temple feasts for social or business reasons, one should not go. One’s eating practice thus focused on fundamental issues of religious commitment and identity rather than social and cultural customs. For details, see Fee, 1980:183-5; Gooch, 1987:106; Williams, 1996:142-3.

<sup>24</sup> For the true knowledge and the imitation of Christ, compare Murphy-O’Conner, 1978:558-66.

(intellectual).<sup>25</sup> This self-transformation is effected because believers are in the process of being changed into the image of Christ,<sup>26</sup> who is the image and glory of God.<sup>27</sup>

If one asks the question whether ancestor practice is idol worship, we need to help the inquirer to clarify the nature of idol worship before we answer the question. According to what have seen in the discussion of I Corinthians, there are two different understandings of the significance of idol: (1) Idol as nothingness. Hence there is no such thing as idol worship. (2) Idol as demonized. Hence idol worship is a reality for idols becomes the dwelling places of spirits and ghosts. The first view of idol I shall call the perspective of the strong and the second view is the perspective of the weak.

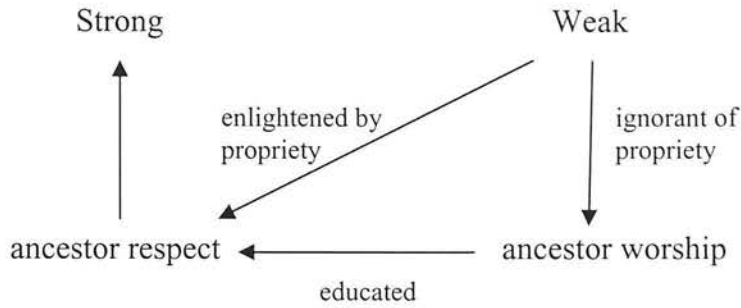
When the question is clarified, the inquirer will probably be 'enlightened' and realize the answer he is expecting. If he holds the strong's view, ancestor practice is not idol worship. If he holds the weak's view, ancestor practice is a form of idol worship. The role I play is a mid-wife dialoguer and the crucial thing I do is to help the inquirer to discover the answer by himself. When the inquirer realizes which stand point he is standing by and what answer he has found, it does not mean that I have finished my pastoral education and care. I still need to help the weak to overcome the time lap between intellectual and emotional acceptances of propriety and monotheism.

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<sup>25</sup> For the education of conscience and the transformation of the weak, compare Murphy-O'Connor, 1978:566-71.

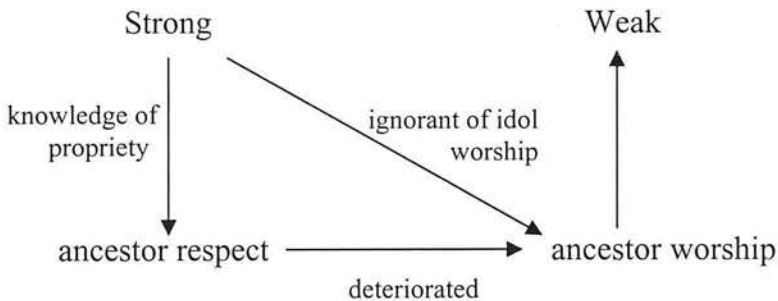
<sup>26</sup> II Corinthians 3:18.

<sup>27</sup> II Corinthians 4:4.



According to the knowledge of propriety, ancestor practice should be ancestor respect and not ancestor worship. This is the view of the strong Confucians. As we shall see in chapter 7, I will follow the Confucian line of thought and stress on education, helping the weak to overcome the time lap between intellectual and emotional acceptances of propriety. Ancestor practice has nothing to do with ancestor worship. Ancestor practice is an expression of propriety and filial piety.

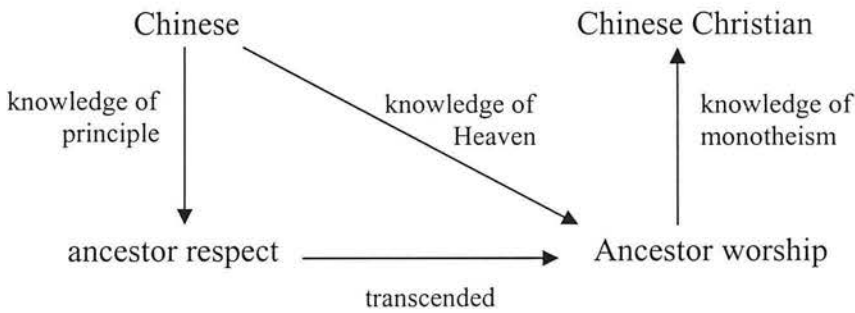
However, the strong also need to be educated and awakened because they are ignorant of supernatural powers and monotheism. They do not know the danger of ancestor practice turning into ancestor worship through idol worship. Idols become the dwelling places of spirits and ghosts.



As the strong do not realize the danger and the stumbling-block of ancestor practice, I will describe and explain how traditional ancestor practice has deteriorated and

become nature worship, spirit worship, manes worship and demon worship in chapter 7. In addition, I shall propose some ways how to move stumbling-blocks in traditional ancestor practice into a modernized ancestor practice, which a Chinese Christian can accept.

Finally, both the strong and weak Chinese need to be educated and awakened because they are ignorant of one True God. Although the (non-Christian) Chinese have the knowledge of propriety and the knowledge of Heaven, they do not know the one True God. The Chinese have forgotten the original meaning of Heaven as God-on-high. In chapter 8, I adopt a missiological strategy and apologetics. I will argue from the knowledge of Heaven and the knowledge of principle to the knowledge of monotheism. Traditional national ancestor practice (namely the rites of Heaven) should be reformed, transformed and transcended into the worship of the Ancestor -- the worship of one True God.



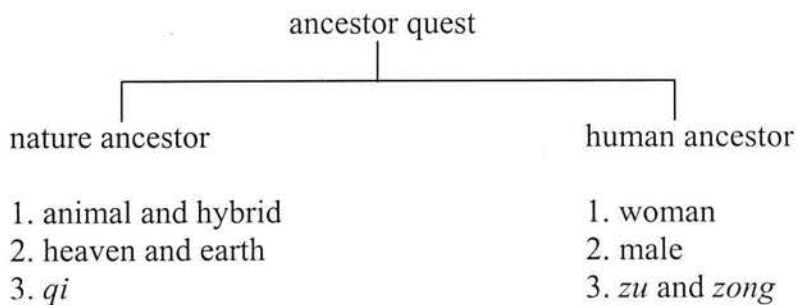
Before doing so, I will build up a theological model with Chinese characteristics to tackle the issue of ancestor practice in the next section. In this section, I have dealt with the question as to whether ancestor practice is idol worship. The answer is yes and no. I have also dealt with the question whether eating idol-meat is acceptable. The answer is also yes and no.

**b. Theological framework constructed with Chinese characteristics**

J. T. Addison concludes in his book *Chinese Ancestor Worship* that ‘ancestor worship still awaits treatment at the hands of those who are both truly Chinese and truly Christian. In their hands we may safely leave its destiny.’<sup>28</sup> In this section, I attempt to construct a theological model to deal with the problem of ancestor practice for Christians. In this task, I adopt Mencius’ ethical theory and propose self-realization, self-cultivation and self-creativity as key categories in the construction of the theological model. For Mencius dealt with ancestor practice (namely nature-related, man-related and Heaven-related ancestor practices) two millennia ago. He was for ethico-political ancestor practice and against religio-political ancestor practice. His analysis and advice is still worthwhile in the contemporary context. In the end, I propose a Christian seven-ladder model of self to tackle the issue of ancestor practice.

1. Self-realization

In Part I, I put forward a working hypothesis that the origin of ancestor practice is an ancestor quest and the quest for ancestors is formulated in the question ‘where do I come from?’ The answer given is either from nature or from man as illustrated in two streams, which later developed into different models and patterns of ancestor rituals:



<sup>28</sup> Addison, 1925:84.

During the Zhou dynasty, the ritual of ancestor practice was well established culturally and politically. Confucius stated that the ground of the ritual was *yi* (righteousness) and the root of righteousness was *ren* (benevolence).<sup>29</sup> It was Mencius who fully established the Confucian school. He put ritual (*li*), righteousness and benevolence together with wisdom and stated the theory of the goodness of human nature.<sup>30</sup>

By Mencius' time, Gaozi's theory of human nature was widely accepted. His view was summed up in the statement 'appetite for food and sex is nature'.<sup>31</sup> Mencius admitted that man shared with animals the possession of appetites and desires. However, the desireful nature of man could not be called human nature because this failed to distinguish him from the animals. What distinguished man from animals was his *xin* (heart and/or mind). There were four moral sprouts in the heart: (1) the heart of compassion, (2) the heart of shame, (3) the heart of courtesy and modesty, and (4) the heart of right and wrong.<sup>32</sup> He further pointed out that these four moral sprouts are the germ of benevolence, righteousness, the ritual-observing disposition (*li*) and wisdom respectively. The growth of the moral sprouts was a natural process. Evil was the result of the failure of human nature to

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<sup>29</sup> The Chinese word for ritual is *li*, which also means orderliness. Confucius justified the orderliness of ritual by righteousness. *Yi* means appropriate, proper and correct. For a philosophical interrelationship between *li*, *yi* and *ren*, see Lao, 1: 39-52.

<sup>30</sup> This doctrine has been the subject of bitter controversy within Confucianism. In Mencius' own day, there were three other theories: (1) Human nature is neither good nor bad. (2) Human nature could be caused to be either good or evil. (3) Some men are by nature good and some men are naturally bad. Creel, 1953:87. For a detailed philosophical discussion, see Lao, 1:99-102.

<sup>31</sup> Lau, 1970:13.

<sup>32</sup> The fourth century BC can be seen as a watershed in the ancient history of Chinese thought. It marks the discovery of the human heart or mind. The complex phenomenon of the human heart was connected with the theory of *qi*. Mencius produced a moral version of the theory of the heart and *qi*. Lau, 1970:45. For the relationship between *xin* and *qi*, see Lao, 1:105-11.

develop along its proper course.<sup>33</sup> If we fully realized the potential in our hearts and minds, we would understand our nature. By understanding our nature, we would know Heaven.<sup>34</sup>

Mencius said that the difference is slight between man and the brutes. The common man loses this distinguishing feature, while the gentleman retains it. However slight the difference is, it sets man apart from the animals. Hence, it is man's nature and his obligation to retain it, cultivate it and realize it perfectly and fruitfully.

From what Mencius has said, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) The nature of animals consists solely of desires and appetites and these must also make up the most part of human nature. (2) However, men should not be seen and treated as animals because the essential nature of man is heart and mind, and not desires and appetites. (3) Hence, animals are not the 'ancestors' of men as the origin of 'human nature' does not lie in the brutes. (4) Therefore, any ancestor practices associated with animals – 'nature' -- are not appropriate. Such ancestor practices are unjustified and unrighteous. (5) In other words, all nature-related ancestor practices including cosmic cults and earth cults are unjustified and unrighteous. Hence, nature-related ancestor practices should be banned.

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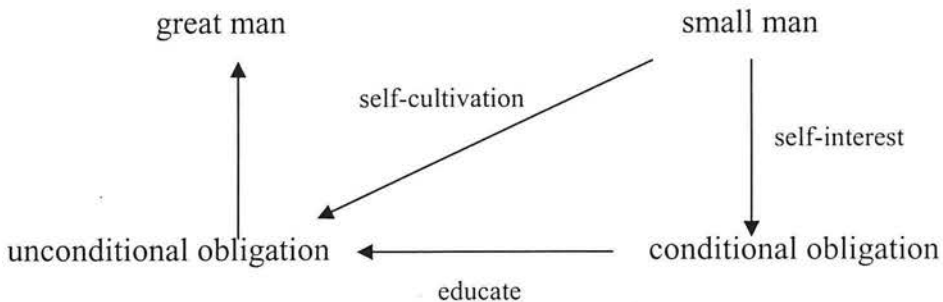
<sup>33</sup> Mencius drew an analogy between the moral barrenness of human beings and the barrenness of Ox Mountain. The Ox Mountain was a hill outside the city and it appeared to be without trees. This was not its true nature. Originally, the mountain was covered with a forest. Through years of abuse by human deforestation and livestock devastation, it came to its present state. Ivanhoe, 1990:52-3. For details of Mencius' view on the origin of evil, see Ivanhoe, 1990:49-60.

<sup>34</sup> Tu Wei-ming states: 'This profound faith in the human capacity for self-understanding and for understanding Heaven by tapping spiritual resources from within enabled Mencius to add an "anthropocosmic" dimension to the Confucian project. Learning to be fully human, in this Mencian perspective, entails the cultivation of human sensitivity to embody the whole universe as one's lived experience.' Tu, 1995:158-9.

## 2. Self-cultivation

If benevolence is the key concept of Confucius' political philosophy, then righteousness is the corner-stone of Mencius' ethical theory. *Mencius* says 'benevolence represents the human heart, righteousness the human way.'<sup>35</sup> Righteousness is the way in which man ought to walk. 'Ought' implies an obligation. There are two kinds of obligation: (1) absolute and unconditional obligation, and (2) relative and conditional obligation. The former is called a moral obligation and the latter is called a utilitarian obligation.<sup>36</sup> Righteousness is a moral obligation, not a utilitarian obligation.

Mencius stated that an action taken for a personal utilitarian end is with a view to profit. Such an action is not a righteous act, but a profit-making act. However, a profit-making act is called righteous if it is for the benefit of the public or of others. Mencius laid special emphasis on the distinction between profit and righteousness. The 'great man' comprehends and seeks righteousness while the 'small man' comprehends and seeks profit. The difference between the two is the moral life and the utilitarian life.<sup>37</sup> It is the task of the sage to educate the common people and it is man's obligation to cultivate his own human nature:



<sup>35</sup> Fung, 1947:11.

<sup>36</sup> For the details of Mencius' moral obligation and utilitarian obligation, see Fung, 1947:11-6.

<sup>37</sup> Fung, 1947:13.

From what Mencius has said about righteousness and profit, ancestor practice associated with man (national ancestors, clan ancestors and household ancestors) can be morally good or not good. If a man-related ancestor practice is performed for its own sake, or for the sake of the public or of others,<sup>38</sup> then it is appropriate and righteous. In such a circumstance, ancestor practice is morally good and well justified. However, if the ritual of ancestor practice is performed for one's own blessing and protection, or out of fear, then the act is inappropriate and unrighteous. Ancestor practice is morally not good in that context and the doer should be educated, corrected and transformed. What Mencius says here is parallel to what Paul says in I Corinthians 8-10. What is counted is not the act itself, but the context of meaning namely the motive, the attitude and the consequence.

### 3. Self-creativity

In addition to the problem of human nature and the discovery of human potentiality, Mencius discussed the question of cosmological origin -- whether there was something behind the universe. There were two opposing views. One was Ji Zhen's theory of 'nothing does it'. He believed that there was nothing behind the universe. The other one was Jie Zi's theory of 'something causes it'. He believed that there was something that caused the universe to function.<sup>39</sup> Mencius ranged himself on the side of the second.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> In the Confucian tradition, the ritual of ancestor practice has many meanings and functions such as national and personal identity, social and familial solidarity, and educational purposes. To Confucius, the obligations to one's family were most important because they were naturally the earliest and strongest bonds human beings form. They were also seen as the source of our social obligations and national obligations. Our obligations to others were flowed out and were modeled on the family. See Ivanhoe, 1990:5-7.

<sup>39</sup> Lau, 1970:32-3.

<sup>40</sup> Lau, 1970:45.

Mencius believed that it was Heaven which planted the moral heart in man.<sup>41</sup> The human *xin* (heart and/or mind) constituted a bridge linking man with Heaven. According to Mencius' ethical theory, the barrier between Heaven and man was non-existent. Man was in the stream of Heaven when his *xin* was cultivated to its utmost possibility.<sup>42</sup> There was no obstacle in man's path to a perfect character except his own failure to make the effort.<sup>43</sup>

From what Mencius has said, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) As human *xin* has its moral and intellectual nature, Heaven must have a moral and intellectual nature otherwise Heaven cannot be the source of human *xin*.<sup>44</sup> (2) As Heaven is the origin of human nature, Heaven -- not nature -- is the 'ancestor' of human beings. (3) Hence, Heaven should be remembered and received with due respect and honour.<sup>45</sup> Heaven-related ancestor practice should be preserved and propagated. (4) As the Will of Heaven is immanent and human *xin* has built-in moral tendencies, it is sufficient for man to act morally according to his *xin*.<sup>46</sup> (5) In other

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<sup>41</sup> Lau, 1970:26.

<sup>42</sup> Lau, 1970:26.

<sup>43</sup> Lau, 1970:45.

<sup>44</sup> Lau concluded in his introduction on *Mencius*: 'In Chuang Tzu's thought there is a sense of oneness with the universe, and that is what qualifies him as a mystic, but a true mystic, it seems to me, ought to feel that the universe has a purpose, and this is missing in Chuang Tzu. Mencius, on the other hand, is more truly a mystic. Not only does he believe that a man can attain oneness with the universe by perfecting his own moral nature, but he has absolute faith in the moral purpose of the universe. His great achievement is that he not only successfully defended the teachings of Confucius against the corrosive influence of new ideas but, in the process, added to Confucianism a depth that it did not possess before.' Lau, 1970:46.

<sup>45</sup> Compare what Paul has stated in Romans 1:21-23. 'For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.' Ancestor practice associated with nature is the best footnote to what Paul has said.

<sup>46</sup> Lau, 1970:28. Compare what Paul has stated in Romans 1:18-20. 'The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities -- his eternal power and

words, man is potentially transcendent. He should develop his intellectual and moral nature to the spiritual realm. For he can know God.

Until our own day, Western Christians have usually focussed on the fallenness of human nature rather than the original goodness of human nature.<sup>47</sup> Philosophically speaking, the goodness of human nature Mencius affirmed is on transcendental ground.<sup>48</sup> In representing sin as a transition from 'essence' to 'existence', Tillich comes close to Mencius' line of an original human goodness from which human beings have deviated.<sup>49</sup>

#### 4. A seven-ladder model of self

To create a suitable model, it must be constructed on the basis of a theological framework relevant to the situation of people in today's China. Also, the theological model must be mine, Chinese and not western, otherwise it is pointless.<sup>50</sup> This is especially so when I am dealing with filial piety which is the core of ancestor practice, and the root and outward expression of the Confucian essential teaching, *ren*.

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divine nature -- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.'

<sup>47</sup> Martin Buber made a comment on Confucianism as manifested in Mencius: 'This [Chinese] trust in the primal being is missing in the Western man.... Even Christianity was not able to alter this situation.... Of the biblical story of the first man, only the Fall is present in a living in the reality of the personal life of the Western Christian man, not the life before the Fall.' From Ching, 1993:76.

<sup>48</sup> This is in contrast to what Xunzi has affirmed on an existential ground: 'Man's nature is evil; goodness is the result of conscious activity. The nature of man is such that he is born with a fondness for profit.... Therefore man must first be transformed by the instructions of a teacher and guided by ritual principles.... It is obvious... that man's nature is evil, and that his goodness is the result of conscious activity.' From Ching, 1993:76.

<sup>49</sup> Tillich stated: 'Creation is good in its essential character. If actualized, it falls into universal estrangement through freedom and destiny.' From Ching, 1993:73.

<sup>50</sup> Ray S. Anderson said in the Lam Chi Fung Memorial Symposium in 1986 that the Chinese should shape their own Christianity built on Confucianism as the Westerners had built on Platonism.

I would propose a ‘seven-ladder model of self’ as my theological framework. The Chinese often see the self as potentially transcendent.<sup>51</sup> Hence, several aspects of the self are presupposed. The ‘seven-ladder model of self’ with seven aspects of the self is as follows:

Aspects	Main Characteristics
1. physical self	1. response
2. biological self	2. desire
3. psychological self	3. passion
4. cognitive self	4. reason
5. moral self	5. will
6. aesthetic self	6. relation
7. mystical self	7. being-in-Being

These seven aspects of the self are postulated as a revised form of Mencius’ ethical theory. The desire and appetites for food and sex are the characteristics of the physical and biological self. Intellectual and moral thinking are the characteristics of the cognitive and moral self. The passion and aesthetic of Mencius’ *qi* become the characteristics of the psychological and aesthetic selves respectively. Lastly, the Will of Heaven endowed in human nature reveals the spiritual dimension of the mystical self -- oneness with Heaven.<sup>52</sup>

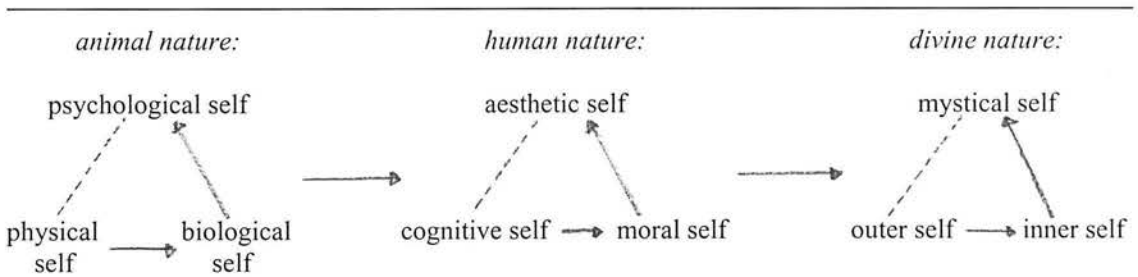
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<sup>51</sup> In Lao’s *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, the author listed four aspects of a self: physical self, cognitive self, aesthetic self and moral self. He further argued that the Confucians affirmed the moral self as the most important and ultimate, whereas the Daoists affirmed the aesthetic self, and the Buddhists no self.

<sup>52</sup> The seven-ladder model of self is a triad of three selves namely outer self, inner self and unified self:

If we look at God as Transcendent Reality, then man is a finite being with transcendence as his *imago dei*. Sin is a fall and/or an attachment. Therefore, whenever a man transcends himself from a lower ladder to an upper ladder, it is good because it manifests human dignity namely transcendence. In such a way, he also glorifies God for God is Transcendence. Whereas whenever a man falls to a lower ladder and/or attaches to that ladder, it is a sin against his own nature. He sins against himself, and also, falls short of the glory of God. For attachment or fall is contrary to transcendence.

For instance, Marx, defining man through dialectical materialism stresses an attachment to the physical self, seeing man as a thing and a political tool. Darwin's evolution is an attachment to the biological self, seeing man as a living organism and defining man as a human species. Freud's sexual drives are an attachment to the psychological self, a being with consciousness. Kant's pure and practical reason is an attachment to the cognitive self, a rational being. Nietzsche's will to power is an attachment to the metaphysical self, seeing man as a superman. Buber's *I-Thou* reveals to us that man is a relational being. However, we easily distort our relation from I-Thou to I-It. Heidegger's *Being and Time* further reveals us that we are living in a house of beings and we are being-towards-death.



The outer self consists of physical self, biological self and psychological self. The outer self shares the same nature with animals. The inner self consists of cognitive self, moral self and aesthetic self. This is where human nature lies. Human beings reflect and retrospect consciousness as a thinking mental-object. Finally, the mystical self which unifies outer self and inner self is a bridge between the outer world and the inner world, or between transcendence and immanence. The inter-relationship and intra-relationship of these three selves are dynamic and spiral upwards.

When a man reaches the highest ladder, he needs to 'die' in order to 'live' -- to forget himself and humble himself.<sup>53</sup> He identifies with the weak and 'reincarnates' as the lowest, the weakest and the smallest.<sup>54</sup> He lives and acts as if he is weak to educate the 'small man'. He shares the burden of the 'weak' and the 'small'.<sup>55</sup> In doing so, he is strong and he is great. He is a Christ-like and God-like man.<sup>56</sup> He attains moral and spiritual immortality.

When we look at ancestor practice with this seven-ladder model of self, we would say that ancestor practice is good in itself, especially when it is the outward expression of filial piety because the rite itself can help and teach man to transcend himself to another virtue, *ren*. But on the other hand, rites can become evil when man

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<sup>53</sup> In Zhuangzi's view, the highest state of mind is total detachment -- no distinction between beings and no differentiation between life and death. In other words, the ideal state of mind is characterized by no-mind. In such a realization, the true man is one with the Way.

Zhuangzi describes some approaches to achieve such oneness with Dao: (1) the fasting of the mind, which means emptying the mind so that Dao will move into the emptiness. (2) 'sitting and forgetting', which means sitting down and forgetting everything. One makes oneself identical with the Dao. (3) 'detaching from things': by observing tranquil self-cultivation, one is able suddenly to break through from the world of darkness into the world of light. One can see the Ultimate that is beyond living and dying. For details, see Liu, 1995:246-8.

<sup>54</sup> Paul exhorted us to imitate Christ's humility in Philippians 2:6-8.

*Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God  
something to be grasped,  
but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death --  
even death on a cross.*

<sup>55</sup> See Isaiah 53, the song of a suffering servant.

<sup>56</sup> Mencius' ladder of perfection in character building is as following:

*Those who command our liking are called good.  
Those who are sincere with themselves are called true.  
Those who are sufficient and real are called beautiful.  
Those whose sufficiency and reality shine forth are called great.  
Those whose greatness transforms itself are called sagely.  
Those whose sageliness is beyond our comprehension are called spiritual [divine].*

Tu, 1995:158. Compare Lau, 1970:199.

uses them as a means to get blessing and/or protection from the deceased and thus turns them into idolatry and superstition.

Ancestor practice is not restricted to people in primal society. It is found at every level of social and educational development within the cultural milieu. The ritual may mean one thing to the 'strong' and the 'great man' and another thing to the 'weak' and the 'small man'. It has many different forms of expression, varying from people to people and from group to group. Much more than that, the meaning and form of the expression of ancestor practice can vary with each person, and from one person to the next. It may be ancestor respect this time but ancestor worship next time.

In conclusion, we must affirm that ancestor practice is good in itself.<sup>57</sup> But we need to educate and remind the people who practice it from time to time about the meaning of it.<sup>58</sup> The situation is similar to that of sex which is good in itself, but we can misuse it and distort its meaning and turn it into adultery.

In this section, Mencius' ethical theory has been studied. According to his theory, nature-related ancestor practice is unjustified and unrighteous. Man-related ancestor practice can be morally good or not good. Heaven-related ancestor practice is good. Based on Mencius' theory, I have constructed a model of self-cultivation to illustrate the good nature and the fallen nature of ancestor practice. As we shall see in

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<sup>57</sup> Ancestor practice had an undeniable power in consolidating Chinese society in the past. To illustrate, Matteo Ricci discovered in the 16th century that Chinese society depended on harmony and peace through ancestor practice. He also observed that the key to successful missionary work in China would lie in the burial customs adopted by the Roman Catholic Church, and in the respect they would show for the dead. These rituals and attitudes would have to replace their Chinese counterparts. Shibata, 1985:255.

<sup>58</sup> For instance, someone asked Confucius about the meaning of the Great Sacrifice. The master replied, 'I do not know. One who knew the meaning could govern the world as easily as look at this!' (He pointed to his palm.) Ivanhoe, 1990:5.

next chapter, ancestor practice has become ancestor worship namely nature worship, spirit worship, manes worship and demon worship.

If one asks the question whether ancestor practice is an expression of filial piety, we need to help the inquirer to clarify the nature of ancestor practice and reformulate the question. In Part I, I have illustrated that the nature of ancestor practice has three dimensions: religious dimension, ethical dimension and socio-political dimension. In other words, there are:

1. three kinds of ancestor practice: nature-related, man-related, Heaven-related;
2. three types of ancestor practice: socio-political, religious, ethical;
3. three forms of ancestor practice: Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian;
4. three levels of ancestor practice: national, clan, household.

When the inquirer realizes the complex Chinese ideological phenomenon of ancestor practice, he will probably not expect to have a simple and straight forward ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer to the question which he has raised. As a matter of fact, he has committed two fallacies of reductionism when he asked the question whether ancestor practice is an expression of filial piety. Firstly, he reduced different kinds and different forms of ancestor practice into one general type ‘ancestor practice’. Secondly, he reduced the different meanings and connotations of different kinds of ancestor practice into one meaning namely an expression of filial piety.

We need to help the inquirer to understand the ideological complex of Chinese ancestor practice and the meanings of different types and different kinds of ancestor practice as I have already shown in Part I. For instance, the meaning of filial piety denotes different references in different teachings. It denotes sincerity in offering

sacrifices in the Confucian teaching. However, it refers to the transfer of merits and the accumulation of merits in the Buddhist teaching and the neo-Confucian teaching respectively. With reference to different levels of ancestor practice, the core meaning of national ancestor practice is loyalty. The meaning of clan ancestor practice is filialty and that of household ancestor practice is sincerity.

We need to help the inquirer to reformulate the question. If he is asking a general question about ‘ancestor practice’, then the proper question to be asked is whether ancestor practice is good in itself (a contemporary formulation). Or, whether ancestor practice is an expression of propriety (a Confucian formulation). The answer to these two questions is affirmative. If the inquirer wants to know whether it is an expression of filial piety, then the exact question I can propose is whether household ancestor practice is an expression of filial piety, or, whether clan ancestor practice is an expression of filial piety. It is only when a question is well-formulated that we can answer it properly. Otherwise, it is a pseudo-question or a misleading question.

Even when the question of whether household ancestor practice is an expression of filial piety is formulated, we need to help the inquirer to clarify which meaning of filial piety he is referring to and which form of ancestor practice he is inquiring about. The pastoral education and care in handling such an inquiry are similar to those involved in the question of whether ancestor practice is idol worship. It is only when the question is put into a specific context (the Buddhist form of ancestor practice or the Confucian form of ancestor practice) and the meaning of the key-word in the question is well-defined (the key-word in this case is filial piety), that we can probably give a definite answer. Otherwise, we can only give a general answer to a general question. For instance, the answer I give to such a general and ambiguous

question whether ancestor practice is an expression of filial piety is yes and no. According to Confucius, filial piety refers to sincerity in offering the sacrifices when parents are dead. In this case, ancestor practice is an expression of filial piety. However, Confucius also defines filial piety as obedience to parents while parents are alive. Since the parents are dead, we cannot fulfill such meaning of filial piety. Therefore, ancestor practice is not an expression of filial piety in this case.

### c. Theory and praxis

Since 1949, China has been disunited. The mainland of China is ruled by a Communist Party with a western Marxist-Leninist ideology while Taiwan is ruled by a Nationalist Party with a traditional Chinese value-system. Hong Kong has been ruled by a British colonial government with a Protestant culture while Macao has been ruled by a Portuguese colonial government with a Roman Catholic culture. In this section, I shall present a picture of these three different places where ancestor practice has undergone changes since 1911,<sup>59</sup> and we shall see how my theological framework can explain and tackle the real situations.

#### 1. Ancestor practice in China: prohibition

Government and civil leaders of this century, many of them stemming from the intellectual and educated classes, were prepared to suppress the 'superstitious worship of spirits' practiced by diviners, astrologers, geomancers, sorcerers and magicians. The Nationalists issued a decree in 1948 and prohibited such practices.<sup>60</sup> In 1950, the new People's Government announced its 'Decisions concerning differentiation of class status in the countryside'. One paragraph of this reads:

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<sup>59</sup> Hong Kong and Macao will be treated as one place as the Chinese government usually does. It is because both Hong Kong and Macao have been under foreign rule. Hong Kong has been returned to China in 1997 and Macao has been returned to China in 1999.

<sup>60</sup> The prohibitions were announced in a Ministry of the Interior decree of 7 September 1948: 'Those who operate unorthodox religious houses to delude the people; those who contribute to spirits of impurity to obtain riches;... those who build shrines for the spirits and fabulous birds to come in to rest;... all who initiate or participate in those processions in which idols are carried to thank the gods; all who invoke superstition in their actions; other illegal movements and secret societies.' Since Nationalist days were numbered, the decree was not enforced. Bush, 1970:383.

All those people who for three years immediately prior to liberation derived the main part of their income from such religious and superstitious professions as those of clergymen, priests, monks, Taoists [Daoists], lay Taoists, geomancers, fortune-tellers, and diviners, are to be classified as religious or superstitious practitioners.<sup>61</sup>

A few months later in Canton the authorities began to demolish ancestral shrines and temples.<sup>62</sup> The Communists saw ancestor practice as a feudal influence obstructing the progress of Marxist-Leninist studies among the people. Ancestor practice could still be carried on in private homes, but clan celebrations were curtailed because income from the land was cut off.<sup>63</sup> Most ancestral temples were transformed for public use such as headquarters for Peasants' Association, village and town cooperative stores, jails, and barracks for soldiers.<sup>64</sup>

By 1958, the government hardened its line on folk religious practices. The main stream of folk religion -- the ancestor cult -- was suppressed in the villages. The statement by Luo Tian is said to be an illustration of Mao Zedong's principle, 'If religion does not interfere with the People's Republic, the People's Republic will not interfere with it.'<sup>65</sup> Luo Tian said:

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<sup>61</sup> Bush, 1970:384.

<sup>62</sup> Bush, 1970:385.

<sup>63</sup> Yang stated: 'Without violence, by the impoverishment of the rich families and the clans, religion was, so to speak, driven from public view back into the homes, where the unchangeable older generation of peasants could cherish their traditional customs and beliefs undisturbed. But the power of religion to strengthen community spirit and to evoke a sense of community sharing was already nearly destroyed. Most important of all, the Communists had embarked on a long-term program... aimed at the eradication of traditional influence in Chinese life. At the heart of that program was the education of the younger generation. It was not on the compulsive remaking of the minds of those who were beyond the age of thirty that the Communists pinned their main hope for the final triumph of atheism, but on the youth who were so universally subjected to Communist education.' Bush, 1970:386; Yang, 1967:389.

<sup>64</sup> Yang reported that in 1951 he 'visited an ancestral temple in a village in Guangdong province and saw only an empty building left after a Peasants' Association mob had completely stripped it of honorific and religious objects and burned them in order to "sever the present generation from the roots of feudalism."' Bush, 1970:386-7; Yang, 1967:391.

<sup>65</sup> Luo Tian was the first secretary of the Communist Party Committee for Waton, Guangdong. Bush, 1970:399.

Ancestral tombs long regarded as sacred have been removed by the masses themselves. In many localities, family altars, gods of the city, gods of thunder, local gods, and the Queen of Heaven have been eliminated.... Grave stones, coffins, etc., are used by collective farms for building irrigation works, pig sties, latrines, carts, manure buckets, sheds, small water gates.... Many temples which formerly housed images have been turned into pig sties or processing plants, thus saving large amounts of expenditure for the collectives.<sup>66</sup>

In June 1958, Zhao Jian-min published an article in *People's Daily Newspaper* outlining the government's policy toward funeral rites and customs.<sup>67</sup> He argued that ancestor practice was part of an old social super-structure which was built on an old economic base. He showed the disadvantages of traditional ancestor practice: (1) the cost of funerals, (2) the amount of land consumed by graves, and (3) the tremendous amount of wood used by traditional coffins.

As a new super-structure had not yet fully emerged from the new economy, Zhao said that many peasants were still following the old customs.<sup>68</sup> He proposed that: (1) the traditional wooden coffins be replaced by coffins constructed with a wooden frame and filled with grass stalks and mud or cement, (2) burials be deep enough to cultivate the land above the grave, (3) gravestones be placed at the side of the field in which the graves were located, (4) tombs dating back more than five generations or not claimed should be leveled, (5) recent tombs which interfered with

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<sup>66</sup> Bush, 1970:399.

<sup>67</sup> Zhao Jian-min was the secretary of the Shandong Provincial Committee. The title of the article was 'Reform funeral customs, encourage thrifty burials without coffins and graves without sepulchral mounds.' Bush, 1970:400-1.

<sup>68</sup> He reported: 'The masses in the rural areas... still "announce the death in the ancestral temple," have a priest "lead the soul of the deceased," provide a wooden coffin and a lavish funeral, give dinners to relatives and friends who have come to mourn, and make frequent sacrificial offerings to the dead.' Bush, 1970:401.

production and construction should be leveled or removed, and (6) cremation should be introduced gradually.<sup>69</sup> Zhao summed up that:

The old funeral rites and customs were created to serve the exploiting classes, to fool the people, and to instill such feudal and superstitious ideas into their minds as ‘a man has a soul, which lives on after he is dead’ and ‘filial piety is the supreme virtue.’ Our new funeral rites and customs, on the other hand, are designed to serve socialist production and construction, to commemorate the dead and encourage the living, and to educate the people with Communist ethical standards.<sup>70</sup>

In 1965, the *People's Daily Newspaper* condemned the burning of paper money and other paper objects to ancestors during the Clear Bright Festival. Its editors maintained that such practices should be combated by education rather than by suppression. They suggested that instead of the old practices tribute to revolutionary martyrs should be paid on that day.<sup>71</sup> By 1966, the Clear Bright Festival had become the National Memorial Day.<sup>72</sup>

Some individuals still visited graves, but burning of paper money and joss sticks, ceremonial kowtowing and offerings were reported to have largely ceased in the cities. Most people who visited graves made simple bows and left fresh flowers. Posters were to be seen denouncing superstition and advocating economic and other

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<sup>69</sup> Bush, 1970:401.

<sup>70</sup> Bush, 1970:402.

<sup>71</sup> The editors specifically stated, ‘We are not against the broad masses “sweeping” the tombs of their deceased close relatives.’ Bush, 1970:410.

<sup>72</sup> Heroes who died in the Revolution of 1911 and during the Liberation period were commemorated. Bush, 1970:410.

advantages of cremation.<sup>73</sup> Still more drastic measures against traditional ancestor practice were employed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76).<sup>74</sup>

Tradition dies hard. After two decades of economic reform, people's living standards have been improved. Since the beginning of the 1990's, traditional ancestor practice has re-emerged: including large-scale funeral arrangements and burial in the ground. The practice of worshipping ancestors has become increasingly common.<sup>75</sup>

## 2. Ancestor practice in Taiwan: accommodation

Since the Nationalists moved to Taiwan in 1949, the government claimed that she had preserved five thousand years of traditional Chinese culture. The Chinese in Taiwan wanted to preserve and revive the Confucian tradition as their cultural mandate.<sup>76</sup> Saso wrote:

Today, Chinese religion in Taiwan perpetuates exactly this traditional form of syncretism [ancestor practice and Three Religions], and religious rituals continue to express it in everyday life. Despite the high level of technology and education (with a literacy rate of over 90 percent) and the official secular policy of the government, religious rituals are more popular than ever, and huge sums of money are spent for their performance. Traditional weddings and funerals are

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<sup>73</sup> A correspondent reported: 'At the entrance [of the Hongrao Road cemetery in Shanghai] were displayed posters on the subject of the correct understanding of the existence of man and the life "beyond", as proved by science, and repudiating old beliefs based on superstitions. There were also recommendations for cremations, ... reminding the people that land required for national reconstruction may be ordered to be cleared of the graves.' Bush, 1970:410-1.

<sup>74</sup> Bush, 1970:400.

<sup>75</sup> For details, see *Beijing*, 1997b:24-5.

<sup>76</sup> 'The technological and scientific advances of the postwar Nationalist government period brought new wealth and affluence, making Taiwan second only to Japan in this area in her standard of living, education, and industrial production. Along with modernization, the Taiwanese population has also promoted a great revival of the old Chinese cultural traditions, largely focused on religious festivals.' Saso, 1982:581.

extremely expensive and impose an enormous financial burden on the poorer families...

Obviously, the practice of traditional religious customs has undergone some modification in modern times. The funeral and other burial services have been shortened.... Essentially, however, the rites in Taiwan today are like those in the past. Indeed, Taiwan is now the best place to study the religious and social customs of the late Ming and early Ch'ing dynasties. Moreover, religious ritual also has become a means of expressing Taiwanese social and political independence as well as pride in the cultural past.<sup>77</sup>

In 1939, Pope Pius XII decreed the removal of *Ex que singularis* and accepted Chinese traditional practices of Confucius and the ancestors. He saw them as mere expressions of respect for the dead, and he believed that these rituals helped teach the young generation to respect their own culture.<sup>78</sup> He was re-affirming the position adopted by the Jesuits on these matters from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In 1971, Cardinal Yu Bin performed ancestor practice publicly in Taiwan.<sup>79</sup> Next year, he put the ritual of Heaven and the ritual of ancestors together and won the public's affirmation.<sup>80</sup> In 1979, he promoted the ritual of Heaven and the ancestors among Roman Catholic believers in Taiwan. He officiated at large-scale ceremonies, thus eliciting a strong response. In spite of the Catholic accommodation

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<sup>77</sup> Saso, 1982:583-4.

<sup>78</sup> The Pope considered it appropriate to bow or to practice other forms of ritual before a dead person, an image of a dead person and a tablet of a dead person. Lin, 1985:152.

<sup>79</sup> On Chinese New Year's Day, Cardinal Yu staged an ancestor practice with incense, sacrificial food without meat, and prayers offered to Heaven and Chinese ancestors in general. Over a thousand people attended including some government officials and a few prominent Protestants. The Cardinal declared that ancestor practice was not idolatry but in accordance with God's will -- the fifth commandment. The media reportedly widely because the Roman Catholic Church seemed to uphold Chinese culture. Hung, 1985:201.

<sup>80</sup> Since then the Roman Catholic Church has been repeating public ancestor worship every Chinese New Year. Sometimes, the ritual has been performed inside a church building. Hung, 1985:201

with ancestor practice, the membership of the church has actually declined. She lost ten percent of members from 1970 to 1980.<sup>81</sup> The ceremonial rituals and forms used by the Catholics were then questionable as the actual impact on mission work was negligible.

In 1983, the Protestants held a Consultation on the Christian Response to Ancestor Practices in Taipei.<sup>82</sup> Since most speakers were Evangelicals, they held to a condemnation of ancestor-related beliefs and practices.<sup>83</sup> The Conference's closing declaration failed to contribute a constructive Christian response to the problem, and the document was presented as a working paper.

“Ancestors’ spirits” have no supernatural power either to bestow blessings or to inflict curses upon the descendants. We, therefore, encourage Christians confronted with the problems of ancestor practices not to be controlled by a sense of fear, trust, or adoration of the ancestors nor create an impression of such to the surrounding society and to fellow Christians. At the same time, Christians in each situation should wisely decide proper action under the leading the Holy Spirit according to Scripture and their conscience....

We acknowledge that some of these approaches are neither final nor guarantee freedom from conflicts. The final answers are in Christ, and His children should be ready to suffer as He did and as many saints in various parts of this continent have done. We are aware that these guidelines would not necessarily help churches grow, but we pray and hope that they may do so.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Hung, 1985:201-2; Lin, 1985:152.

<sup>82</sup> The consultation had a three-fold objective: (1) To examine ancestor practices in the light of Scripture. (2) To study how Chinese, Japanese, and Korean churches have dealt with ancestor practices so that the participants can learn from each other. (3) To formulate Christian alternatives to ancestor practices to further the evangelization of Asia. Bong, 1985:preface.

<sup>83</sup> The Joint Declaration on Ancestor Practices stated: ‘We affirm that true worship is that which we offer to the triune God of Scripture who alone is worthy of all our adoration and praise and who alone is able to bestow blessings upon us. We deny the validity of ancestor worship as true worship.

We also hold to the position that the Christians in the contexts of various cultures should not try to culturalize the gospel but to transform the cultures according to the teachings of the Scripture.... Our point of reference is not cultural contexts but Christ, and cultures should be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit under the Lordship of Christ.’ Bong, 1985:9. For the full joint declaration, see Bong, 1985:3-10.

<sup>84</sup> Bong, 1985:9-10.

### 3. Ancestor practice in Hong Kong: transformation

Living space in Hong Kong has become a problem.<sup>85</sup> More than four million people are currently crammed into an area the size of a medium Scottish town.<sup>86</sup> One closely populated area has a density of some 150,000 per square kilometre. Hong Kong's environment over the last generation has greatly weakened and transformed traditional ancestor practice.

As Hong Kong was a British colony, no ritual of Heaven was performed. The Christian faith has been taught and practiced in most schools. Due to land development and urbanization, clan ancestor practices and lineage gatherings have become inappropriate and unpopular. As the native people of the New Territories move to urban areas or emigrate to other countries, clan celebrations deteriorate and disintegrate.<sup>87</sup> However, the Hong Kong Chinese retain a high level of involvement in household ancestor practices.<sup>88</sup>

In 1985, Smith did a statistical research on ancestor practice in Hong Kong to test whether the practice was a religious ritual or a social custom. Some of the findings were: (1) The contact between the living and the dead is no longer widely

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<sup>85</sup> The total area of Hong Kong is 1052 square kilometre, and its population is 6.5 million people. Macao is 55 kilometres from Hong Kong. It is a peninsula of five kilometres long and one kilometre wide, and its population is half a million people.

<sup>86</sup> *The Herald* (a Scottish newspaper), 24 October 1997.

<sup>87</sup> Freedman made *A Report on Social Research in the New Territories* in 1963. One of the texts reads: 'a few hundred New Territories women have gone to the United Kingdom to join their men, the general character of the migration has been male. But a large-scale exodus of able-bodied men entails some serious consequences for the social and economic life of the people left behind. In some areas of the New Territories the absence of young and middle-aged men is so striking as to be obvious even to the casual observer.' Freedman, 1979c:230.

<sup>88</sup> Most of Hong Kong's people came from mainland China as refugees in the 1950's and 1960's. Hence, most adults remain fixed in patterns of ritual expression which they learned during childhood. Smith, 1989a:35.

held.<sup>89</sup> (2) The people approach their ancestors not out of fear and seldom for assistance.<sup>90</sup> (3) Filial concern and family solidarity are the primary motives.<sup>91</sup> (4) Few people see ancestor practice as maintaining social morality.<sup>92</sup>

The research further showed that: (1) The Clear Bright Festival is primarily a social event.<sup>93</sup> (2) Hungry ghosts are unlikely to cause misfortune to the living.<sup>94</sup> (3) The Hungry Ghost Festival is a religious event performed by believers.<sup>95</sup> (4) The *feng-shui* of an ancestor's grave possibly affects the fortunes of the living.<sup>96</sup> In

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<sup>89</sup> When respondents were asked if they or anyone in their families had tried to communicate with a deceased relative during the five years, the results were:

87.1%	no attempts
4.9%	one or two attempts
4.9%	attempted 'now and then'
3.0%	attempted frequently

Smith, 1989a:40.

<sup>90</sup> When encountering trouble or misfortune, the interview responses were:

70.6%	never appealed to the ancestors for assistance
10.4%	seldom did so
14.1%	sometimes did so
4.9%	usually did so

Smith, 1989a:40.

<sup>91</sup> One objective of Smith's research was to rank the motives of ancestor practice. There were twelve selected motives. The four top-ranked reasons for participating in ancestor practice were: (1) to show respect for the deceased, (2) to demonstrate love for the deceased, (3) to express gratitude to ancestors, (4) to fulfill family responsibility. See Smith, 1989a:35-7.

<sup>92</sup> Only 4.3% of the respondents held the view that morality would deteriorate if everyone started to neglect their ancestors. 21.5% considered somewhat likely. 33.1% expressed unlikely to deteriorate and 41.1% labelled such a proposition impossible. Smith, 1989a:41.

<sup>93</sup> The Clear Bright Festival is a public holiday in Hong Kong. The occasion offers a family gathering and outing. The Festival reinforces family solidarity and provides an alternative to lineage gathering. Smith, 1989a:34.

<sup>94</sup> When asked how often hungry ghosts were responsible for bringing misfortunes to the living, the respondents gave the following result:

14.7%	denied the existence of hungry ghosts
58.3%	allowed the existence of hungry ghosts but unable to influence the living
17.8%	affirmed the existence of hungry ghosts and able to influence the living

Smith, 1989a:40-41.

<sup>95</sup> After data analysis, Smith wrote, '... Thus, while Ching Ming [Clear Bright Festival] participation seems almost mandatory for everyone capable of visiting the graves, only those with some kind of religious incentive [Buddhists and Daoists] appear to observe the Festival of the Hungry Ghosts.' Smith, 1989a:34.

<sup>96</sup> The sample population yielded the following result:

definite influence	12.2%
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short, the cultural view of ancestor practice seems to predominate over the religious view among the Hong Kong people.<sup>97</sup> Smith concluded that:

Of course, ancestor practice draws on a religious worldview for those Chinese who worship traditional deities. However, they should not be judged inherently religious on that basis.... If ancestor veneration is more an integrating element than an expression of supernatural relations, and if it has undergone a radical secularization in recent times, then the churches need not feel the compulsion to oppose all ancestor-related practices.<sup>98</sup>

#### 4. Situational ethics

The past is gone, but traditional ancestor practice still has its value. However, it needs to be reformed and transformed. 1911 was a celebration year for the Chinese. Two millennia of feudal and imperial Chinese dynasties came to an end. A new heavenly mandate was proclaimed and a new era of the Republic of China began. Eight years later came another unforgettable year notably for young intellectuals. The youths and scholars of the time cried out for democracy and science. They uprooted the ancestral root of Chinese culture. Three millennia of dominant Confucian culture came to a halt in the May Fourth Movement of 1919. Forty years later came another great event, a victory for some and a loss to others. A new nation was born and a big social change in China began. Five millennia of old traditional Chinese society gave way to a new socialist society. Ideologically speaking, the

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some influence	12.9%
very little influence	26.4%
no influence	20.9%
do not believe in <i>feng-shui</i>	27.6%

Smith, 1989a:41.

<sup>97</sup> Smith, 1989a:43.

<sup>98</sup> Smith, 1989a:44.

nation was ruled by the people, for the people, and of the people as her name was called the People's Republic of China. Within half a century, every aspect of the old China seemed to be a new China.

1 July 1997 was a D-day for the Chinese. Hong Kong was returned to China her motherland after a century of humiliation.<sup>99</sup> Macao has also been returned to China in 1999. It sums up a wish that China will finally be unified, peacefully and progressively, some day.<sup>100</sup> It is a wish for Christians that China will one day be Christianized. As ancestor practice is seeing a new paradigm shift, it is a wish that the Christian faith may have a definite role in its historical development.

The present attitude towards traditional ancestor practice in modern China can be summarized as follows:

	<i>Mainland</i>	<i>Taiwan</i>	<i>Hong Kong</i>
household practice	no	yes	yes
clan practice	no	yes	yes/no
national practice	no	yes	no

<sup>99</sup> Shanghai Bund Park was set up by British imperialists. It was notorious at one time for a notice board saying, 'No Chinese and Dogs Allowed'. In 1898, Britain forced the lease of the New Territories for 98 years, thus occupying the entire Hong Kong area. The New Territories comprised 95% of the Hong Kong colony.

At the public gathering to celebrate Hong Kong's return, President Jiang Zemin said, 'Today [1 July 1997] the Chinese and British governments have held the handover ceremony of Hong Kong, declaring the resumption by the Chinese government of sovereignty over Hong Kong.... The return of Hong Kong marks an end to the 100-year national humiliation of leaving Hong Kong under foreign occupation.... The occupation of Hong Kong is an epitome of the humiliation China suffered in modern history. The Treaty of Nanking was the first unequal treaty imposed by a big Western power upon the Chinese people. The Opium War turned China from a feudal society into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal one....' For the full speech, see *Beijing*, 1997a:27-30.

<sup>100</sup> On 1 July 1997, President Jiang Zemin said in Hong Kong, 'It is an ardent aspiration of all Chinese to settle the Taiwan issue in line with the basic policy of "peaceful reunification and one country, two systems" and to realize the great cause of national reunification.' On the same day, Premier Li Peng said in Beijing, 'If the formula of "one country, two systems" works in Hong Kong and Macao, it should also work in Taiwan. No matter how many difficulties we may encounter in the road ahead, and we will and can achieve the complete reunification of our motherland.' *Beijing*, 1997a:26, 30.

Analogically speaking, the different attitudes towards traditional ancestor practice in modern China parallel those attitudes towards sacrificial food in Corinth. Theoretically, the mainland represents the 'strong' because she denies the existence of idols and false gods while Taiwan symbolizes the 'weak' because she accepts the existence of gods, ancestors and ghosts. Practically, the mainland is the 'weak' since she bans ancestor practice while Taiwan is the 'strong' since she accommodates ancestor practice.

From a Christian viewpoint, the mainland needs to learn to be 'spiritual' and 'religious' to liberate herself from dialectical materialism and move towards true religion.<sup>101</sup> Taiwan needs to learn to be 'rational' and 'secularized' to liberate herself from traditional religiosity and move towards ethical religion.<sup>102</sup> Probably, Hong Kong is the model both the mainland and Taiwan can learn from and aim at -- a place of the meeting of East and West, a new horizon of merging tradition and modernity, an emerging new model of ancestor practice in a modernized Chinese society. In other words, the religious and political dimensions of traditional ancestor practice should be transformed and transcended into a cultural dimension, and the cultural dimension of traditional ancestor practice should be reformed and transcended into a new horizon.

In sum, after adopting Paul's and Mencius' ethical theory and considering the present situation of modern China, I propose the following 'ambiguity' (like Paul's

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<sup>101</sup> For communism as a non-theistic faith, see Yang, 1967:381-6.

<sup>102</sup> Chan Wing-tsit in *Religious Trends in Modern China* says: 'I have always urged that instead of dividing the religious life of the Chinese people into three compartments called Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism [Daoism], it is far more accurate to divide it into two levels, the level of the masses and the level of the enlightenment.... By the masses is meant the 85 per cent of the Chinese people who are devout but ignorant. By the enlightened is meant the intelligentsia and the illiterate farmers, fishermen and similar humble folks who may often use a smaller vocabulary but often express greater wisdom.' Chan, 1953:141.

position towards the eating of idol-food) resolution towards traditional ancestor practice:

	<i>ancestor practice in general</i>	<i>ancestor practice in specific</i>	<i>ancestor practice in context</i>
‘no’ approach	nature-related	national	religious-political
‘yes/no’ approach	man-related	clan	socio-political
‘yes’ approach	Heaven-related	family	ethical-political

Theoretically, I admit the good nature of ancestor practice but practically I disapprove the ‘fallen’ nature of *traditional* ancestor practice. As we shall see in the chapter 7, the good nature of man-related ancestor practice (namely ancestor memorial and ancestor respect) has become ancestor worship (namely nature worship, spirit worship, manes worship and demon worship). Also, the good nature of Heaven-related ancestor practice has lost its original meaning of worshipping the God-on-high. The ritual has become the worship of natural objects, spiritual beings and heavenly bodies.

However, we can reform and transform traditional ancestor practice by reconstructing ancestor practice in Chinese Christianity. We can ‘redeem’ the good nature of man-related and Heaven-related ancestor practices to its original meaning through the gospel of Jesus Christ. This will be the theme of the next two chapters: (1) a pastoral perspective towards man-related ancestor practice, redeeming ancestor worship and ancestor cult to ancestor memorial and ancestor respect; and (2) a missiological perspective towards Heaven-related ancestor practice, exploring the knowledge of Heaven and the knowledge of principle to the knowledge of monotheism.

## Summary

I, as a contemporary Christian, have made a response to ancestor practice in several ways in this chapter. Firstly, I have drawn some biblical guiding principles to tackle the question whether ancestor worship is idol worship. The answer is affirmative for an idol is demonized by spirits and ghosts. The answer is also negative because idol is nothingness according to the knowledge of monotheism. Secondly, I have worked out a theological model to tackle the issue of ancestor practice. I affirm the good nature of ancestor practice (according to the knowledge of propriety) and disapprove the fallen nature of traditional ancestor practice. With respect to the general question whether ancestor practice is an expression of filial piety, my answer is yes and no. It depends on how we interpret the meaning of filial piety and which level of ancestor practice one is referring to. Lastly, I have proposed a ‘yes and no’ option to different kinds and types, and different forms and levels of ancestor practice in today’s China.

In the next two chapters, I shall deal with the ritual of (human) ancestor practice and the ritual of Heaven respectively. In chapter 7, I shall describe how ancestor respect and ancestor remembrance become ancestor worship and ancestor cult. Man-related ancestor practice has fallen into idol worship namely nature worship, spirit worship, manes worship and demon worship. In chapter 8, I shall describe how the ritual of Heaven has lost its original meaning of worshipping the God-on-high. The ritual has become the worship of natural objects, spiritual beings and heavenly bodies.

## Chapter 7

### Ancestor practice in its pastoral perspective: ritual transcendence

In Part I I stated: ‘to understand ancestor practice, it is necessary to ask three basic questions: (1) Who are our ancestors? (2) Where do ancestors go after death? (3) What is the ritual?’<sup>1</sup> In the last chapter, I dealt with the first question: the origin of our ancestors. In this chapter, I shall deal with the second question: life after death, and with the third question: ritual. Firstly, I shall deal with the two essential components of ancestor practice namely burial rites and tablet rites. Secondly, I shall deal with the beliefs lying behind these rituals. Finally, I will propose the notion of ritual transcendence aiming to reform and transform traditional ancestor practice into Christian ancestor practice.

#### a. Ancestor rituals

The theory of *yin-yang* is important in understanding ancestor rituals, which consisted of burial rites and tablet rites. The ritual of burial was concerned with the *po* and the ritual of tablets was connected with the *hun*.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, geomancy and almanacs which were closely related with *yin-yang* were employed in these rites. I shall deal with burial rites, tablet rites, geomancy and almanacs respectively in this section, and I shall use a diagram of *dai-qi* to illustrate the inter-relationship between them.

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<sup>1</sup> These three questions parallel to the three questions Kant asked about man:

<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Kant</i>
1. Who are our ancestors?	What can we know?
2. Where do ancestors go after death?	What shall we hope?
3. What is the ritual?	What should we do?

<sup>2</sup> For the meaning of *hun* and *po* and their relationship with *yin* and *yang*, see p23-4.

## 1. Civil act (1): three-phased burial rites

In traditional Chinese society, the dead underwent three stages of burial. The first phase of burial rites dealt with the 'wet' medium of the body while the second and third phases dealt with the 'dry' medium of the body.<sup>3</sup> Soon after death, the dead was buried in an unmarked spot in neighbouring hills. Little care was taken over the spot because it was temporary. It was a time for the bones to dry slowly through decay. This was called the 'corpse' burial.

After seven years, the skeleton was disinterred and the bones were cleaned by an expert. The remains were placed in a pottery urn, which was partially buried in the soil. The rite was called the 'bones' burial. For many people this might be their last resting place. If their descendants stopped visiting the urn, its location was simply forgotten. The purpose of the Clear Bright Festival was to 'remember' ancestors -- the location of the urn. To sweep the graveyard was to make the location identifiable and the urn recognizable.

The third stage involved the construction of graves and tombs. The bones were ultimately buried in a brick omega-shaped tomb and the rite was called 'entombment' or 'honour' burial. This might occur decades after death or even several generations afterwards. It happened only if descendants deemed it worthwhile. Very few seemed to achieve this last stage of the threefold process.<sup>4</sup>

The first phase of the burial rituals was to remove the dead from the realm of the living world. The second phase placed the dead into the supernatural world of ancestors and the third phase honoured the dead in the realm of respectful ancestors.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Hertz (1882-1915) was the first to introduce the 'wet' and the 'dry' mediums of the body in analysis of death rites. He devoted his analysis to primal Indonesian cultures, which involved two-phased death rituals. A rite was called 'wet' because it dealt with corruptible flesh, and a rite was called 'dry' because it dealt with bony remains. For details, see Davies, 1997:12-3.

<sup>4</sup> Davies, 1997:95.

## 2. Civil act (2): three-phased tablet rites

After someone died, a paper tablet was immediately established as a symbol of the deceased. A yellow rectangular paper was mounted on a stick and this was believed to be the temporary abode of the spirit of the departed. The name of the deceased was written on the front of the paper. The time and date of the deceased's birth and death were written on the back.<sup>5</sup> The paper tablet with an incense pot was placed on a table in the living room.<sup>6</sup> This was the first phase of tablet rites -- a paper tablet.

After a year, the paper tablet was burnt and was replaced by a wooden tablet. A solemn ceremony was employed. An honoured literati or mandarin was invited to dot the character *wang* with a red pencil, which then became *zhu* 'a living person'.<sup>7</sup> *Zhu* also meant 'dwell', in which case *shen-zhu* meant 'the spirit dwells'.<sup>8</sup> Before making the dot, the writer breathed upon the brush and said,

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<sup>5</sup> The names of the descendants were written on the back too. Liaw, 1985:187.

<sup>6</sup> The tablet was placed at the head of the coffin. It is important to understand the objects laid on the table: (1) The paper tablet was placed in the centre. (2) The incense pot was placed before the tablet. The incense was kept burning. (3) A bowl of rice was placed on the left of the tablet. A pair of chopsticks was stuck in the rice. This offering was called *dao-tou-fan*, the-rice-placed-at-the-rear-of-the-head. (4) A large bowl with an uncooked cock was placed on the right of the tablet. The feathers except those of the tail had been plucked off and the head was turned towards the coffin. (5) Two large candles were placed on each side of the tablet. They burnt constantly. (6) A small Chinese lamp of oil was placed on the front of the table. For details, see Dore, 1:50-4.

<sup>7</sup> The ceremony was thus called dotting-the-character (*dian-zhu*). The ritual was rather expensive but what honour it conferred on the family! The ceremony was accomplished either in the ancestral hall or at the burial ground. Dore, 1:53.

<sup>8</sup> In Chinese calligraphy, it is a basic but important skill to master how to put *jing*, *qi* and *shen* together. This explains why an honoured literati was invited to such a ceremony. For he was supposed to have mastered such a skill. If he was a mandarin, it would be better. The higher rank he had the better he was, because he was supposed to be a god (*shen*) after death. In the meantime, he still had the spiritual power and authority to summon the spirit (*shen*) of the departed to dwell (*zhu*) in the ancestor tablet (*shen-zhu pai*).

*The spirit rests in this wooden tablet,  
And the wooden tablet is spiritualized by its resting.*

*The spirit and the wood together dwell  
In ages of unending spring!*

The breathing upon the brush was a very significant act of communion. Sometimes, the blood of the sons of the departed was used to dot the tablet.<sup>9</sup> This was the second phase of the tablet rites -- a wooden tablet. The eldest son was supposed to erect and possess the domestic tablets, both the paper and the wooden ones.<sup>10</sup>

After three generations, sometimes five generations, the domestic tablet was burnt<sup>11</sup> and it could be replaced by another wooden tablet deposited in a clan ancestor hall. Theoretically, every member of the clan had the right and equal footing to be placed in the hall. Practically, there was the question of the admission and arrangement of tablets in the hall.<sup>12</sup> Rules were laid down -- whose tablets were to be admitted, and how much money had to be paid for installing them.<sup>13</sup>

Criteria for admission were: (1) being a mandarin,<sup>14</sup> (2) being prominent on a scholastic basis,<sup>15</sup> (3) excelling in filial or fraternal conduct, (4) making

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<sup>9</sup> This established the unique relationship between the deceased and the descendants -- a blood tie.

<sup>10</sup> Since the spirit of the departed would dwell in the tablet, only one tablet could exist for one person. Younger brothers wishing to worship their ancestors must go to the house of their oldest brother. Freedman, 1970:82-3; 1979a:297.

<sup>11</sup> Sometimes the wooden tablet was buried in or near the grave of the person they represented. In some parts of China, the tablet was removed to a clan ancestor hall directly. Freedman, 1970:82.

<sup>12</sup> Freedman, 1970:79.

<sup>13</sup> The tablets could not be accepted free of charge. Otherwise, the ancestor hall would have been overcrowded. Freedman, 1970:79.

<sup>14</sup> In addition to their tablets to commemorate them, there were also honorific boards on which their glory was set out. Freedman, 1970:84.

<sup>15</sup> Scholars and gentlemen knew best the ancestor rites and how to carry them out. Freedman, 1970:80.

contributions to common funds, (5) for ordinary members of the clan -- dying without a blemish on their conduct.<sup>16</sup> The exclusion from tablets in an ancestor hall was a disgrace to descendants socially and politically.<sup>17</sup> Hence, it was an honour for descendants to erect a 'hall' tablet.<sup>18</sup> This was the third phase of tablet rites -- an honor tablet.<sup>19</sup>

In sum, both burial rites and tablet rites consisted of three phases in which the first two phases stressed ancestor 'remembrance' and the last phase focused on ancestor 'honour'. In other words, ancestor remembrance and ancestor honour had a specific reference in the strict sense of usage. Ancestor remembrance referred to the corpse burial and the bones burial, and the erection of the paper tablet and the domestic tablet. Ancestor honour referred to the entombment burial and the erection of hall tablet.

	<i>Burial rites</i>	<i>Tablet rites</i>
ancestor remembrance	corpse burial (funeral service)	paper tablet (immediately after death)
	bones burial (7 years after death)	domestic tablet (1 year after death)
ancestor honour	entombment burial (within first generation or after several generations)	hall tablet (after three or five generations)

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<sup>16</sup> Freedman, 1970:79.

<sup>17</sup> Once an ancestor was placed in an ancestor hall, he ceased to be an object of personal devotion (family memorial) and became part of the ritual center of a lineage segment (kinship solidarity). Ancestor practices in the halls took on a professional and 'classical' aspect which was lacking at the household level. Freedman, 1970:84-5.

<sup>18</sup> Freedman called the tablets of the second and the third phases 'domestic tablet' and 'hall tablet' respectively.

<sup>19</sup> In Amoy and the area adjacent to it, de Groot reported that hall tablets were bigger than domestic tablets, and that they were decorated as their descendants could afford. Freedman, 1970:81-2.

However, ancestor memorial and ancestor respect were not exclusive to each other in the general sense. Within ancestor memorial, there was ancestor respect, and within ancestor respect there was memorial. The situation is similar to the diagram of *dai-qi*: within *yang* there is *yin*, and within *yin* there is *yang*.

### 3. Religious act (1): geomancy and grave sites

Sometimes, the coffins of the poor were buried in large graveyards established by lineages. Those with power and status would bury their ancestors according to geomancy (*feng-shui*). In Chinese theory the burial site determined the prosperity of the living.<sup>20</sup> In reality the prosperity of the living determined the burial site.<sup>21</sup> With a rise in fortune, the immediate descendants of the poor would transfer their recent deceased to more propitious surroundings.<sup>22</sup>

Very often, prosperity which followed from a well-sited burial was a temptation to the less fortunate. They tried to tap the good *feng-shui* by burying their dead on or near the sites which had proved favourable.<sup>23</sup> Changes in fortune from generation to generation and the constant search for better *feng-shui* grave sites encouraged people to disperse their dead.<sup>24</sup> The competition for good grave sites often led to

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<sup>20</sup> The theory of *feng-shui* states that the geomagnetic influences (the 'winds' and 'waters') of the landscape are channeled through the bones of the ancestors to their descendants. By geomancy, a Chinese may seek riches and successes for himself to outpace his agnates. Freedman, 1979a:298.

<sup>21</sup> Freedman, 1970:78.

<sup>22</sup> Freedman, 1970:78.

<sup>23</sup> Poaching was a serious offense and might be the cause of bitter disputes or even court cases. Freedman, 1979b:197.

<sup>24</sup> A Chinese proverb speaks of the excessive scattering of graves produced by the pursuit of *feng-shui*: 'In the southern mountains to bury the father, and in the northern mountains to bury the mother.' Freedman, 1970:78.

disputes and rivalry between members of a family, between groups of different status, between two lineages or even between two villages.<sup>25</sup>

In China before 1949, coffins covered with straw or grass were frequently seen in the midst of fields or on hill-sides because: (1) a *feng-shui* burial site had not been found, (2) the time for burial was found to be unlucky, or (3) women who died in childbirth must remain exposed in the open for three years.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. Religious act (2): almanacs and burial time

If geomancy aims for sacred places, almanacs (*tong-shu*) aim for sacred times.<sup>27</sup> The Imperial Almanac laid down what should be done and what should not be done on certain days and certain months.<sup>28</sup> If one did not follow their advice, failure or misfortune would befall oneself. There was a fixed and legal time for performing burial rites and ancestor practices.

Families buried their dead and acted according to the Imperial Almanac in the hope of seeking happiness and avoiding misfortune.<sup>29</sup> For instance, one must not weep for the deceased on the day of the month denoted by the cyclical character

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<sup>25</sup> *Feng-shui* is a form of divination. The link between the general properties of a grave site and the fate of those who occupy it lies in the horoscope. Each person has his own 'eight characters' expressing the time and date of his birth. As a result, members of a family will not be equally advantaged by a grave site. For details, see Freedman, 1979d:328-9.

<sup>26</sup> For details, see Dore, I:57.

<sup>27</sup> A *feng-shui* practitioner often carried a magnetic compass, an almanac and the *Book of Changes*. The compass was the practitioner's instrument *par excellence*. The almanac was used for calendric and astrological data. The divining process rests on the two axes of space and time, and the *Book of Changes* was the bridge between canonical metaphysics and divination on the one hand and the *feng-shui* on the other. For details, see Freedman, 1979d:322-3.

<sup>28</sup> Months were divided into lucky and unlucky. Days were divided into three classes: lucky, unlucky, and neither lucky nor unlucky. For details, see Dore, 4:385-7.

<sup>29</sup> Dore, 4:390.

*chen*. When paying a visit of condolence, one should put on a smiling countenance.<sup>30</sup>

Another example was that everybody born on the same cyclical day as the deceased should abstain from approaching the coffin. In such circumstances, one should wear festal dress and avoid following the funeral procession even of one's own parents. Otherwise, one would risk the misfortune of death for oneself.<sup>31</sup>

When a man died, his *hun* ascended to heaven and united with the *qi* of heaven while his *po* descended to earth and became one with the *qi* of earth. The tablet rites were concerned with the *hun* and almanacs were related with the *qi* of heaven. The burial rites were concerned with the *po* and geomancy was related with the *qi* of earth. In short, burial rites, tablet rites, geomancy and the almanac were each involved in a network of relationships which involved all of them.

In this section, the three-phased burial rites and the three-phased tablet rites have been described. Ancestor remembrance and ancestor honour in the strict sense denoted an act of burial rites and tablet rites. Ancestor memorial and ancestor respect in the general sense denoted an attitude of remembrance and respect. Moreover, the social customs of performing geomancy and consulting almanacs associated with burial rites have been described. Geomancy and almanacs are religious beliefs associated with spiritual powers and divination.

If one asked whether ancestor practice is idol worship, as intimated, we need to help the inquirer to clarify the question. In this case, we assume the inquirer is referring to the burial rites and the tablet rites. Then, I suggest the educational and pastoral approach should be focused on the following:

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<sup>30</sup> Dore, 4:396.

<sup>31</sup> Dore, 4:396.

1. As it has been shown, the three-phased burial rites are a civil act. They comprise the corpse burial, the bones burial and the entombment burial. Hence, ancestor practice referring to three-phased burial rites is not idol worship.
2. If ancestor practice refers to the three-phased tablet rites, my answer is yes and no. For the tablet can be an idol (which is demonized) and it need not be an idol (which is nothingness).
3. If ancestor practice refers to the burial rites associated with geomancy and/or almanacs, my answer is definitely yes. For geomancy and almanacs are associated with spiritual forces. From a biblical perspective, we are forbidden to consult a geomancer to find *feng-shui* grave sites.<sup>32</sup> Hence, burial rites associated with geomancy and/or almanacs are idol worship.
4. If ancestor practice refers to the tablet rites associated with geomancy and/or almanacs, my answer is definitely yes. For geomancy and almanacs are religious beliefs with spiritual powers. From a pastoral perspective, there is no need to consult a spiritual diviner or almanacs to choose a 'lucky' sacred time to remember and respect ancestors. If one does so, I shall say that such act of ancestor practice is idol worship.

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<sup>32</sup> '... do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no-one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead.' Deuteronomy 18:10.

## b. Ritual beliefs

The Chinese often see funeral rites as both a taboo and a blessing. They have to make sure that the corpse is properly disposed of, and that it can no longer be a source of danger to the living but rather a source of blessing. In this section I shall analyze the nature of the beliefs underlying ancestor rituals under the following heads: cosmology, pneumatology, ancestor worship and ancestor cult.

### 1. Myth (1): three layers of world view

Ancestor practice was generally based on the theory of *yin-yang*. Whitehead stated, 'In the philosophy of organism this ultimate is termed "creativity" and God is its primordial, non-temporal accident.'<sup>33</sup> The Daoists said too that this ultimate was creativity, and that creativity was the *Dao*. In chapter 43 of the *Laozi* we read:

*The Dao gives birth to the One. [qi]  
The One gives birth to the Two. [yin and yang]  
The Two gives birth to the Three. [Heaven, Earth, Water]  
The Three gives birth to the myriad creatures.*

The numbers used here are simply intended to represent the process of creativity, the process of differentiation from non-differentiation, and the realization of the diversities of concrete existence emanating from the unity of the primordial *Dao*.<sup>34</sup> 'Heaven' represented the realm of pure *yang* and 'Water' represented the realm of pure *yin*. The middle layer 'Earth' symbolized the realm of *yin* and *yang* interacting.<sup>35</sup> Man was the typical harmonious being -- the most spiritual,

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<sup>33</sup> Whitehead in *Process and Reality* as quoted in Chang, 1963:56.

<sup>34</sup> Chang, 1963:56.

<sup>35</sup> Saso, 1991:352-3.

intellectual and material being -- ever made from such an interaction. The *yin-yang* theory governed not only the worldview of Daoism, but also neo-Confucianism and Chinese Buddhism. The three layers of the cosmos were reflected in their own terms:

	<i>Daoism</i>	<i>Confucianism</i>	<i>Buddhism</i>
upper layer	Heaven	Heaven	Heaven
middle layer	Earth	Man	Mountain
lower layer	Water	Earth	Hell

## 2. Myth (2): three levels of spiritual beings

The three layers of the cosmos were reflected in the head, chest and belly of the microcosm of the body.<sup>36</sup> Through meditative breathing man achieved the natural integration of self with the universe.<sup>37</sup> The fundamental text on meditative breathing is the work entitled *Meditation on Identity and Unity*.<sup>38</sup> The book became famous for commentaries written by Zhuzi in the twelfth century and Yu Yan in the thirteenth century. The basic idea of the work was:

if man seizes for himself the secret of Heaven and Earth in order thereby to compound for himself the great elixir of the golden fluid, he will then exist coeval with Heaven and Earth from the beginning.... Each time that Heaven unites itself with the Earth seize for yourself the secret springs of the creative activities of *yin* and *yang*.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Saso, 1991:352.

<sup>37</sup> For details, see Chang, 1963:134-68.

<sup>38</sup> It was attributed to Wei Boyang, a legendary immortal who supposedly lived in the second century. Chang, 1963:134; Robinet, 1997:220.

<sup>39</sup> Chang, 1963:134.

The basic theory of this internal alchemy is that the inner elixir was compounded through *jing*, *qi*, and *shen*.<sup>40</sup> In addition to the transmutation of *jing* to *qi* and transmutation of *qi* to *shen*, Daoist practitioners advocated the transmutation of *shen* to *xu* -- a return to nothingness.<sup>41</sup> In *Laozi*, the Dao was nothingness, non-being and void.

Before man was born, the phenomenon of non-being was unique and primordial. But as soon as man was born, such non-being was separated into two: *ming* (life or destiny) and *xing* (the nature of man).<sup>42</sup> In other words, *ming* was the substance of life and death,<sup>43</sup> and *xing* was the root of spiritual consciousness.<sup>44</sup>

The microcosmic universe within parallels the macrocosmic universe without:

	<i>individual life</i>	<i>individual spirit</i>	<i>life after death</i>
<i>Yin</i>	<i>jing</i> (essence)	<i>po</i> (earthly soul)	<i>gui</i> (ghost)
<i>Zhong</i> <sup>45</sup>	<i>qi</i> (breath)	<i>ling</i> (human soul)	<i>ling</i> (spirit)
<i>Yang</i>	<i>shen</i> (spirit/god)	<i>hun</i> (heavenly soul)	<i>shen</i> (god)

In Daoist practices, meditative breathing of *jing*, *qi* and *shen* was the way to become a ‘god’ and the transmutation of *shen* to *xu* was a return to ‘nothingness’.

<sup>40</sup> See Chang, 1963:135ff.

<sup>41</sup> *Xu* means nothingness, non-being or void. For details, see Wong, 1997:178-183.

<sup>42</sup> Chang, 1963:136.

<sup>43</sup> *Ming* was the beginning of breath. However, *ming* itself was not breath. Chang, 1963:136-7.

<sup>44</sup> *Xing* was the beginning of spiritual consciousness, yet it was not spiritual consciousness. It was where spiritual consciousness had its origin. In my seven-ladder model of man, *xing* has three manifestations namely animal nature, human nature and divine nature. Spiritual consciousness refers to human nature and divine nature.

<sup>45</sup> *Zhong* means middle, medium or mean. It denotes the interaction, equilibrium or harmony of *yin* and *yang*.

The former is called the way of creativity and the latter is called the way of reversal.<sup>46</sup> When a 'god' returned (*gui*) to 'nothingness', cosmic renewal began. In other words, the life and death of an individual reflects creativity and the renewal of the universe.

### 3. *Shen* and ancestor worship: worship gods

If there were 'strong' and 'weak' Christians in Corinth, it was not surprising that there were 'strong' and 'weak' Daoists and Confucianists in China.<sup>47</sup> The strong either: (1) simply denied the survival of a soul after death, or (2) if they did speak of immortality, they conceived it in the sense of the holistic universe and never in the sense of a micro-cosmic individual.<sup>48</sup> Such a perspective is basic in chapter 7 of *The Prince of Huainan*:<sup>49</sup>

Heaven and Earth, in their revolutions, permeate each other, and the 'ten thousand things' combine to form the One. If we understand this One, there is no single thing that we cannot understand; but if we do not understand this One, there is no single thing that we can understand. For example, living in the world, I too am a thing. Can I not then realize that with me the things in the world are made complete, and that without me these things are incomplete?... In life I am added to the kind that have form, just as in death I am submerged among the kind that are formless. Yet the number of things (having form) is not increased by my life, nor is the thickness of the earth increased by my death.... The Creator's moulding and guidance of

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<sup>46</sup> These two complimentary ways are also called: (1) the principle of being and the principle of nonbeing, (2) the principle of activity and the principle of passivity, and (3) the principle of movement and the principle of quiescence.

<sup>47</sup> During the Han dynasty, it was difficult to differentiate between the Daoist *fangshi* and the 'Confucian literati'. During the Six Dynasties, a significant number of the elite studied *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* and practiced longevity practices. It was only under the the Song dynasty that neo-Confucianists cut themselves off from Daoism (from which they had borrowed so much). Robinet, 1997:187-8.

<sup>48</sup> Bodde, 1942:324.

<sup>49</sup> A Daoist work compiled under the patronage of Liu An (d. 122 BC), Prince of Huainan.

things is like a potter's kneading of the clay. The earth which he has taken and formed into basins and bowls is in no wise different from that which he has left in the ground. And when the vessels which he has created become broken, they are dispersed and return to their source, where they are in no wise different from the basins and bowls as they were made.<sup>50</sup>

Without the above passage as a guide, the text which followed only a few pages later might easily be open to mis-interpretation:

The body may die, but the spirit never undergoes change. With this absence of change it replies to the never ending thousand shifts and ten thousand turnings of the flux (of the universe). What undergoes change reverts to the formless, but what does not undergo change remains co-existent with Heaven and Earth.<sup>51</sup>

Certainly it was difficult for lay people to grasp and understand such a text in a scholarly and philosophical context. The weak simply accepted: (1) the immortality of the human soul, (2) the transformation of man to god, and (3) the pantheistic nature of the universe.<sup>52</sup> In sum, the weak embodied ancestor practice with nature worship and spirit worship. They honoured and worshipped immortals, genii, deified hermits and magicians.<sup>53</sup> They offered sacrifices to heavenly bodies, mountains, rivers and earthly objects. In other words, ancestor practice became simultaneously nature worship and spirit worship to the weak.

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<sup>50</sup> Bodde, 1942:322-3.

<sup>51</sup> Bodde, 1942:323.

<sup>52</sup> This concerns hermeneutical principles: (1) philosophical and 'spiritual' interpretation, and (2) literal and 'superficial' interpretation.

<sup>53</sup> *The General History of Gods and Immortals*, which was published for the first time in 1640, recorded a series of biographical sketches of 800 saints, sages and divinities. A second edition was published in 1700, in 22 books. A third revised edition was published in 1787, in 39 books. Dore, 7:i, 441.

#### 4. *Gui* and ancestor cult: worship demons

To the weak, a man could become a god, a spirit or a ghost after death. Stars and constellations were regarded as the abodes of gods. Mount Kunlun and the Three Fairy Islands were paradises where earthly souls, genii and immortals would live.<sup>54</sup> Even the most wicked villains could have some chance of immortality if they performed the correct rituals or ingested the elixir of life.

With the advent of Buddhism, the idea of Hell was introduced to China. Stories of terrible supernatural beings who ruled over the dead were brought to China too.<sup>55</sup> The ideas of demon and devil were added to the Chinese word *gui*, which literally means ghost.<sup>56</sup>

During the reign of the Tang Emperor Su-zong (756-763), a foreign Buddhist prince-hermit Jin Qianjue arrived in China.<sup>57</sup> It is noteworthy that his arrival coincided with Amoghavajra's arrival.<sup>58</sup> The life of the hermit-monk soon attracted the attention of the local people and his fame began to spread throughout the neighbourhood.<sup>59</sup> Jin Qianjue died at 99 years old, sitting cross-legged in his coffin. Three years later his tomb was opened and the corpse was found in a state of perfect preservation -- a sign of holiness. His disciple gave him the title Jin Ti-zang

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<sup>54</sup> Mount Kunlun was the axis of the world, whose summit touched the Polestar and whose base was rooted in the Yellow Springs (the underworld). Robinet, 1997:94.

<sup>55</sup> Hades is called *Naraka* in Sanskrit, which is the abode of the wicked and demons. The ruler of this realm is Yama, the Vedic god of the dead. Hades is rendered into Chinese as *di-yu*, which means an earth-prison. Dore, 7:250.

<sup>56</sup> Walters, 1992:69.

<sup>57</sup> It was said to be from Korea, and of noble if not royal descent. Dore, 7:238; Walters, 1992:157.

<sup>58</sup> He was famed for his charms and talismans, and his ability to bring rain. He introduced into Buddhism the worship of the dead and he was the founder of the Hungry Ghost Festival.

<sup>59</sup> For details of his life and legend, see Dore, 7:235-49.

(Golden Earth-Womb).<sup>60</sup> Later he was deified as Ti-zang Wang (Earth-Womb King). Mount Jiuhua became a sacred mountain, where his tomb was located. He was superior to and distinct from Yanluo Wang (the King of Hell). Every year, pilgrims flocked to the mountain to beg him to deliver their ancestors from Hades and to protect themselves from the tortures of the Infernal Regions.

During the Song dynasty, a Daoist monk Dan Chi went in a trance to the spirit-world and wrote the *Treatise on the Infernal Regions* for the benefit of the living.<sup>61</sup> The underworld was fixed in Sichuan province<sup>62</sup> and was divided into ten courts.<sup>63</sup> Each was administered by a king with his officials.<sup>64</sup> This hell was like a purgatory.<sup>65</sup> The soul was purified before it reincarnated. Every form of

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<sup>60</sup> His surname was Jin meaning 'golden'.

<sup>61</sup> Dore, 7:iii, 254-6.

<sup>62</sup> Near the city of Fengdu is a high mountain. During the reign of Ming Emperor Wan-li (1573-1620), the governor of the province named Gou penetrated into the interior of the mountain. He was said to have met Guan-gong (the Chinese God of War) who showed him Hades in detail. Since then, the city of Fendu had been constructed in the blue print of Hades. For details of the legend, see Dore, 7:254-6.

<sup>63</sup> Brahmanism reckoned there were 21 hells. Buddhism borrowed the idea and function from Brahmanism. Buddhism originally had eight hot hells but the Northern School added eight cold hells. It was under the Song dynasty that the ten courts originated. The first court was a kind of ante-chamber, where souls were first examined and then conducted to their destined court. The tenth court was an outer chamber, where souls were born into their next life after their crimes had been punished. The number ten was thus practically reduced to eight. Each of these eight courts comprised a large hell and sixteen smaller hells. Dore, 7:256-8.

<sup>64</sup> The Buddhist doctrine of Hades was much modified in the *Treatise*. The kings of the ten courts were indigenized with Chinese symbolic figures or places. The kings of the courts were:

1st court: King of Grand Qin [dynasty]	6th court: King of City Bian
2nd court: King of River Chu	7th court: King of Mount Tai
3rd court: King of Emperor Song [dynasty]	8th court: King of Emperor Capital
4th court: King of Five Ministers	9th court: King of Equal Rank
5th court: King of Yama (or Judge Bao Cheng)	10th court: King of Turning Wheel (Buddhist Wheel of Dharma)

<sup>65</sup> The Buddhist hells were not eternal. Although punishment was not eternal, its shortest duration in any one hell was 500 years. Each day in hell was equal to 50 on earth. There was a relativity of time. According to tradition, ghosts only knew the past but not the future. On the contrary, gods only knew the future but not the past because time in heaven was relatively faster than time on earth. This explains why the divination concerning ancestor practice comprised both almanac and geomancy, diviner and spirit-medium. Dore, 7:258-9.

torture, physical and mental, was found there. The crimes punished exhibited Chinese life in a nutshell.<sup>66</sup>

When the *ling* of a person left the body, it meant the separation of *hun* and *po* and hence the death of a person. The *po* would stay with the corpse and would go to the Yellow Springs. However, the *po* would become (often malevolent) *gui* if proper funeral offerings were not made.<sup>67</sup> As for the *hun*, the road to paradise was so perilous that unless the deceased was of high rank or someone spiritual, it would be difficult for it to reach its destination.<sup>68</sup> The *ling* would reside in the ancestor tablet and receive daily offerings. The trinity of three souls reflects the three layers of the traditional Chinese worldview. Traditional ancestor practices were hence closely related with Chinese cosmology and mythology.

	<i>Cosmology</i>	<i>Pneumatology</i>	<i>Mythology</i>
ancestor worship	Heaven	heavenly soul	nature worship spirit worship
ancestor rites	Man	human soul	burial rites tablet rites
ancestor cult	Earth	earthly soul	manes worship demon worship

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<sup>66</sup> The tortures endured and instruments used were borrowed from official and domestic life. They included: the extremes of cold and heat, cutting, flaying, racking, slow burning, harrowing with red-hot prongs, insulting and tantalizing. Dore, 7:261. For details, see Dore, 7:262-302.

<sup>67</sup> In Han times, clay models and even actual domestic items were buried with the deceased. To this day, paper models and mock money are burnt.

<sup>68</sup> 'Poetry of the third century BC reveals that it was customary to try to dissuade the *hun* from embarking on the hazardous adventure, and return to its body to die a second death. If, however, the soul could not be persuaded to abandon its quest, then a cosmological map of the next world would be a useful addition the funerary furnishings.' Walters, 1992:84. See also p.24 n.65.

In this section, three forms of ancestor practice have been introduced. The Confucian form of ancestor practice is a civil act. The Daoist form and the Buddhist form of ancestor practice are religious acts. The Daoist rituals have shifted ancestor practice into nature worship and spirit worship. The Buddhist rituals have deviated ancestor practice into manes worship and demon worship. Since the Three Teachings have mixed and merged into one, ancestor practice has become a complex Chinese ideological phenomenon with three layers of worldview and three levels of spiritual beings.

If parishioners ask whether ancestor practice is idol worship, a minister need to help him or her clarify which form of ancestor practice they are talking about. The minister also needs to help the inquirers understand the meaning of each form of ancestor practice before aiding him to make their own decisions about the question they ask. From my personal experience, it is always better to help the inquirers to find the answer themselves than to give them a direct answer yes or no. My personal pastoral view about different forms of ancestor practice is as follows:

1. The Confucian form of ancestor practice is not idol worship. As intimated, it is a civil act referring to the three-phased burial rites. If it refers to the three-phased tablet rites, the answer will be yes and no according to Paul's self-understanding principle. The answer is yes when the tablet becomes an idol according to the weak. The answer is no because the tablet is nothingness according to the strong.
2. The Daoist form of ancestor practice is idol worship. Although the strong Daoist does not believe any individual immortality, the weak does. The weak identifies ancestor practice as nature worship and spirit worship. According to Paul's

stumbling block principle, I shall treat the Daoist form of ancestor practice as idol worship.

3. The Buddhist form of ancestor practice is idol worship. The strong Buddhist aims at nirvana (nothingness after death), but the weak Buddhist believes life after death. The weak treats ancestor practice as manes worship and/or demon worship. According to Paul's stumbling block principle, I shall treat the Buddhist form of ancestor practice as idol worship.

As we have analyzed different forms and different patterns of ancestor practice, I have adopted a 'yes and no' option to the question whether ancestor practice is an idol worship. In the next section, I will attempt to preserve the ethical dimension of ancestor practice and eliminate the religious dimension of ancestor practice. A modernized civil form of ancestor practice will be proposed. In addition, I shall provide a Christian interpretation of such a modernized form of ancestor practice.

### c. Ritual transformation

Confucianism was the state religion throughout the Han dynasty. It was tainted with beliefs in spirits and ghosts, omens and prophecies. Xunzi (312?-238 BC) exercised a great influence on the Chinese world during the Han dynasty.<sup>69</sup> He advocated the importance of rites as a corrective to the chaos of the time. He also taught religious beliefs within the limits of reason. In this section, I shall adopt Xunzi's social theory of secularization, socialization and education as key categories and propose myth elimination, myth preservation and myth re-interpretation.<sup>70</sup> Finally, I shall propose the notion of ritual transcendence as a way of reforming the traditional ancestor practice into a modernized ancestor practice which may be in accordance with Christian faith. I shall also provide a Christian interpretation to such a new form of civil rites.

#### 1. Secularization: myth elimination

*Li* was originally denoted as sacrifice and was connected with the spirits. Xunzi almost completely eliminated superstitious belief from his thinking.<sup>71</sup> Ghosts were

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<sup>69</sup> Xunzi had remarkable success as a teacher. Two of his famous students were Han Fei and Li Si. Han Fei was the last great philosopher of the Warring States period and Li Si was the minister who made the Qin dynasty the first universal state in Chinese history. Since he was the teacher of both Han Fei and Li Si, he was degraded when his two students were officially anathematized. See Knoblock, 1988:36-7.

<sup>70</sup> This can be compared to Johnson's [The Origins of Demythologizing: Philosophy and Historiography in the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann] understanding that Bultmann's concept of myth consists of three elements: (1) the *religionsgeschichtliche* formulation of myth, (2) the Enlightenment formulation of myth, and (3) the existential formulation of myth.

If Johnson's analysis is correct, this helps us a great deal in understanding what Bultmann really means by demythologization. In the *religionsgeschichtliche* formulation of myth, it is religious and soteriologically oriented. The myth is about the cross and crucifixion as a saving act, and it should be preserved. In the Enlightenment formulation of myth, it is epistemologically and scientifically oriented. Myth as a pre-scientific mode of thought, such as the projection or objectification of supernatural powers and forces resulting in a three-tier universe, and should be eliminated. In the existential formulation of myth, it is anthropologically and existentially oriented. The purpose is to express a particular understanding of existence and transcendence. Such kinds of myth should be re-interpreted. For details, see Mak, 1992:48-50.

<sup>71</sup> Creel, 1953:129-30.

just imagined by confused people for they did not see them. Beating a drum to cure rheumatism would not cure the disease but wear out the drum. If someone prayed for rain and got rain, Xunzi argued that if they had not prayed it would have rained anyway.

According to Xunzi, the proper conduct of sacrificial rites was the highest expression of refinement. What was sacrificed was 'neither substance nor shadow'.<sup>72</sup> Rituals were carried out simply for the expression of emotional feelings, social values and educational purposes. The common people considered rituals as serving spirits but the gentleman was aware that rituals really had to do with the living.<sup>73</sup>

During the three years of the mourning period, certain religious rituals were performed. Traditional mourning rituals showed a strong interest in: (1) the existential situation of the departed after death, (2) atonement for the deceased, and (3) communication with ancestral spirits. Such rituals aimed to comfort the grieving person and to help the departed pass through a spiritual journey. After burial, the living descendants began a seven-day period of mourning. The ritual was reckoned in multiples of seven days within the full 'seven seven' (49 days) and was marked by a meal to honour the dead.<sup>74</sup> During that period, ideally, the descendants did not emerge from their house and did not do any work. After the seven-seven ritual had ended, descendants were no longer considered to be a threat to the community and they were free to participate in community activities.<sup>75</sup> For most people, the

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<sup>72</sup> Creel, 1953:130.

<sup>73</sup> Creel, 1953:130.

<sup>74</sup> Watson, 1982:165. For the details of such ritual, see Watson, 1982:165-6.

<sup>75</sup> Every household in the village had to send one representative to the funeral to share the burden of death pollution. A large turn-out was not only a sign of respect to the deceased but also a way of helping the bereaved with the problem of contamination. The ritual of sharing death pollution might be the distribution of contaminated coins, or the pouring of wine and the cutting of a white cord.

completion of the first cycle of seven-days marked their entry into society. The seven-seven ritual was closely linked with the belief in seven *po* and ten courts.

There was a popular belief that there were three *hun* and seven *po*.<sup>76</sup> After death, the first *hun* would go to heaven, the second to the ancestor tablet and the third to the graveyard. The seven *po* would disappear in seven weeks after death, one each week. The third *hun* would pass through the ten courts.

<i>The Court</i>	<i>The hearing</i> <sup>77</sup>	<i>The date of hearing</i>
1st court	registrar: the book of life and death	first seven
2nd court	reward and punishment: according to the ledger of merits and demerits	second seven
3rd court	law and punishment: according to Chinese law <sup>78</sup>	third seven
4th court	minor crimes: lying, cheating	fourth seven
5th court	Vedic god Yama presided <sup>79</sup>	fifth seven

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Death pollution was associated with the decaying flesh and the 'killing airs', that emanated from the corpse.

When the news of an imminent death was spread, pregnant women and children were advised to stay away from the house in question. Neighbours closed their doors and found an excuse to be away for a few hours. Piglets and calves were removed from sheds nearby. These precautions were taken because the 'killing airs' permeated the house of the deceased and clung to the mourners 'like an invisible cloud' (*hun* is made up of 'cloud' and 'ghost').

Certain members of the community were not allowed to attend the funeral because they were vulnerable to the 'killing airs': (1) children under fourteen years old, (2) pregnant women and their husbands, (3) households with an infant who was not yet one month old, and (4) people of 'unlucky ages', divined by a fortune teller, who matched them with the deceased's horoscope. Watson, 1982:158-9, 169.

<sup>76</sup> The theory of the three *hun* and ten *po* was first mentioned by Ge Hong in the fourth century.

<sup>77</sup> Ge, 1987:332. For the details of administration, various punishments in the ten courts, crimes punished in these hells and means of escaping these punishments, see Dore, 7:262-302.

<sup>78</sup> Crimes punished in these hells included: (1) those who prevented funerals taking place in due time, (2) those who dug up a coffin, and did not bury it elsewhere, (3) those who sold the family burial ground, dug it up, or opened it with the plough. Dore, 7:271.

<sup>79</sup> The hell was called 'Hell of Lamentations'. The corpse on earth had already been so decomposed that the soul could not animate it anew. Crimes punished in these hells included: (1) those who refused

6th court	adultery, theft, robbery	sixth seven
7th court	crimes committed by monks and priests	seventh seven
8th court	serious crimes	100 <sup>th</sup> day
9th court	unfilial and unfraternal crimes <sup>80</sup>	1st anniversary day
10 <sup>th</sup> court	Buddhist King presided: wheel of rebirth	3 <sup>rd</sup> anniversary day

During the early centuries of Buddhism in China, the Chinese found it difficult to accept the Buddhist theory of no-self. On the one hand, the Buddhists taught the theory of karma and reincarnation, not only in the human but also in the animal and spirit worlds. On the other hand, the Buddhists denied the existence of a permanent self that might pass through stages of successive rebirths.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, the theory of no-self denied the Chinese belief and practice of ancestor rites, which presupposed a permanent self. In accommodating Chinese ancestor practice, the Buddhists reversed the early Buddhist theory of no-self by advocating a belief in a definite soul surviving through countless existences.<sup>82</sup> Tang Yongtong stated quite categorically:

From the very beginning the Chinese failed to comprehend the deep meaning of Buddhism [as to the non-existence of the atman]... Buddhism spoke about the endless cycle of transmigration. Because of this, the doctrine that the soul does not perish, but is carried on as a result of karma, became a current belief [among the Chinese].<sup>83</sup>

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to believe in Buddha and the spirits, (2) those who denied retribution in an after-life, (3) those who burnt religious works. Dore, 7:280-1.

<sup>80</sup> At the right of the Ninth Court stood the City of Suicides. It was a place of torment and torture for those who killed themselves out of passion or slight and trivial motives. Those who cut short their lives through fidelity, filial piety or loyalty, were not brought to this city. Dore, 7:296.

<sup>81</sup> Bodde, 1942:325.

<sup>82</sup> Bodde, 1942:325.

<sup>83</sup> Bodde, 1942:325-6.

In addition to the belief in a permanent soul, the Buddhists propagated the teachings of hell and punishment, merit-making and atonement, and karma and rebirth. These teachings seemed to satisfy the quest for knowledge of life after death, yet they filled the Chinese with anxiety and fear regarding the final resting place of their ancestral spirits. Contemporary Chinese Christians should learn a lesson here that it is unwise to accommodate Christian faith with traditional ancestor practice, which has already intermingled with popular Buddhist and Daoist beliefs and rituals.

According to Paul's guiding principles namely the stumbling-block principle and the self-restraint principle, the following precautions should be taken into account: (1) The seven seven ritual and other similar rituals<sup>84</sup>, which presupposed a belief in ghosts and in the ten courts, should not be adopted. (2) Food offerings, incense, paper money and utilities, which have been identified with the Buddhist theory and praxis of atonement, should not be used. (3) Geomancy and almanac, which have been linked with spiritual forces and divination, should not be consulted. (4) The Hungry Ghost Festival, which was practiced by Buddhists and Daoists, should not be kept.

## 2. Socialization: myth preservation

If Mencius is an *a priori* transcendental philosopher, then Xunzi is *a posteriori* existential thinker. In Xunzi's day, the stratification and organization of society had broken down to a considerable degree. He advocated *li* as a corrective. He wrote :

If all men were equal in power, the state could not be unified; if all stood on the same level, there could be no government. As soon as heaven and earth existed, there was the distinction of superior and inferior. When the first wise king assumed the throne there were classes.

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<sup>84</sup> For instance, rituals held on the hundredth day, the first anniversary day and the third anniversary day.

Two nobles cannot serve each other, and two commoners cannot give each other orders -- this is a law of nature. If a man were equal in power and position, and all liked and disliked the same things, since there would not be enough to go around the inevitable consequence would be strife. The result of this would be disorder, and the impoverishment of all.

To forestall such disorder the ancient kings established *li* and justice to divide the people into the classes of rich and poor, noble and plebeian, so that all might be under control. This is the fundamental necessity in caring for the empire.<sup>85</sup>

In other words, one's conduct should be governed by *li*. If it was not, there would be chaos. According to Xunzi, *li* was artificially invented and hence *li* was not natural to human nature. Yet, it was this cultural invention and heritage that marked the difference between man and beasts.<sup>86</sup> Ritual principle was the fundamental basis of society by which relationships between men were defined.<sup>87</sup> *The Book of Rites* states:

The parrot can talk, but it is not distinct from other flying birds; the orangutan can speak, but it too is not apart from other animals. Now when men today are lacking ritual principles, though they too can speak, do they not also have merely the mind of an animal? Only wild animals lack ritual principles. Hence parents and offspring indiscriminately share females of the species. For this reason, the sages created ritual principles to instruct man and cause him to know that it is only through rites that they are different from the beasts.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> From Creel, 1953:131.

<sup>86</sup> '... what makes a man human lies not in his being a featherless biped but in his ability to draw boundaries. Even though wild animals have parents and offspring, there is no natural affection between them as between father and son, and though there are male and female of the species, there is no proper separation of sexes. Hence, the proper way of Man lies in nothing other than his ability to draw boundaries.' Knoblock, 1988:206.

<sup>87</sup> Xunzi conceived human relationship in terms of unequal pairs: ruler and subject, husband and wife, father and son, elder and younger brother. The superior position must deal gently with the inferior position and the lower position must obey the superior position and follow his example. Knoblock, 1988:87; 100.

<sup>88</sup> Knoblock, 1988:202-3.

With the model of the family in mind, Xunzi assumed a cosmic and cultural hierarchy.<sup>89</sup> He reduced the Way of Heaven to the law of nature, and denied the existence of spirits and ghosts.<sup>90</sup> In other words, ceremonies and rituals were prized for their social value and for their expression of emotion in a recognized and beneficial manner.<sup>91</sup> To Xunzi, chaos was natural and symbolized the naturalness of nature. On the other hand, ritual was artificial but brought orderliness out of chaos. Hence, ritual became a sign of civilization: (1) a process of culture-transforming-from-nature, and (2) a process of culture-transforming-nature. The vital link between nature and culture was family. Family values were thus highly regarded in traditional Chinese society..

After decades of experimental socialization and the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, the family as the basic unit of society is now ideologically accepted on the mainland of China.<sup>92</sup> A collectivized life will not aim at the segregation of

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<sup>89</sup> The familial and cultural hierarchies could be seen as a social hierarchy, which was invented by humans. The cosmic hierarchy was natural and originated from Tian (nature). *Zhi* means intelligence or wisdom and *yi* means righteousness or proper. For the details of the cosmic and the cultural hierarchies, see Machle, 1993:147-63.

<i>Familial hierarchy</i>	<i>Cultural hierarchy</i>	<i>Cosmic hierarchy</i>
1. child (son)	the petty man	fire, water ( <i>qi</i> )
2. adult (unmarried)	the scholar	grass, trees ( <i>qi</i> + life)
3. husband (married)	the gentleman	birds, beasts ( <i>qi</i> + life + <i>zhi</i> )
4. father (with son)	the sage-king	humans ( <i>qi</i> + life + <i>zhi</i> + <i>yi</i> )

<sup>90</sup> ‘When we sacrifice for rain, it rains. What sort of thing is that? We maintain, no special sort of thing. It’s just like the rain when we don’t sacrifice.... We engage in divination and then decide some matter of great moment. It is wrong to regard [these things] from the standpoint of obtaining something for which we beseech, but rather as the proper form. Thus, whereas the *junzi* [gentleman] sees them as the proper form, the populace sees them as [influencing] spirits.’ Machle, 1993:120.

<sup>91</sup> Creel, 1953:130.

<sup>92</sup> Engels pointed out that: (1) individual family life must not remain the basic unit of society, (2) private household affairs were to be transformed into social affairs, and (3) the upbringing of children would become a public undertaking.

In 1958, the Chinese Communist Party intended to break the traditional family system by the establishment of people’s communes, production brigades and production teams. To the communists, family loyalty and party loyalty were incompatible. They claimed not to have eliminated families, but to have replaced the old family with a new family. Chao, 1977:133, 140, 168. For the change in the Chinese family under the Communist rule, see Chao, 1977:122-95.

husband and wife. For an ethical relationship between a husband and wife and their children can be even more genuinely expressed in a socialist society.<sup>93</sup> The Communist Party claims to target the inequality of the sexes and the hierarchy of the old family. The recent new approach to the family is on the basis of love, respect and trust.<sup>94</sup>

According to Caillois' triple division of life (sacred, profane and play)<sup>95</sup>, myth without rite becomes a tale and rite without myth becomes play.<sup>96</sup> Profane life depends upon the sacred for a meaningful answer to the problem of death, and the sacred lies in myth in association with ritual. With Paul's three 'constants' -- faith in the Saviour Lord Jesus Christ, hope in physical transfiguration and resurrection, and love for the beloved and the departed,<sup>97</sup> the following ancestor practices are proposed for consideration:

<i>The date</i>	<i>The ritual</i>	<i>The myth</i>
1. Funeral service	cremation rite	the Fall <sup>98</sup>
2. Mourning period <sup>99</sup>		

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<sup>93</sup> Chao, 1977:169.

<sup>94</sup> Marriage will be based on admiration and love without regard to property and status. Chao, 1977:133, 172.

<sup>95</sup> Caillois said, 'The sacred and the play dimension both are outside the realm of daily life.... Play, however, is free activity in its purest form, it does not have a content and does not have effects on another plane besides its own. In relation to life, play is pleasure and entertainment. But life, on the contrary, in its relation to the sacred is itself but vanity and diversion.... Play must avoid real life: categories of real life brought into the realm of play destroy life on first impact. Life, on the contrary, is depending upon, suspended at the sacred.' From Ooms, 1976:84.

<sup>96</sup> Caillois said, 'Without the myth, the rite becomes a mere ineffective action, empty gestures, a powerless reproduction of the ceremony, a mere play. And myth without rite becomes a mere play of words, without content or import, just empty words.' From Ooms, 1976:85.

<sup>97</sup> Faith, hope and love were called the 'three constants' in the Nestorian Monument. Compare the 'three constants' of Han Confucianism.

<sup>98</sup> The story of the Fall includes the myth of judgment and death. Genesis 3:1-21.

a. three-day rite	memorial service	the Resurrection
b. seven-day rite	memorial gathering	the Creation <sup>100</sup>
3. Burial service	entombment of remains	the Re-creation <sup>101</sup>
4. Clear Bright Festival	sweeping graves <sup>102</sup>	the Easter
5. Double Bright Festival	hill walking, tree planting <sup>103</sup>	the Transfiguration
6. Anniversary death day	memorial gathering	the Lord's supper

Tokio Kochi once said that Protestants had tended to overlook the doctrine of death and eternal life, fearing that Christian faith might become another 'funeral religion'.<sup>104</sup> Such a fear may well be justified. However, what cannot be justified is to jump to the conclusion that since Christian faith is a religion of the living, it does not concern itself with death. Buddhism and Daoism became popular just because they satisfied the quest for life after death and a knowledge of spiritual matters.

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<sup>99</sup> The mourning period may be graded as the following: (1) friends: till the funeral service; (2) relatives: till the three-day rite; (3) closed relatives: till the seven-day rite; and (4) descendants: till the burial service.

<sup>100</sup> God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. From a Christian perspective, seven days a week symbolizes a cycle of creativity and reversal. A cosmic renewal begins on the eighth day. Genesis, 1:1-2:3.

<sup>101</sup> The Valley of Dry Bones. Ezekiel 37:1-14.

<sup>102</sup> The term *sao-mu* (sweeping grave) began to be used only after the 1920's by modern educated Chinese. It was probably due to the influence of Christians. The traditional term used was *ji-mu* (sacrificing to the grave). In the Chinese calendar, the Clear Bright Festival and Easter are very close to each other. Sometimes, they coincide. Chiu, 1985:31.

<sup>103</sup> The Chinese term for 'hill walking' is *xing-shan*. The traditional term used is *bai-shan*, which means 'worshipping the hill'. Most Hong Kong Christians use 'hill walking' instead of 'worshipping the hill'.

A Chinese proverb says, 'Men rear sons to provide for old age; they plant trees because they want shade.' In traditional entombment burial, it is usual to plant trees on the two sides of the tomb. In a contemporary Christian context, tree planting symbolizes the myth of transfiguration illustrated by Paul in First Corinthians. Besides this, it is for environmental purposes and green peace. Chiu, 1985:23.

<sup>104</sup> Buddhism and Daoism have already become 'funeral religions' in Chinese society. People will seldom call upon the Buddhist monks or Daoist priests unless there is a funeral service. Mak, 1989:12, 16.

Christians should overcome and transcend such fears and express the good news through ancestor rites. For Christian faith is a religion of faith, hope and love. Moreover, Christians should witness to their filial piety by preaching such a good news to their households. For 'believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved -- you and your household.'<sup>105</sup>

### 3. Education: myth re-interpretation

If the Buddhist worldview is mechanical (karma and reincarnation), then the Daoist worldview is organic (creativity and reversal). Behind the physical realm is the idea of 'substance' and behind the metaphysical idea of 'substance' is the logical idea of 'identity'.<sup>106</sup> On the other hand, behind the biological realm is the idea of 'life' and behind the metaphysical idea of 'life' is the concept of 'creativity'. Being is becoming and de-becoming. It is all the time on the way to becoming something else. The idea of 'substance' is lost and that of 'identity' is blurred.

Xunzi accepted the dynamic interaction of *yin* and *yang*.<sup>107</sup> He did not believe in gods, ghosts or immortal souls. As a critical thinker, he discussed the theory of language in addition to the theory of culture. For he believed that language was a basic and distinctive sign of culture. He firstly asked, 'Why do things have names?' His answer was a matter of convenience and social custom.<sup>108</sup> In other words, names were used to distinguish things that were similar and things that were

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<sup>105</sup> Acts 16:31.

<sup>106</sup> Hughes, 1942:52.

<sup>107</sup> Machle, 1993:30.

<sup>108</sup> Creel, 1953:116-7.

different,<sup>109</sup> and to discriminate things that were more valuable and less valuable. His second question was: ‘What is the basis of similarity and difference?’ Xunzi’s reply was the testimony of the senses.<sup>110</sup> Things were considered to be of the same class when the senses indicated them to correspond to the ‘mental objects’ that one had formed to represent that class.<sup>111</sup> Once the convention was fixed and the custom was established, they were called fitting names.<sup>112</sup>

To Xunzi, the importance of *li* was to educate a man to recite in order to penetrate, to reflect deeply in order to comprehend, and to practice in order to embody in life.<sup>113</sup> Xunzi declared that the proper performance of sacrificial rites was the highest expression of refinement. However, what was sacrificed to had ‘neither substance nor shadow’.<sup>114</sup> The ideas of god and ghost were invented without any regard to sensible objects for no one had perceived god or ghost.

The learning and practice of *li* was to educate and train a practitioner to recall the memory of the departed, to recollect the image of the deceased, and to form a mental object and call it ‘god’ or ‘ghost’ as circumstances required. The practitioner offered sacrifices as if the ancestor spirit was present. In sum, gods and ghosts had an immanent existence within one’s mind but no transcendent existence outside one’s mind.

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<sup>109</sup> For instance, it is better to say ‘there are five cows, three horses and two dogs in a field’ than ‘there are ten objects in a field’. One might go further in classifying them by similarity and difference, and say ‘there are two black cows and three brown cows...’. Creel, 1953:117.

<sup>110</sup> Creel, 1953:117-8.

<sup>111</sup> Creel, 1953:118.

<sup>112</sup> Creel, 1953:119.

<sup>113</sup> Xunzi said, ‘Where should study begin, and where should it end? The art begins in reciting the classics, and ends in learning the *li*. Its purpose begins with making the scholar, and ends in making the sage.’ Creel, 1953:127.

<sup>114</sup> Creel, 1953:130.

The original custom of tablet rites was the worship of *shi* (literally 'corpse') during the Three Dynasties.<sup>115</sup> The role of *shi* was usually played by the youngest son or grandson of the worshippers. He was called the impersonator, who represented the spirit of the deceased and served as the visible and tangible recipient of the sorrow and respect that the descendants wanted to express to the dead.<sup>116</sup> The *shi* was regarded as the 'living ancestor' and everyone in the family had to respect him as if he had a 'real' and 'authentic' existence.

When the impersonator entered the hall during the ancestor rite, a horn was blown. The priest (Confucian) asked the worshippers to kowtow to the standing *shi*. The impersonator would then eat the meal that had been prepared for the deceased as if the deceased were actually partaking in the feast.<sup>117</sup> When the impersonator was a child or still young, he could behave badly. He might not do what he was told (i.e. according to *li*). The practice of the *shi* produced some controversial issues: (1) The father kowtowed to the son. This was inappropriate according to *li*.<sup>118</sup> (2) The father must have a son in order to guarantee himself to be served after his own death.<sup>119</sup> (3) The chosen 'child' had to learn from his childhood to act as an adult and behave as if he was the 'living ancestor'. (4) The child might 'play' the role badly and abuse the authority his role carried. (5) Stories of spirit possession frequently occurred in children.

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<sup>115</sup> Wei, 1985:128.

<sup>116</sup> Wei, 1985:128.

<sup>117</sup> Wei, 1985:128.

<sup>118</sup> In later times, the impersonator was a grandson or anyone who looked like the deceased ancestor.

<sup>119</sup> For this reason, the Chinese considered it most unfilial not to produce sons. The absence of male heirs would mean the end of the worship of the whole line of ancestors. This influenced the Chinese system of marriage and family: (1) Daughters were considered inferior to sons. (2) The daughter-in-law was only considered to be a good wife provided she produced sons. (3) This encouraged polygamy and the practice of taking concubines. Tan, 1985:86.

The practice of the *shi* was replaced during the Qin and the Han dynasties by the custom of the wooden tablet, which was placed on a table like a picture to commemorate the deceased.<sup>120</sup> The practitioners had to learn how to ‘recollect’, ‘remember’ and ‘respect’ the tablet as if it was the ‘living ancestor’. The erection and practice of wooden tablets finally turned into the worship of idols and the worship of ghosts and demons, especially for the weak who did not learn well and practice the rite properly.

With Paul’s guiding principle namely a context of meaning and discipline, ancestor tablets should not be erected and should not be used at home or in a memorial service. With today’s technology, a picture of the deceased fulfills the original purpose of a tablet. Under a context of love and care, there is no need for the strong to argue for and erect ancestor tablets, which may easily become a stumbling block to the weak.

Secondly, there is no necessity to insist on practicing kowtowing as a norm during ancestor rites. Social norms and customs change with time. In China before 1911, kowtow was not necessarily a religious act but rather a social norm. A difference of respect and obedience was expressed by different postures of the body. There were eight grades of respect and obedience:

1. The lowest form of respect was joining the hands and raising them before the breast.
2. The second form of respect was bowing low with the hands joined.
3. The third form of respect was bending the knee, as if about to kneel.
4. The fourth form of respect with obedience was to kneel.

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<sup>120</sup> Wei, 1985:128.

5. The fifth form was kneeling and striking the head against the ground. This was called *kowtow*. Kowtow to magistrate and parents was an ordinary and usual act of respect and obedience in China before 1911.
6. The higher form of respect and obedience was striking the head three times against the earth before rising from one's knee.
7. The next higher form of respect and obedience was kneeling and striking the forehead three times, rising on one's feet, kneeling down again, and striking the head again three times against the earth. Some gods were entitled to the sixth form and others to the seventh form of rituals.
8. The highest form of respect and strongest form of obedience was kneeling three different times, and at each time knocking the head thrice against the ground. Only Heaven and the emperor were entitled to this ritual.

In modern society, kowtowing is no longer an act of respect and honour. Rather, kowtowing becomes a sign of being 'timid' and 'submissive'. It denotes a bad connotation of 'out-dated' and 'old-fashioned', 'feudalistic' and 'traditional'. A new form of gesture is needed to denote an act of remembrance, respect and honour. As 'standing still' and 'bowing' are widely accepted as tokens of remembrance and respect, standing still and bowing should be encouraged and widely adopted in ancestor practice.

#### 4. Ritual transcendence

Candles, incense and paper money were three essential elements in a traditional ancestor ceremony. According to Zhang Yijing's *Research on Ancestor Rites*, they

were added to ancestor practices after the introduction of Buddhism to China.<sup>121</sup> During the Three Dynasties, candles had been used to illuminate exhibited food prepared for worship. The ceremonies were conducted before dawn.<sup>122</sup> During the Southern dynasty (420-589), candles continued to be used though sacrifices were offered during the daytime. From the Yuan dynasty, an official was appointed to be in charge of the candles.<sup>123</sup>

The use of incense was probably introduced to China from other countries.<sup>124</sup> The terms 'burning incense' and 'using incense' were not mentioned in the Chinese classics.<sup>125</sup> *West Stream Talk* said that the use of incense began between the Later Wei dynasty (534-556) and the early Tang dynasty. In the *History of Jin Dynasty*, the burning of incense was mentioned. In the royal ancestor practice of the Tang dynasty, incense was burnt three times a day.<sup>126</sup>

Paper was invented by Cai Lun of the Han dynasty. So the use of paper money must be after that time. According to Zhang Yijing, the burning of paper money began in the Tang dynasty.<sup>127</sup> An official of the Tang dynasty Wang Yu said that during the Han dynasty money was buried at funerals, and that in later generations paper money was used to serve ghosts.<sup>128</sup> Another contemporary official Hu

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<sup>121</sup> Wei, 1985:128.

<sup>122</sup> Wei, 1985:128-9.

<sup>123</sup> Wei, 1985:129.

<sup>124</sup> Ancient Judaism practiced the burning of incense. Later, this practice spread to India and eventually to China. Generally speaking, the use of incense in Chinese ancestor rites was derived from Buddhism. Wei, 1985:129.

<sup>125</sup> Wei, 1985:129.

<sup>126</sup> Wei, 1985:129.

<sup>127</sup> Some believed that this practice began between the Wei and the Jin dynasties. Wei, 1985:129.

<sup>128</sup> Wang Yu was responsible for the royal ancestor ceremonies. Wei, 1985:129.

Zhitang commented, 'People of former generations used money to make friends with ghosts (gods) at sacrifices, just like people used money as gifts among friends. Later on they used ghost money (paper money) to bribe ghosts. Can ghosts be bribed?'<sup>129</sup> This statement showed that the use of paper money was very popular at the time.

Generally speaking, the Three Religions of China are complementary to each other. Confucianism stressed the importance of the living and kept silent about life after death. Daoism emphasized the transformation of humans into gods and the transfiguration of mortal body to immortal body. Buddhism entered China and filled the vacant platform of ghosts and helis. Buddhism mixed with Chinese astrology and divination and became an imaginative religion.<sup>130</sup> At the same time, Daoism borrowed from the Buddhist doctrines of karma and reincarnation and became a popular belief.<sup>131</sup> Zhuzi commented, 'Buddhism has stolen the good points of Daoism while Daoism has stolen the bad points of Buddhism.'<sup>132</sup>

Buddhism and Daoism mixed with each other and produced various kinds of religious customs. Buddhist deities began to be placed on Daoist altars, and vice versa. The ordinary people were prepared to worship any spirits, regardless of denomination, who were likely to give them the best return for their money. They took up ancestor worship, ancestor cults, and the propitiation of the spirits of the departed, which were the only popular features Confucianism had to offer. Otherwise, Confucianism was too academic and dry for them. They wanted something more colourful and sensational. For simple and uneducated folk, it is hard

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<sup>129</sup> Wei, 1985:129-30.

<sup>130</sup> Wei, 1985:130.

<sup>131</sup> Wei, 1985:130.

<sup>132</sup> Wei, 1985:130.

to differentiate between worshipping ancestors and respecting ancestors for they did not have the chance to learn the *li*.

Among the worthy motives for ancestor rites are filial piety, the longing to commemorate the departed, and the desire to maintain family unity as a basis of society. Ancestor practice has 'fallen' and become 'attached' to superstition and utilitarianism. Traditional ancestor practice has to 'transcend' itself and 'return' to its original meaning -- to enlighten moral virtues, to edify filial piety and to show gratitude to ancestors. Based on Paul's guiding principles, Mencius's ethical theory and Xunzi's social theory, the following suggestions are proposed for consideration:

1. The purpose of burning money and paper instruments is to plead for blessing and protection from the ancestor spirits, and to bribe ghosts during the spirit's underworld journey.<sup>133</sup> Since its motive is utilitarian and self interested, the burning of paper money and utilities should be eliminated.
2. The use of incense has been identified with the communication of spirits. By means of smoke curling up, a spirit is notified of the intention to communicate.<sup>134</sup> The smell of incense catches the spirit's attention and the smoke directs it to the person and the matter in hand.<sup>135</sup> As burning incense carries such a religious

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<sup>133</sup> Different kinds of paper money were burnt for different purposes:

(1) gold paper money: for the gods,  
(2) silver paper money: for the ghosts and the ancestors,  
(3) treasury money: mostly used for repaying the debt of life, and  
(4) money for the resolving of crisis: used mainly in rites of exorcism.  
Seidel, 1978:421.

<sup>134</sup> The similarity of burning incense to formal greetings was: 'burning incense is an invitation to the god', 'a polite formality', 'a signal of respect', 'to open communication', 'like handling out an invitation card', 'like offering a cigarette' or 'like giving a cup of tea'. Feuchtwang, 1992:126-7.

<sup>135</sup> Incense may itself be the medium as well as the introduction of communication. For details, see Feuchtwang, 1992:127.

connotation and significance, incense should not be used in ancestor practices. For the rites aim at memorial and not at communication.

3. The use of candles has its historical context and significance. As ancestor practices are performed in daytime, candles become useless and can be abolished. However, candles are now used as decoration. With reference to the guiding principle of social convention and custom, candles can still be used for decoration during funeral or memorial services. Not to be confused and identified with Buddhist belief and practices, white candles should be used instead of red candles.

Christians are often criticized by traditionally-minded Chinese for their disrespect and lack of concern for their ancestors in funeral services: (1) Christians do not mourn for the deceased in the way that non-Christians do.<sup>136</sup> (2) A Christian funeral service is only a sermon and some hymns, like a meeting. No propitiation of the spirit of the deceased is performed. (3) Christian funeral services and burial rites are too 'cheap' and thus 'lose face'.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> In traditional ancestor practice, the family can hire professional mourners for the funeral ceremonies, funeral procession and burial rites. Today, the Taiwanese still regard those who die without people to mourn for them with speech-wailing as being unfortunate. Christians fit into this category. 'Die without mourning' has become a stinging nickname for Christians.

There is a cultural difference between Chinese and Westerners on human feelings. In short, Westerners are full of passion at ordinary times. But at solemn occasions such as a funeral service, they seldom show their passion. Whereas the Chinese are solemn at ordinary times. But during solemn occasions such as wedding or funeral services, they are full of passion and express feeling unreservedly. See Hung, 1985:206; Mak, 1989:16.

<sup>137</sup> Hung described his personal agony at the funeral rites of his mother as follows: 'Saving face is very important in Oriental society. In private most ancestor worshippers admit that the deceased cannot eat food sacrifices and that the traditional Taiwanese funeral customs are wasteful, impractical and cumbersome. But they dare not give up worshipping ancestors or following traditional customs because they are afraid of losing face. They are afraid of other people's criticism that they are unfilial. They are afraid of verbal persecution, especially from their living elders.... When we realize that the monthly income of the average breadwinner in Taipei is US\$300 to \$350, the funeral cost of \$16,000 is horrifying and wasteful. But the Chinese will go into deep debt to have costly funeral services to save face.' Hung, 1985:206-7.

At a contemporary Chinese Christian funeral, mourning should always be permitted in the funeral service but not wailing especially speech-wailing. For Christians have the Easter hope. It is inappropriate to cry loudly, 'Oh, how can I live on without you?' 'I'll never be able to see you again!' Secondly, there should be appropriate decoration of the hall, bowing, a moment of silent meditation and memorial during the funeral service. Thirdly, Christians should be encouraged to have a family Bible. The names of one's ancestors can be written on the family-tree page.<sup>138</sup> This can witness to, fulfill and transcend the practice of filial piety by remembering and honouring the root of man, worshipping God and respecting one's ancestors at the same time, when the Bible is read every day.

In short, the funeral service should be arranged like a solemn and sober occasion. There must be control but no suppression of filial and natural emotion.<sup>139</sup> The note of hope and peace must be there.<sup>140</sup> With these three aims, ancestor rites fulfil what the original meaning of the *Book of the Rites* was supposed to aim at.

In this section, different patterns and elements of traditional ancestor practice have been discussed. Those religious elements that should be eliminated are: the seven-seven rituals, the Hungry Ghost Festival, geomancy, almanac, incense, paper money and paper utilities. Those ethical and civil elements that should be preserved are: the mourning period, the Clear Bright Festival, the Double Bright Festival and the anniversary death day. Those elements that should be reformed are: tablets, food

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<sup>138</sup> The names of ancestors are within three generations and at most five generations.

<sup>139</sup> Uncontrolled and excessive or suppressive emotional feelings will injure one's health.

<sup>140</sup> Human culture is divided into four types according to different attitudes towards death:

(1) denial of death: Buddhism,  
(2) acceptance of death: Confucianism,  
(3) embracement of death: Daoism,  
(4) challenge to death: Christianity.  
Compare Kang, 1994.

offerings, kowtow, red candles and speech wailing. In addition, the expensive funeral and burial services should be discouraged and replaced by economical but dignified services. A modernized civil form of ancestor practice is proposed and a Christian interpretation is provided.

If parishioners ask whether ancestor practice is idol worship and they are referring to different specific elements of traditional ancestor practice such as the seven-seven rituals and kowtow, my pastoral care is to help the inquirers to understand the meaning of each specific element they have raised. In addition, I shall help him to understand the biblical principles from Paul's teaching (I Corinthians 8-10).

For instance, an inquirer asks whether the erection of an ancestor tablet is idol worship. I explain the meaning of the erection of ancestor tablet and the historical development of the tablet. From my personal pastoral experience, most inquirers will then abandon the tablets and prefer a picture. The important tactic in pastoral education and care is to know and understand what kind of worries are lying behind the inquirer's question.

Sometimes, a Chinese dare not put away ancestor tablets because he fears the revenge of ancestral spirits upon him. In that case, we need to educate him in the proper knowledge of monotheism and the nothingness of idols. Moreover, we can teach him the knowledge of propriety and help him to grasp the true meaning of ancestor practice. In my past pastoral experience, a minister would help the parishioner to put away the tablets and have a purification and celebration service with him and his family to pace his disturbing mind.<sup>141</sup> We need to give him the

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<sup>141</sup> Psalm 115:4-8, 135:15-18; II Kings 19:18; Issiah 37:19.

assurance of the sovereignty of the one True God, the triumphant victory of Jesus Christ over demons, and the protection the Holy Spirit with us.

## Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed three forms of ancestor practice: (1) the Confucian form of ancestor practice, (2) the Daoist form of ancestor practice, and (3) the Buddhist form of ancestor practice. The good nature of ancestor practice is ancestor memorial and respect, which is the core meaning of the Confucian form of ancestor practice. However, such a civil act has deteriorated. The rites mixed and merged with the Daoist and the Buddhist forms of ancestor practice. Traditional ancestor practice becomes idol worship namely nature worship, spirit worship, manes worship and demon worship. In reforming and transforming traditional ancestor practice, I have proposed a modernized civil form of ancestor practice and I have provided a Christian interpretation to it. In other words, the modernized ancestor practice is a civil act, which is in accordance with Christian faith. It can then be interpreted as a Christian form of ancestor practice. It can also be interpreted as a Confucian form of ancestor practice.<sup>142</sup>

In the last chapter, I mentioned that weak Chinese should be educated with the knowledge of propriety and monotheism, and strong Chinese should be enlightened by studied ignorance of supernatural powers and by monotheism. In other words, the Chinese should be preached the good news of Jesus Christ. As a contemporary Christian, I shall make my final response to Chinese ancestor practice -- how to preach the gospel to the Chinese through ancestor practice in China.

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<sup>142</sup> This is similar to the sense and meaning of the Venus. The sense of the morning star is different from that of the evening star. However, they both refer to the planet Venus.

In the final chapter of Part III, I will argue from the knowledge of Heaven and the knowledge of principle to the knowledge of monotheism. Heaven-related ancestor practice will be reformed and transformed into Sunday rest and the Lord's Supper in remembrance of our true Ancestor -- God-on-high. Hence Chinese ancestor practice will be transmuted into Christian Ancestor Worship through dialogue theology.

<i>Issue concerned</i>	<i>Pastoral advice</i>	<i>Reasons/Suggestion</i>
1. seven seven ritual	no	Buddhist ritual
2. Hungry Ghost Festival	no	Buddhist festival
3. geomancy	no	spiritual forces
4. almanac	no	astrological divination
5. paper money	no	bribery of ghost
6. incense	no	communication of spirits
7. offering food	not recommended	flower preferred
8. ancestor tablet	not recommended	picture preferred
9. <i>kowtow</i>	not recommended	substitute: standing still and bowing
10. expensive funeral services	not recommended	advice: economical but dignified funeral services
11. mourning	yes	speech wailing not recommended
12. candles	yes	red candles not recommended
13. Clear Bright Festival	yes	memorial: sweeping graves
14. Double Bright Festival	yes	memorial: hill walking
15. anniversary death day	yes	memorial: family gathering
16. eating idol meat	yes/no	yes: nothingness of idol no: anticipating ghost meal

**A contemporary Christian response to ancestor practice**

## Chapter 8

### **Ancestor practice in its missiological perspective: sacrament of transcendence**

In Part I, three basic models of ancestor practice were proposed: a religious model, a socio-political model and an ethical model. According to what was described, all three models had their womb and their original-model during the orientation period of ancestor practice when the socio-political model was fully developed and well-established.

However, the emperors of the Han and Tang dynasties used religious beliefs and rituals to justify their mighty power and their authority as divine. Hence, a religious-political model of ancestor practice became predominant in the de-orientation period. The three religious-political models were Han Confucianist, Daoist and Buddhist. At the beginning of the Song dynasty, the literati attempted to revive the early Confucian ethical model and replace the religious-political models. This began the ethical-political model of the re-orientation period of ancestor practice.

Throughout the era of the Chinese dynasties, it was the emperor who was entitled to perform the rites of Heaven. The performance of this ritual had a religious significance and a political implication. It signified that the emperor on the throne had the divine right to rule and it implied the whole of China was unified as one empire under one royal family roof. Hence, it is quite important to understand the explicit and implicit meanings of Heaven and its respective rituals before 1911.

In this final chapter, I shall first investigate the basic and hidden meanings of Heaven. Secondly, I shall describe how the Heaven-related ancestor practice became

the worship of natural deities, spiritual beings and heavenly gods and a belief in cosmic renewal. Finally, I shall adopt Zhuzi's cosmic ultimate, human ultimate and great ultimate as categorical ideas and argue from the knowledge of Heaven and the knowledge of principle to the knowledge of monotheism. I shall then suggest how to reform and transform the Heaven-related ancestor practice into a social and civil rite in accordance with Christian faith.

### a. The meaning of Heaven

Zhuzi clearly said, 'Some understand *Tian* (Heaven) as the blue sky, some understand *Tian* as the *zhu-zai* (Lord), and some understand *Tian* as *li* (principle).'<sup>1</sup> In this section, I shall describe the three basic senses and meanings of *Tian*: as the realm of nature, as the realm of culture, and as the realm of the supernatural. Finally, I shall discuss the significant implications of these three basic realms: *Tian* as the unknown, unrevealed and mysterious realms.

#### 1. *Tian* as a physical universe: cosmos or sky

Early Confucianism put emphasis upon problems of politics and human relations, and paid little attention to cosmological observation and metaphysical speculation. However, the Daoist and Yin-Yang schools were from the beginning interested in such questions and concerned to explain creation. They worked out the origin of the universe and exercised a great influence on Han Confucianism.

*The Prince of Huainan* recorded the creation of the universe and this represented the official Confucian view of the Later Han period.

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<sup>1</sup> *Zhu* means master and *zai* means controller. Chan, 1987:98.

Before heaven and earth had taken form all was vague and amorphous. Therefore it was called the Great Beginning. The Great Beginning produced emptiness and emptiness produced the universe. The universe produced material-force [*qi*] which had limits. That which was clear and light drifted up to become heaven, while that which was heavy and turbid solidified to become earth.... After a long time the hot force of the accumulated yang produced fire and the essence of the fire force became the sun; the cold force of the accumulated yin became water and the essence of the excess force of the sun and moon became the stars and planets. Heaven received the sun, moon, and stars while earth received water and soil.

When heaven and earth were joined in emptiness and all was unwrought simplicity, then without having been created, things came into being. This was the Great Oneness. All things issued from this oneness but we became different.... while a thing moves it is called living, and when it dies it is said to be exhausted. All are creatures.... man was born out of nonbeing to assume form in being. Having form, he is governed by things. But he who can return to that from which he was born and become as though formless is called a 'true man'. The true man is he who was never become separated from the Great Oneness.<sup>2</sup>

According to *The General History of Gods and Genii*, the structure of *Tian* (the physical universe) was divided into three parts: (1) the silvery street where constellations glittered with undiminished splendour, (2) the sea of stars where the firmament was, and (3) the region of the falling stars, which in reaching the earth became stones.<sup>3</sup> The physical *Tian* had moreover nine layers:

<i>The layer</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>
1st layer	the wide expanse of air, which was the link between <i>Tian</i> and earth
2nd layer	wind, rain, thunder, lightning, clouds, hoarfrost, mist and snow fell upon the earth

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<sup>2</sup> de Bary, 1960:192-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Repository*, 7:510.

3rd layer	the moon revolved from the left to the right <sup>4</sup>
4th layer	the eclipses of sun and moon
5th layer	the sun <sup>5</sup>
6th layer	the stars, twenty-eight constellations <sup>6</sup>
7th layer	Ursa Major, the pivotal centre of the starry heavens <sup>7</sup>
8th layer	the immovable heaven <sup>8</sup>
9th layer	heaven's vault, divided into nine parts (like the earth) <sup>9</sup>

The heavens were round and the earth was square. Water was outside and inside the heavens. The earth floated in the waters. Heaven enveloped the earth like the white of an egg and the earth resembled the yellow.<sup>10</sup> Like the heavens, the earth had nine layers. They were: (1) the uppermost fine materials, (2) the tops of mountains, (3) the material of hills, (4) the material of loam, (5) the substance of rivers and marshes, (6) quicksand, (7) yellow clayish fountains, (8) the abyss, and (9) vapours.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The moon revolved more than thirteen times quicker than the sun. *Repository*, 7:510.

<sup>5</sup> The whole circumference of heaven amounted to 365 degrees. The sun walked very fast, yet it scarcely accomplished one degree a day. *Repository*, 7:510, 513.

<sup>6</sup> Stars were the essence of all things and the ethereal part of the substance of light itself. Every individual was said to have one's own star, which controlled and determined one's own fate and destiny. *Repository*, 7:510.

<sup>7</sup> All stars moved in accordance with their revolutions as the wheel moved round the nave. *Repository*, 7:510.

<sup>8</sup> It was firm like the very surface of the earth. *Repository*, 7:510.

<sup>9</sup> The nine heavens were called after the various hues they assumed. For instance, the green heaven towards the east and the azure heaven towards the southeast.

<sup>10</sup> This is not merely metaphorical language, but the actual state of things. The Chinese are used to call the earth 'the yellow land', the River Huang 'the yellow river', and the people the 'yellow people'.

<sup>11</sup> Dragons dwelt in the eighth layer. *Repository*, 7:510-1.

## 2. *Tian* as an intellectual construct: principle or law

The primary meaning of *Tian* was a physical universe. As it was perceived as a natural phenomenon and a physical object, it needed to be conceived and interpreted. Hence, the secondary meaning of *Tian* was an intellectual construct namely natural law or the laws of nature. Heaven was represented as principle or law in the context of an ethico-political system or a scientific discovery model.

Needham distinguished sharply between natural law and the laws of nature. The former was wholly juridical and applicable only to the human world.<sup>12</sup> The latter consisted of those physical laws such as the law of gravity, which solely pertained to the nonhuman world.<sup>13</sup> The *Guanzi* reads:

What are basic to the [Yin and Yang] vital forces (*qi*) of Heaven and earth, to the harmonious balance between cold and heat, to the properties of water and soil, to the existence of human beings, birds, animals, plants, and trees; and which things, despite their extreme abundance, all possess as standards (*jin*), yet which never undergo change [themselves] -- such are called 'rules' (*ze*).<sup>14</sup>

'Rules' were basic to humans, animals, plant life and inorganic matter.<sup>15</sup> All things possessed these rules. Yet, the rules themselves never underwent change.<sup>16</sup> Another *Guanzi* passage further spelt out these rules as *li* (principle) and *fa* (law) to

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<sup>12</sup> According to Needham's analysis, the Chinese term *li* (propriety, ritual) presented a fairly good parallel to the Western concept of 'natural law'. Bodde, 1979:300.

<sup>13</sup> For details, see Bodde, 1979:300-2.

<sup>14</sup> Bodde, 1979:304. The original text adopted the Wade-Giles system, but it has been changed to the Pinyin system for convenience.

<sup>15</sup> The term *ze* was one of the technical terms Needham used for Chinese 'laws of nature'. Bodde, 1979:304.

<sup>16</sup> Bodde, 1979:304.

establish a macrocosmic-microcosmic parallelism between the natural and human worlds.

Heaven covers over the myriad creatures. It regulates (*ji*) heat and cold. It moves (*xing*) the sun and moon. It sequentially arranges the stars. Such are Heaven's regularities (*chang*). It governs (*ji*) these matters by means of its principles (*li*), starting them anew when they have reached their ends.

The ruler shepherds his myriad people. He governs (*ji*) all-under-Heaven. He supervises his hundred officials. Such are the ruler's regularities (*chang*). He governs (*ji*) these matters by means of his laws (*fa*), starting them anew when they have reached their end.<sup>17</sup>

*Tian* was conceived as a principle governing the alteration of cold and heat, movements of sun and moon, and orderly sequence of the stars. By analogy, the ruler imitated Heaven and governed the human world with moral principles derived from the Heavenly principle. Theoretically speaking, *Tian* 'ordained' principles and 'revealed' its mandate to man. In reality, man 'discovered' the law and 'imposed' the rules on *Tian*. In later cosmological and metaphysical thinking, especially the neo-Confucianists, principles were conceived as immanent and morally-oriented.

### 3. *Tian* as a personal deity: God-on-high or god

If the naturalist and the moralist conceived the force behind natural phenomena as material force (*qi*) and moral principle (*li*) respectively, then the royal priests interpreted the force as a spiritual power manifested by their royal ancestors while the theists explained the force as a divine decree revealed by a supreme personal deity. The naturalists and the moralists claimed that the force was impersonal and

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<sup>17</sup> Bodde, 1979:305-6.

immanent in nature while the priests and the theists believed that the force was personal and transcendent.

To the primal tribal people, the regular movements of the heavenly bodies symbolized *Tian's* regulative power to keep the universe in stable order. The proper succession of seasonal changes was of particular importance to an agricultural society. Any individual who could predict and 'determine' seasonal changes would convince the people that he was the earthly representative of such heavenly forces.<sup>18</sup> He would share Heaven's superhuman power and receive the 'Mandate' of Heaven. He was enthroned and was called the Son of Heaven.<sup>19</sup> *Tian* became his father. The ancestors of the new born king consequently became royal ancestors, dynastic ancestors and gods and thus received sacrifices.

Hence, the ruling class had a religious justification for its sovereignty<sup>20</sup> and a religious explanation for the failure of an ethico-political order. All calamities and miseries were attributed to disturbing acts and unjust acts.<sup>21</sup> The *Mozi* reads:

Heaven sends down immoderate cold and heat and unseasonable snow, frost, rain and dew. The five grains do not ripen and the six domestic animals do not mature. There are diseases, epidemics, and pestilence. Hurricanes and torrential downpours occur repeatedly. These are Heaven's punishments, visited on men below because they fail to identify themselves with it. Therefore the ancient sage-kings understood what Heaven and the spirits desire and avoided what they

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<sup>18</sup> Yang, 1967:130.

<sup>19</sup> The Mandate of Heaven and the title Son of Heaven were invested in the office of the throne, rather than in the person of the ruler. The Confucian tradition accepted the bare fact: 'The one who won [power] became a king; the one who lost [power] became a bandit.' For details, see Yang, 1967:130-3.

<sup>20</sup> Yang wrote, 'In the Chinese religious tradition the supernatural realm was patterned closely after the image of the human world. In temporal life the common people were rigidly excluded from any contact with the monarch, but they were permitted to deal with the lower echelon of officialdom. Following the same principle, while the people were excluded from direct formal worship of Heaven, they were permitted to deal with Heaven's subordinate deities, the objects of worship in the popular cults.' Yang, 1967:144.

<sup>21</sup> Yang, 1967:142.

dislike.... With purifications and baths and clean wine and cakes they led the people in sacrificing to Heaven and the spirits.... They did not dare to miss the proper time for the spring and autumn sacrifices. In judging lawsuits they dared not be unjust. In dividing property they dared not be unfair. Even in informal moments they did not dare to be disrespectful.<sup>22</sup>

To Mozi, *Tian* was a personal deity who intervened in human affairs to punish wrong doing. Rulers should act accordingly -- practise love and avoid violence -- so as to get the blessing of Heaven and the approval and assistance of their people.<sup>23</sup> Mozi advocated the principle of identification with the superior (*Tian*).<sup>24</sup> He gave various proofs of the activity of a personal *Tian*. For instance, Mozi said:

*How can one know that Heaven loves all the people?  
Because it enlightens them.*

*How can one know it enlightens them?  
Because it possesses them.*

*How can one know it possesses them?  
Because it accepts sacrifices from all of them.*<sup>25</sup>

To prove the existence of God and the gods, Mozi argued historically, existentially and rationally. He cited a number of instances showing that: (1) From past history, gods and spirits were recorded to have rewarded virtues and avenge wrongs. (2) From the present situation, many people claimed to have seen gods and

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<sup>22</sup> Creel, 1953:59-60.

<sup>23</sup> Creel, 1953:60.

<sup>24</sup> The emperor was subject to *Tian* and the people were subject to the emperor. Creel, 1953:58-9.

<sup>25</sup> Creel, 1953:60.

spirits. (3) From rational dialectical thinking, Mozi argued that not all people saw gods and spirits because they were not always visible.<sup>26</sup>

According to Mozi's conception, *Tian* had the following attributes: (1) He was a personal, loving and merciful God. He wished everyone to love everyone else and he hated violence and killing. (2) He was all-knowing, all-present and all-mighty. (3) He was the supreme, the noblest and the wisest. (4) He was the Lord of heaven and earth. All political authority rested on him. (5) He was the Legislator of moral codes. All ethical authorities ultimately relied on his will. (6) He was the Creator and Judge. He rewarded the good and punished the evil.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4. *Tian* as a mysterious realm

In the 1920's and 1930's, there seemed a common agreement that *Tian* had been considered to be a supreme personal deity in the pre-Confucian period. Altogether, on eighteen occasions *Tian* appeared in the *Analects*. According to Creel's study, not one of the pre-Song Chinese commentaries on the *Analects* considered Confucius as agnostic.<sup>28</sup> On the contrary, *Tian* was used as a personal being. Fung Yulan (1895-1985) said, '... the *Tian* of which Confucius speaks in the *Analects* is altogether a *shangdi* [Lord-on-High] having intelligence and purpose, an 'over-ruling Heaven.'"<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Mozi said, 'Even in deep gorges and great forests, where there is no man, one may not act improperly. There are ghosts and spirits who will see one!' Creel, 1953:61.

<sup>27</sup> *Classics*, 5:304-5.

<sup>28</sup> Among the Song and later commentaries only four passages indicated skepticism. Creel wrote, 'These four passages, then, represent the sum total of skepticism found in the study of more than eighty commentaries on the *Lun Yu* [*Analects*].'

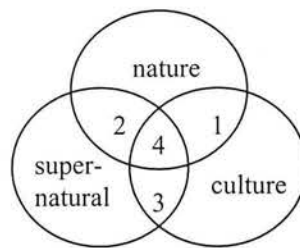
Yang commented, 'This "rationalization" of Confucius is particularly apparent in many modern Chinese scholars who have worked under the influence of Western rationalism and of a general secularizing trend in a period of revolution.' Creel, 1932:69-71; Yang, 1967:246.

<sup>29</sup> Creel, 1932:66.

Confucius advised people to give priority to ‘knowing life’ and ‘serving man’. He did not attempt to disapprove of the existence of supernatural forces.<sup>30</sup> Instead, Confucius seemed to keep it alive in the background in his admonition to ‘respect the spiritual beings’, in his emphasis on sacrifice, and in his attitude towards Heaven. Confucius’s thought left ample room for the development of theistic religious ideas.<sup>31</sup>

In *Mencius*, *Tian* appeared as a very personal being much interested in human affairs.<sup>32</sup> Mencius’ moralist approach and Xunzi’s naturalist approach to *Tian* both belonged to the Confucian legacy. Even Mozi’s theistic and religious approach to *Tian* was a Confucian legacy too. For he was said to have studied under the Confucian tradition. These three approaches to *Tian* reflected the three basic meaning of *Tian*.

These three connotations of *Tian* symbolize three basic realms: (1) the realm of nature, (2) the realm of culture, and (3) the realm of the supernatural. However, these three realms are not distinct and separate from each other. On the contrary, there are four overlappings and they are called ‘hidden’ realms.



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<sup>30</sup> Yang, 1967:247.

<sup>31</sup> Yang, 1967:247.

<sup>32</sup> Creel, 1932:67.

<i>Realms of Overlapping</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Issues concerned</i>
1. nature-culture	material force and principle	the rite of cosmic renewal
2. nature-supernatural	immanence and transcendence	the worship of natural objects
3. culture-supernatural	human nature and divine nature	the worship of spiritual beings
4. culture-supernatural-nature	the realm of mystical experience <sup>33</sup>	the one-ness between Heaven and man

From such a structural view of *Tian*, the Christian idea of God is theoretically compatible with the Chinese conception of Heaven in three ways: (1) *Tian* has a basic meaning of personal transcendent deity. (2) *Tian* refers to a supreme God-on-High. (3) *Tian* signifies a hidden and unknown dimension, which is pointed towards the unfathomable mystery that needs to be revealed.<sup>34</sup> This explains why Matteo Ricci believed that the Confucian *Shangdi* and *Tian* were identical with the Christian idea of God.<sup>35</sup> The Catholic position was re-affirmed by a Protestant J. P. Bruce of Oxford. He said that *li* (principle) had a religious character because it included benevolence and wisdom and *Tian* was the Lord.<sup>36</sup> Among the

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<sup>33</sup> Julia Ching said, 'In China's case, it is my opinion that nature mysticism has predominated in the experience of many individuals, including Confucian and Taoist philosophers, as well as Ch'an Buddhism. Devotional, theistic mysticism may be found in religious Taoism, and in devotional, Pure Land, Buddhism.' She defined nature mysticism as 'a transformed consciousness in which the person experiences a sense of inner peace and stillness, sometimes even a sense of oneness or inter-connectedness to the universe or all things.' Ching, 1997:172-3.

<sup>34</sup> Xunzi said, 'The fixed stars make their round; the sun and moon alternately shine; the four seasons succeed one another;... The results of all these changes are known, but we do not know the invisible source: this is what is called Heaven.' Kasoff, 1984:54.

<sup>35</sup> See p.64.

<sup>36</sup> In 1918, Bruce published a paper entitled 'The theistic import of the Sung [960-1279] philosophy'. In 1923, he published his *Chu Hsi and His Masters*. He emphasized Zhuzi's theistic position. According to Bruce, Zhuzi regarded Heaven as the Divine Immanence and the Supreme Ruler and

neo-Confucianists, *Tian-li* literally meant heavenly principle and heavenly reason which could be referred to the Ultimate Principle and the divine reason respectively.

Theoretically speaking, the approach advocated by Matteo Ricci was appropriate when he was dealing with the translation of the Christian God in accordance with the Chinese term *Tian* in the seventeenth century. However, the appropriate term for God in the nineteenth century was *Shen* or *Shangdi* which the Protestant missionaries adopted in their translation of the Bible.<sup>37</sup>

	<i>Christian</i>	<i>Translation</i>
7th century	Nestorian	<i>Fo, Tian-zun</i> <sup>38</sup>
17 <sup>th</sup> century	Catholic	<i>Tian, Shangdi</i> <sup>39</sup>
19 <sup>th</sup> century	Protestant	<i>Shen, Shangdi</i>
21 <sup>st</sup> century	Chinese	? <sup>40</sup>

In this section, the three basic meanings of *Tian* have been explored. The three basic meanings are: a physical universe, an intellectual construct and a personal deity. From a contemporary Christian apologetic perspective, such a structural view of *Tian* is compatible with the Christian idea of God.

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thus anthropomorphic. Chan, 1987:74. For the details of Zhuzi's view towards religious life, see Chan, 1987:139-61.

<sup>37</sup> Boone said, 'If we admitted that the Chinese do not know the true God, (which we understand is admitted by all the Protestant missionaries,) then it appears to us one of the two terms must be sought for: viz. either the name of the chief God of the Chinese, or the name by which the whole class of Gods is known in their language.' Boone, 1848:19. For details, see Anonymous, 1848; Boone, 1848, 1850; Medhurst, 1848a, 1848b, 1848c.

<sup>38</sup> Alouben translated God as the Buddha and the Heavenly Worthy in the seventh century.

<sup>39</sup> The Catholic Christians finally translated God as the Heavenly Lord (*Tian-zhu*). See p.64.

<sup>40</sup> Some western Christians of the twentieth century have translated the idea of God as the Ultimate Concern, the Wholly Otherness and Being. For the Chinese Christians, which appropriate term shall we use to denote 'God' in the twentieth-first century? This question needs to be asked and answered but that is not a matter for this dissertation.

If one asks whether ancestor practice is idol worship and one is referring to Heaven-related ancestor practice, then the answer is yes and no.

1. The rites of Heaven can easily become the worship of natural objects, spiritual beings and heavenly bodies as we shall see in the next section. In such a case, ancestor practice is idol worship. This explains why de Groot said that the Chinese religion before 1911 was the worship of natural objects.
2. However, the rite of Heaven is potentially transcendent. It points beyond itself and towards an unknown being. In such a case, Heaven-related ancestor practice is not idol worship. On the contrary, it is a bridge or a sign-post to the one True God. This is the view of Matteo Ricci and this is also my personal view. I shall illustrate this and argue for this in the final section of this chapter.

## b. The rites of Heaven

*Tian* has altogether a sevenfold meaning. Its basic and ‘revealed’ meanings are nature, culture and the supernatural. However, there are four other ‘hidden’ meanings of *Tian*. In the last three centuries, the hidden meanings of *Tian* have overshadowed its basic meanings in the rites of Heaven. The ritual thus became the worship of natural deities, spiritual beings and heavenly gods. In addition, the rites of Heaven denoted the belief of cosmic renewal. In this section, I shall deal with these four aspects of the rites of Heaven in sequence.

### 1. The worship of *jing*: natural deities

According to the theory of yin-yang, various organic and inorganic beings were endowed with different kinds of material force (*qi*). Some possessed more vital energy (*jing*) and they became genii (*jing*) or spirits (*ling*). Some of them transformed and metamorphosed, and even became gods (*shen*). It was widely believed in China that these ‘spiritual’ animals, trees and stones were ‘possessed by spirits’, and the masses worshipped them.

Among wild animals, the fox held a prominent place in zoanthropy. The belief in the change of men into animals and of animals into men was common in China.<sup>41</sup> Animals behaved, thought and understood as men did.<sup>42</sup> People believed that the *jing* of were-animals might enter persons and cause disease, madness and even death.<sup>43</sup> They also believed that ancestor spirits could transform into were-animals

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<sup>41</sup> It was a belief similar to that in were-wolves in Europe. de Groot, 4:157.

<sup>42</sup> Animals showed much the same passions and feelings as men. They had analogous wants in life and suffered similar illness and weakness. Finally, they were subject to the same laws of decay and death. de Groot, 4:157.

<sup>43</sup> Were-animals consisted of were-tigers, were-wolves, were-dogs, were-foxes, were-bears, were-stags, were-monkeys, were-rats, domestic animals as were-beasts, were-reptiles, were-snakes,

and return home after several days of death. The fox was particularly regarded as able to change its form into a pretty woman to seduce men and extract the *jing* (semen, vital energy and essence) of its male sexual partners.<sup>44</sup> The monkey was also regarded as possessing the power of transformation. The legend of the monkey-king Sun transforming itself is well-known in Chinese society.<sup>45</sup>

As in the animal kingdom, trees and plants were supposed to store up vital energy. The Chinese believed that the very old trees were animated and that they became genii (*jing*).<sup>46</sup> This accounts for tree and plant cults in Chinese society.<sup>47</sup> Old pines were especially regarded as harbouring the souls of the dead, whose remains they had sheltered for years.<sup>48</sup> Centennial trees were deemed to give forth blood if they were cut.<sup>49</sup> The peach was considered as a powerful demon-expeller because its exorcising power was said to be derived from the sun.<sup>50</sup>

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were-birds, were-fishes and were-insects. For details of each of these were-animals, see de Groot, 4:156-252.

<sup>44</sup> The Chinese names for fox are *hu* and *li*. The former character *hu* is composed of dog and orphan contracted because this animal was always seen alone. The latter character *li* is composed of dog and village because foxes lurked about villages and hamlets. Dore, 5:695, 700-1.

<sup>45</sup> The legend of the monkey Sun is a typical illustration of transformation, canonization and deification. Before Sun was a monkey, it was a stone who absorbed the *jing* of heaven and earth. After having accompanied Xuanzhuang to India for a Buddhist pilgrimage, Sun became a god.

<sup>46</sup> The *Yuanshongji*, which is frequently quoted in books from the fifth or sixth century onwards, said: 'The *tsing* [*jing*] of millennial trees are blue goats, and that of trees ten times as old, are blue cows. Those souls often quit the trees to move away from men. And the sap of centennial trees is like blood.' de Groot, 4:288.

<sup>47</sup> For details of the identification of plant-spirits with men or animals, see de Groot, 4:273-324.

<sup>48</sup> Dore, 5:xi, 724.

<sup>49</sup> See de Groot, 4:273-4.

<sup>50</sup> When someone suffered fever, swooning or other demonic diseases, a peach-rod was used to cure him. He was beaten by the rod or by simply having brandished the rod over his head. Dore, 5:717-9

In the mineral world, stones were graded like animals. Precious stones had more *ling* than ordinary stones.<sup>51</sup> Those stones which were deep red in colour were considered to be the best, while white ones or those with combinations of purple, yellow or green were of the second rank. Stones which were part black and part white were considered to be third grade. In some cases, stones were kept in temples as 'honourable' objects of worship for they were more *ling* (divine and powerful) -- they acted in accordance with what the worshippers petitioned.

## 2. The worship of *ling*: spiritual beings

Traditional Chinese naturalists made five grand divisions in the animal kingdom: (1) the naked animal, (2) the hairy animal, (3) the feathered animal, (4) the shelly animal, and (5) the scaly animal. At the head of each division was the most spiritual (*ling*) of all species. They were the human, the unicorn, the phoenix, the tortoise and the dragon.<sup>52</sup>

In the *Book of Rites*, the last four animals were regarded as being specially endowed with marvellous supernatural powers and they were called the four *lings*. They had the power of transformation and could render themselves visible or invisible at pleasure.<sup>53</sup> Their appearance was deemed to symbolize good government, peace, prosperity and the birth of sages.<sup>54</sup> The unicorn represented the god of peace and prosperity<sup>55</sup> while the phoenix symbolized the god of begetting

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<sup>51</sup> Mackenzie, 1994:186.

<sup>52</sup> *Repository*, 7:212.

<sup>53</sup> Dore, 5:657.

<sup>54</sup> Dore, 5:viii, 658.

<sup>55</sup> The unicorn was at the head of the quadrupeds and was supposed to combine and possess all the good qualities which hairy animals had. It was the noblest animal and was full of gentleness. The unicorn carefully avoided treading upon any living organism or destroying the grass with its feet. It

children.<sup>56</sup> The tortoise was worshipped as the god of protecting river embankments<sup>57</sup> while the dragon was worshipped as the god of rain.<sup>58</sup>

The dragon was regarded as the most spiritual among the four *lings*<sup>59</sup> while the human was regarded as the most spiritual of all (living and non-living) creatures. The dragon symbolized the emperor and the blessings of his beneficent government.<sup>60</sup> As the emperor identified himself as the dragon ruling on earth, his subjects were regarded as the descendants of the dragon.<sup>61</sup> The classification of

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was always seen alone and appeared when a sage was born. The unicorn was said to appear during the days of Yao and Shun, and at the time when Confucius was born. For details, see Dore, 5:672-4; *Repository*, 7:212-7.

<sup>56</sup> The phoenix was the most honourable among the feathered species. The feathers had five colours and were named after the five cardinal virtues. Like the unicorn, the phoenix did not peck or injure any living insect nor tread upon any living herb. The first historical record of official worship offered to the phoenix was during the Former Han dynasty. In Chinese poetry, the bird was the emblem of conjugal fidelity. Jade girdle-ornaments with double phoenixes were usually given as love-tokens between husband and wife. For details, see Dore, 5:666-71; *Repository*, 7:250-2.

<sup>57</sup> When Yu the Great was going to control the flood, a tortoise came forth from the River Luo. The animal bestowed on him a chart of the *River* and a scheme of the *Great Plan*. The former contained all about the regulating of the waters and the latter contained all about the regulating of heaven and earth. This explains one of the reasons why the tortoise was chosen to divine the Will of Heaven in the remote ages.

During the reign of the late Emperor Guangxu (1875-1908), an Imperial Edict ordered Li Hongzhang to proceed to a shrine on the banks of the Yellow River and offer three Tibetan incense-sticks to the divine (*ling*) tortoise. For the tortoise had protected the embankments. Dore, 5:659-60, 662.

<sup>58</sup> It was customary in times of drought to organize a dragon procession and pray for rain. A paper dragon was made and was carried on a platform by eight men. The procession was headed by two men carrying banners, which were inscribed 'all good folks (on one side) pray for rain (on the other side)'. They were followed by the crowd. Each person held a branch of a willow tree or sticks of burning incense. For details, see Dore, 5:685-90.

<sup>59</sup> It was due to the existence of dragons in all three layers of the universe: the celestial dragon, the earthly dragon and the watery dragon.

<sup>60</sup> Dore, 5:684.

<sup>61</sup> The dragon was the emblem of imperial power. Imperial edicts were issued from the 'dragon's seat' or the throne. A five-clawed dragon was embroidered on the emperor's court robes. Dragons were inscribed on his banners. Imperial books were published with dragons on the title pages. *Repository*, 7:254.

dragons was due to the Song Emperor Huizong (1101-1126). He canonized dragons under the title of 'dragon-spirits' and raised them to the dignity of kings.<sup>62</sup>

No matter whether it was a historical figure or a mythical figure, as long as a being was 'proved' to be *ling* it would receive appropriate offerings from the masses. When a being was officially canonized and deified by the emperor, the personified being would be given a proper place in a Chinese pantheon. This process of canonization resulted in a pantheon with countless gods. All these 'gods' and 'goddesses' had their reputed birthdays. They were honoured with sacrifices, thank-offerings, incense, fire-crackers and even theatre-plays.<sup>63</sup>

### 3. The worship of *shen*: heavenly gods

The seasonal changes and the farming activities were governed by the *qi* of the *yin-yang* and the *wuxing*. In Chinese astronomy, the great *yang* refers to the sun and the great *yin* refers to the moon. The mechanism of change and interchange between these two vital forces *yin* and *yang* are called *wuxing*. Firstly, *wuxing* literally means five movers referring to Venus, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars and Saturn. They move according to their own orbits.<sup>64</sup> Secondly, *wuxing* denotes the five elements with

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<sup>62</sup> He classified dragons into five kinds: (1) the blue-dragon spirits: kings being compassionate, (2) the red-dragon spirits: kings bestowing blessings on lakes, (3) the yellow-dragon spirits: kings favourably hearing all petitions, (4) the white-dragon spirits: kings being virtuous and pure, and (5) the black-dragon spirits: kings dwelling in the depths of the mystic waters.

The emperor added the sixth hornless dragon, which might be placed on the tombs of high officials. The hornless dragon was deemed to bestow blessings on the deceased and his descendants. Dore, 5:682.

<sup>63</sup> All large temples had theatres. The birthdays of gods were invariably celebrated by the performance of plays before their images. Dore, 5:v.

<sup>64</sup> The formation of heavenly bodies was principally due to the *yang*, which was called the *qi* of heaven. In other words, the 'five movers' represented the five basic heavenly elements which the physical universe was composed of.

which the five planets are named -- metal, wood, water, fire and earth.<sup>65</sup> Finally, *wuxing* refers to five phases of change. The change can be a controlled mode or an uncontrolled mode of change. The controlled mode of change includes: (1) a harmonious mode of change, (2) a creative mode of change, and (3) a destructive mode of change.<sup>66</sup>

The rise and fall of the Xia, Shang, Zhou, Qin and Han dynasties was explained according to such a theory of change.<sup>67</sup> In sum, the theory of *wuxing* provides the Chinese with a complete means of explaining change and with a powerful tool with which change can be controlled.<sup>68</sup> In addition, the ideas of the five elements are spatial as well as temporal concepts according to the following:

	<i>Wood</i>	<i>Fire</i>	<i>Metal</i>	<i>Water</i>	<i>Earth</i>
sacred being	Jupiter	Mars	Venus	Mercury	Saturn
sacred time	Spring	Summer	Autumn	Winter	'Fang'
sacred place	East	South	West	North	Center

The *wuxing* had a *yin* and *yang* aspect. During the first half of the year, the *yang* was ascending and nature was growing. During the second half of the year, the *yin* was ascending and nature began to rest and 'die'. The systematization of the *wuxing*

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<sup>65</sup> The formation of earthly substances was principally due to the *yin*, which was called the *qi* of earth. In other words, the 'five elements' represented the five basic earthly elements which the earth was composed of.

<sup>66</sup> The formation of all living and non-living beings was due to the combination of *yin* and *yang*, in which man was the prime existence. Such a prime existence reflected an equilibrium between *yin* and *yang*, which is named as the *qi* of man. In other words, the 'five phases of change' represented the growth and decay of a being.

<sup>67</sup> It is called the theory of five virtues, a Confucian version of *wuxing*. For detailed discussion, see Gu, 1983:90-103.

<sup>68</sup> The theory of change consisted of three basic principles: (1) the principle of change, (2) the principle of interchange, and (3) the principle of the unchanged.

extended to the invisible spiritual world and the visible physical world. The *Book of Mountains and Seas* recorded five mythical emperors governing the five movers. The five great peaks of China were regarded to be the sacred places for the spirits of the five directions.

	<i>Wood</i>	<i>Fire</i>	<i>Metal</i>	<i>Water</i>	<i>Earth</i>
sacred emperors	Fuxi	Shennong	Shaohao	Xuanxu	Huangdi
sacred mountains	Taishan	Hengshan	Huashan	Hengshan	Songshan

Heavenly bodies, mythical emperors and sacred mountains were hence worshipped by all classes and ranks in China. The five sacred mountains were offered sacrifices in the third, eighth, eleventh and twelfth lunar months.<sup>69</sup> The gods of heavenly bodies were also offered sacrifices in definite months.

<i>First half of the year</i>		<i>Second half of the year</i>	
1st m.	Jade Emperor Five Cardinal Gods <sup>70</sup>	7th m.	Queen Mother of the West <sup>71</sup> Wind and Rain God
2nd m.	Sun Festival Heaven and Earth	8th m.	Moon Festival Thunderbolt God
3rd m.	Earth Goddess Heavenly Empress	9th m.	Southern Constellation <sup>72</sup> Double Yang Festival

<sup>69</sup> For exact dates, see Dore, 5:578-9, 598, 609, 614.

<sup>70</sup> The five cardinal points referred to North, South, East, West and Centre. The gods each had a festival on the tenth day of the five first months. Dore, 5:566.

<sup>71</sup> She presided over the congregation of genii and immortals on Mount Kunlun. In her garden grew peaches, which ripened once every 3000 years but conferred immortality upon those who ate them. Later tradition had given her a husband the Royal Lord of the East. Dore, 5:587, 593.

<sup>72</sup> He descended to control the death of mortals. Dore, 5:601.

4th m.	Lu Dongbin <sup>73</sup> Soil Goddess	10th m.	King of the Western Heavens North Pole
5th m.	Longevity God (South Pole) Great Bear <sup>74</sup>	11th m.	Jade Emperor Ten Cardinal Gods <sup>75</sup>
6th m.	Fire God Thunder God	12th m.	Stove God Longevity God (Great Bear)

#### 4. The rites of cosmic renewal

The theory of cyclical growth and renewal was reflected in the annual cycle of seasonal changes of the year and the life cycle of humans.<sup>76</sup> Rites of passage (birth, capping, marriage and death) were correspondent to the planting of spring, growth of summer, harvest of autumn and rest of winter.<sup>77</sup> The annual cycle of seasonal changes theoretically and liturgically symbolized and celebrated the natural events of life. Ancestor practice was thus integrated with the ritual of Heaven, i.e. the rites of cosmic renewal, and vice versa. The rites integrated the individual into family, community and cosmos. The rituals of Heaven celebrated the rites of passage through the cycle of life (microcosm) and of nature (macrocosm) at the same time.

The rites of cosmic renewal followed the farmer's almanac.<sup>78</sup> Cyclical festivals fell in the *yang* (odd-numbered) months and farming activities fell in the *yin*

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<sup>73</sup> Lu Dongbin was worshipped under the name of 'Pure Yang', which means 'Pure Supreme Essence of the Universe'. Dore, 5:581.

<sup>74</sup> The first part of Ursa Major contained the first four stars in the Dipper. Dore, 5:587.

<sup>75</sup> The ten cardinal points were: north, northeast, east, southeast, south, southwest, west, northwest, above and below.

<sup>76</sup> Saso, 1991:354.

<sup>77</sup> Saso, 1991:354.

<sup>78</sup> Saso, 1991:358.

(even-numbered) months.<sup>79</sup> The festivals were doubly symbolic in representing the life growth of humans and of crops. There were altogether twenty-four seasonal festivals with two festivals in each lunar month.

<i>Spring</i>	<i>Summer</i>	<i>Autumn</i>	<i>Winter</i>
beginning spring rain water	opening summer little filled	beginning autumn extreme heat	opening winter little snow
exciting insects spring equinox	busy in planting summer solstice	white dew autumnal equinox	much snow winter solstice
clear brightness grain rains	little heat great heat	cold dew hoar frost	slight fall big fall

The lunar New Year was preceded by the solar New Year which was celebrated at the winter solstice of the eleventh lunar month.<sup>80</sup> The seasonal festival of the winter solstice celebrated the rebirth of the *yang* principle. A proverb says, ‘the winter solstice is greater than the (lunar) New Year.’ The actual celebration of the lunar New Year began on the twenty-fourth day of the twelfth lunar month when the household gods were sent off to report to the Jade Emperor.<sup>81</sup> After the farewell meal to the Stove God, the residence was given a complete cleaning in preparation for the arrival of the heavenly spirits on New Year’s Eve.<sup>82</sup> The cleaning

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<sup>79</sup> Saso, 1991:358.

<sup>80</sup> Saso, 1972:16.

<sup>81</sup> Saso, 1972:16.

<sup>82</sup> On the 24th day, the Stove God ascended to heaven and reported to the Jade Emperor on the conduct of the family during the past year. This day was called the Day of Farewell-to-Stove-God. The Stove God returned to the family on New Year’s Eve. Dore, 5:615, 623.

symbolized renewal, blessing and purification from the powers of *yin*.<sup>83</sup> Evil powers and death were expelled at the end of the old year.

It must be remembered that the lunar New Year was not celebrated on a single day but in a series of events representing the annual rebirth of *yang* in the universe.<sup>84</sup> It began on New Year's Eve.<sup>85</sup> Every family decided at what moment the heavenly gods arrived and thus initiated the blessing and renewal of the family for the coming year. Prescribed acts of New Year included: (1) the pasting of red papers on the door, (2) the laying out of a banquet for the heavenly gods,<sup>86</sup> (3) the communion meal of cooked food for the ancestors,<sup>87</sup> (4) the offering of a banquet for the earthly spirits,<sup>88</sup> (5) the banquet for the living family members assembled for the New Year's celebration, (6) the opening of the front door signalling the arrival of the New Year and its blessing, and (7) all members of the family wearing new clothes. The fifteenth day of the first month was called 'spending the little New Year' which

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<sup>83</sup> Saso, 1972:16.

<sup>84</sup> The first ten days of the New Year were the birthdays of the following in sequence: hens, dogs, hogs, ducks, oxen, horses, man, rice, vegetables and wheat. On the eleventh day, preparation for the Lantern Festival was made. On the thirteenth day, ghost-lamps were placed on tombs. On the fifteenth day, the Lantern Festival was celebrated which marked the close of the New Year. For details, see Dore, 5:626-44.

<sup>85</sup> The rituals on New Year's Eve included: (1) ceremony of closing the wells, (2) sweeping and cleaning up the house, (3) making presents on New Year's Eve, (4) receiving back the Stove God, (5) pasting slips of red paper on the door, (6) hanging lucky objects and ornaments on the wall, and (7) ceremony of rubbing the mouth. For details, see Dore, 5:620-25.

<sup>86</sup> The sacrificial objects included sweet oranges, sweet rice cakes, cake, incense, wine, and new lighted candles. The Chinese words for heaven and sweet are homonyms. Saso, 1972:17.

<sup>87</sup> After the rites of offering to the ancestors, the food would be consumed by the living family members. Saso, 1972:17.

<sup>88</sup> These earthly spirits were not members of the family. They might have been the owners of the land before the present occupants, children who had died young, the unmarried and orphan spirits. Small silver paper-money was burned for them whereas large gold paper-money was burned for the heavenly spirits. Gold is *yang* and silver is *yin*. Saso, 1972:17.

marked the close of the New Year. The evening of the day was the Lantern Festival.<sup>89</sup>

The year and its festivals were divided into three unequal segments. The first was from the fifteenth day of the first month till the fifteenth day of the seventh month. It was governed by the gods of the heavens. The second was from the fifteenth day of the seventh month till the fifteenth day of the tenth month. It was ruled by the gods of earth. The third was from the fifteenth day of the tenth month till the New Year. It was governed by the gods of water.<sup>90</sup> The three stages of the macrocosm corresponded to the three sections of the microcosm: the head, chest and belly of man.<sup>91</sup>

If the microcosm is a reflection of the macrocosm, then what has been said about the ancestor rites is analogically applicable to the rituals of Heaven. As we struggle to understand how Christians deal with them today, the following conclusions are drawn according to Paul's guiding principles and Xunzi's social theory (of myth elimination, myth preservation and myth interpretation): (1) Theoretically speaking, the rituals of Heaven are good in themselves because the rites point towards God-on-High. (2) Existentially speaking, the rituals of Heaven have become 'fallen' and become the worship of natural deities, spiritual beings and heavenly gods. The rites should thus be viewed with suspicion. (3) The pre-scientific

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<sup>89</sup> A dragon procession was organized. Respectable married women might go out to see the display of lanterns on that evening. The celebration was said to be in honour of the approach of spring and lengthening days, coupled with prayer for rains. During the Han dynasty, it was the occasion for sacrifices to the God of the Pole Star because he embodied the principles of *yin* and *yang*. By the fifth century, the festival became an occasion for poetic contests. The lanterns were decorated with pithy verses. Saso, 1972:19; Walters, 1992:98-9. For details, see Dore, 5:642-4.

<sup>90</sup> The three segments were governed under three rulers: (1) Heavenly segment: Cuwei-dadi the giver of blessings, (2) Earthly segment: Qingxu-dadi the one who forgives sins, (3) Watery segment: Dongyin-dadi the dispeller of evil spirits. Saso, 1972:19.

<sup>91</sup> Saso, 1972:19.

three-tiers of worldview and belief in were-animals should be eliminated in the rites of cosmic renewal. (4) The theory of *wuxing* and cosmic renewal should be existentially re-interpreted as the theory of co-creation and re-creation. (5) The rites of cosmic renewal should be preserved but Christians should re-enact them as a sacrament of transcendence.<sup>92</sup>

In the Christian myth of creation, there are three layers of meanings: (1) creation from nothingness, (2) co-creation of God and man, and (3) re-creation, i.e. a new creation of heaven and earth. A Chinese Christian theology of creation may be integrated with the Daoist ideas of *yin-yang*, *wu-xing* and the cosmic renewal. For the name of the days denote *yin-yang* and *wu-xing* and every Sunday symbolized a cosmic renewal.

	Heavenly bodies	<i>Yin-yang</i> and <i>Wu-xing</i>
Sunday	Sun	<i>yang</i>
Monday	Moon	<i>yin</i>
Tuesday	Mars	fire
Wednesday	Mercury	water
Thursday	Jupiter	wood
Friday	Venus	metal
Saturday	Saturn	earth

In this section, I have described how Heaven-related ancestor practice (namely the rites of Heaven) has fallen and deteriorated into various kinds of idol worship namely the worship of natural deities, spiritual beings and heavenly gods. When

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<sup>92</sup> This will be dealt with in the next section.

strong Chinese argue that the rite of Heaven is good in itself, I am totally in agreement. The ritual is potentially transcendent and it is not idol worship. However, I need to remind him about the fallen nature of man. Most Chinese (the weak Chinese) see the rites of Heaven as idol worship. We need to educate the weak to know the nothingness of idols and the knowledge of monotheism. We also need to awaken the strong to realize their ignorance of the demonic powers and the reality of one True God.

In the final section of this chapter, I shall argue from the knowledge of Heaven and the knowledge of principle to the knowledge of monotheism. In reforming and transforming traditional Heaven-related ancestor practice, I propose the observance of Sunday rest for the Chinese and the Lord's Supper for the Christians. Through a sacrament of transcendence, Chinese ancestor practice is transformed and transcended into a Christian pattern of Honouring the Ancestors. Ancestor theology and dialogue theology are then proposed for further development and for inter-faith dialogue.

### c. The Mandate of Heaven

The greatest thinker of neo-Confucianism was Zhuzi. If Mencius is a moralist and Xunzi is a naturalist, then Zhuzi is a synthesizer of the two. As a moralist, Zhuzi emphasized love (*ren*). As a naturalist, he stressed reason (*li*). As a synthesizer, Zhuzi advocated the harmony and one-ness of love and reason. Zhuzi was also an important contributor to the cultural model of ancestor practice. He reconstructed the religious model into a cultural model based on his theory of principle.

Following his line of thought, I shall suggest a reconstruction of traditional Heaven-related ancestor practice into a modernized social and civil rite compatible with Christian faith. I adopt Zhuzi's cosmological theory and propose principle, reason and love as categorical ideas. Firstly, I shall argue from the knowledge of Heaven and the knowledge of principle to the knowledge of monotheism. Secondly, I shall propose a view of spiritual cultivation on the ground of Zhuzi's intellectual and moral cultivation. Thirdly, I will suggest a reformation of the rites of Heaven. Finally, I shall suggest how Chinese ancestor practice can be transformed into a form of Christian Ancestor Worship through dialogue theology.

#### 1. The cosmic ultimate: principle

The neo-Confucianists arose in the eleventh century. The Five Masters of the Northern Song were: Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai, Shao Yong and the Zheng brothers Zheng Hao and Zheng Yi. However, it was Zhuzi who synthesized neo-Confucian ideas into a harmonious whole and brought neo-Confucianism to its highest development.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> According to Chan Wing-tsit, Zhuzi's contributions in philosophy were: (1) determining the direction of Neo-Confucianism, (2) refining the concept of principle, (3) clarifying the relationship between principle and material force, (4) developing the concept of the Great Ultimate, and (5) bringing the doctrine of *ren* to culmination.

Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073) is famous for his *Penetrating the Book of Changes* and the *Treatise on the Diagram of the Great Ultimate*. The key concept of the former is sincerity and of the latter tranquillity.<sup>94</sup> According to the *Diagram*, the Great Ultimate generated *yin* and *yang*:

*The Nothing Ultimate and also the Great Ultimate!*

*The Great Ultimate through movement generates yang....  
Through tranquillity the Great Ultimate generates yin....*

*When the reality of the Nothing Ultimate and the essence of yin, yang,  
and the wuxing come into mysterious union, integration  
ensues....*

*The myriad things produce, and reproduce, resulting in an unending  
transformation.*

For Zhang Zai (1020-1077), the basic element of reality is material force (*qi*). He identified the material force with the Great Ultimate, with *yin* and *yang* as its two polar aspects.<sup>95</sup> For Shao Yong (1011-1077), the basic element of existence is number. Universal operation or change was due to spirit which gave rise to number, number to form, and form to matter. And number came out of principle.<sup>96</sup> The Zheng brothers identified principle as the ultimate. Principle was identical with the

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Zhuzi also opened up new grounds in three other aspects: (1) in writing and books: his skepticism toward the Five Classics and the grouping of the Four Books, (2) in education and community work: the establishment of the White Deer Hollow Academy and the Wu-fu community granary, and (3) in the tradition of the Way: by declaring that the doctrine of the sage was transmitted from Yao and Shun, through Yu, Tang, Wen to Confucius and Mencius, and then to Zhou Dunyi and Zheng's brothers. For details, see Chan, 1987:39-69.

<sup>94</sup> Chan, 1987:106.

<sup>95</sup> As substance, material force was the Great Void in which the *qi* was undifferentiated and 'above form'. As function, material force was the Great Harmony in which the *qi* was condensed and 'below form'. The *yin* and the *yang* were its two basic properties. In the process of creation (activity and tranquillity), certain fundamental laws were at work. Basically, the *qi* condensed to form objects and then dispersed, returning to its undifferentiated state. Chan, 1987:106; Kasoff, 1984:36-43.

<sup>96</sup> Chan, 1987:107.

nature of men and things.<sup>97</sup> All beings were understood in the light of their specific principles.<sup>98</sup> In sum, there were four approaches to cosmology in early neo-Confucianism: (1) Zhou Dunyi centered on the Great Ultimate. (2) Zhang Zai focused on material force. (3) Shao Yong stressed number. And (4) the Zheng brothers emphasized principle.

In making his decision, Zhuzi interpreted Zhou's Great Ultimate along with Zhang's material force and Zheng's principle. The Great Ultimate was the most perfect principle and it was also the totality of all the principles of the myriad things.<sup>99</sup> Fung Yulan (1895-1985) compared the Great Ultimate to Plato's Form of the Good and to Aristotle's God.<sup>100</sup> The basic neo-Confucian cosmology was that the One produced the two (*yin* and *yang*) and the two produced the myriad things.<sup>101</sup>

Zhuzi proposed the doctrine of investigating things and examining principles because 'Heaven and Earth cannot speak, and rely on the sage to write books for them.'<sup>102</sup> Similarly, Mencius said, 'He who has fully employed the power of his mind knows his nature. Knowing his nature, he knows Heaven.'<sup>103</sup> The

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<sup>97</sup> Zheng I (1033-1107) said, 'All things under heaven can be understood in the light of their principles. "As there are things, there must be their specific principles." [*Book of Odes*] One thing necessarily has one principle.' Chan, 1987:107.

<sup>98</sup> Zheng Hao (1032-1085) said, ' "As there are things there must be their specific principles." All things have their principles. It is easy for a thing to function if it is in accord with principle but difficult if it violates it.' Chan, 1987:107.

<sup>99</sup> Ching, 1997:109.

<sup>100</sup> This comparison is to be understood in the context of function rather than in the context of substance. Ching, 1997:109.

<sup>101</sup> Zhuzi wrote, 'When things were first produced, the essence of *yin* and *yang* condensed spontaneously and formed two things. This is creation from transformation of *qi*, and is like lice bursting forth spontaneously. Once there exist these two, one female and one male, things are thereafter produced gradually out of seeds. This is from transformation of forms. The myriad things are all thus.' Chan, 1987:108; Kasoff, 1984:51.

<sup>102</sup> Ching, 1997:116.

<sup>103</sup> Fang, 1986:440-1.

presupposition is that men were akin to Heaven. Based on Mencius' self-cultivation and Zhuzi's theory of principle, a seven-ladder model of Heaven is proposed in correspondence to the seven-ladder model of the self:

<i>Aspects</i>	<i>Principle</i>
1. physical Heaven	1. atheism: principle of creativity <sup>104</sup>
2. natural Heaven	2. pantheism: principle of transformation <sup>105</sup>
3. personal Heaven	3. polytheism: principle of projection <sup>106</sup>
4. cultural Heaven	4. agnosticism: suspension of judgment
5. moral Heaven	5. monotheism: principle of as-if <sup>107</sup>
6. cosmic Heaven	6. panentheism: principle of association <sup>108</sup>
7. mystical Heaven	7. mysticism: tri-unity principle <sup>109</sup>

When the individual self has developed and exercised its inherent power (mind-heart) to the full, it will find its identity with Heaven.<sup>110</sup> The trouble is that men have belittled themselves by: (1) an ethical dualism between heavenly reason

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<sup>104</sup> The principle consisted of creation from nonbeing, emanation and natural evolution.

<sup>105</sup> The principle consisted of: (1) transformation from *qi* to *jing*, (2) transformation from *jing* to *shen*, and (3) transformation from *shen* to *xu*.

<sup>106</sup> The projection theory consisted of the processes of canonization, deification and ghostification.

<sup>107</sup> There are three postulates: (1) a moral universe which is benevolent, (2) the God-on-high who is righteous, and (3) a judgment and rebirth after death which harmonize righteous judgment and benevolence. For judgment symbolizes a correction and rebirth provides a chance of repentance.

<sup>108</sup> The principle consisted of: (1) the principle of correspondence, (2) the principle of harmony, and (3) the principle of oneness.

<sup>109</sup> In Daoism, the tri-unity principle refers to 'the One that produced the two and the two produced the three.' In Confucianism, the principle refers to 'the One that produced the two (*yin-yang*) and the two produced the *wuxing*.' In Christian faith, this tri-unity principle can be interpreted as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

<sup>110</sup> Fang, 1986:441.

(*tian-li*) and human desires, (2) an attachment to human desires, and (3) a fall from heavenly reason. Such an attachment and fall become a cause of human sinfulness and turn the ritual of Heaven into the worship of ‘false’ gods and deities.

## 2. The human ultimate: reason

In traditional Chinese thought, man was a part of nature. What was found in natural phenomena could also be found in human phenomena and vice versa. Hence, the Great Ultimate also served as the paradigm and exemplar for human beings.

	<i>qi of Heaven</i> <sup>111</sup>	<i>qi of Earth</i> <sup>112</sup>	<i>qi of Man</i> <sup>113</sup>
<i>yin-yang</i> <sup>114</sup>	bright and dark	light and heavy	clear and turbid
<i>wu-xing</i>	Jupiter Mars Venus Mercury Saturn	wood fire metal water earth	benevolence propriety righteousness wisdom faith

<sup>111</sup> *Yin* and *yang* originally stood for the shadowy and sunny sides of the hills. Zhuzi divided the stars into two kinds based on the presence or absence of their own light. The sun was called *yang* and the moon was called *yin*. Fixed stars were called regular stars and planets were called irregular stars. For the detail of the luminaries and their rotations, see Kim, 1980:161-70.

<sup>112</sup> Zhuzi used two dichotomies for dividing the five elements into two groups. They were the light-heavy dichotomy and the clear-turbid dichotomy. Fire and water were clear and light representing the group of fluids. Metal and wood were turbid and heavy representing the group of solids. Kim, 1980:269. For Zhuzi’s view on matter and material qualities, see Kim, 1980:262-273.

<sup>113</sup> Zhuzi also used other paired terms to describe the *qi* of man such as good and bad, correct and deviant, and bright and dark. According to his theory of living things, man’s *qi* was clear, complete and correct while the *qi* of other things was turbid, incomplete and deviant. Moral mind and virtues grew from clear *qi*. When *qi* was dark, man lost his moral courage and moral nature. The two main distinctions between men and animals were virtues and language. Kim, 1980:52-5, 276-80.

<sup>114</sup> For the details of how Zhuzi associated things and events with *yin-yang* and *wu-xing*, see Kim, 1980:63-104. Two useful tables listing all *yin-yang* and *wu-xing* associations in Zhuzi’s writings are on p. 64-6 and p. 82-4 respectively.

According to Zhuzi, *qi* was an integral part of nature but it must be subordinated to principle.<sup>115</sup> Yet, principle and *qi* were never separated. *Qi* could not be independent of principle.<sup>116</sup> Logically speaking, there was the principle of existence before things came into existence.<sup>117</sup>

Principle was necessary to explain the reality and universality of things. It was one, eternal and unchanging. It constituted the essence of things. Principle was always good because it provided the reason for creation.<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, *qi* was necessary to explain physical form, individuality and the transformation of things. It was many, transitory and changeable. It constituted the substance of things. *Qi* was both good and evil because it provided the vehicle and material for creation.<sup>119</sup>

Principle lay beneath all objects and phenomena. All individual principles were manifestations of a single universal principle.<sup>120</sup> However, it is difficult to say in a few words exactly what principle is. Zhuzi said that principle refers to ‘the reason that things and events are as they are and the way that they should be.’<sup>121</sup> In other words, principle consists of two kinds: ‘is’ and ‘ought’. The former is within the natural realm and belongs to natural knowledge. The latter is within the cultural

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<sup>115</sup> Chan, 1987:110.

<sup>116</sup> The Zheng brothers famous saying in this respect is: ‘It would be incomplete to talk about the nature of man and thing without including material force and unintelligible to talk about material force without including nature. It would be wrong to consider them as two.’ Similarly, Zhuzi said: ‘In the universe there has never been any material force without principle or principle without material force.’ Chan, 1987:111. For details, see Chan, 1987:110-113.

<sup>117</sup> Chan, 1987:112-3.

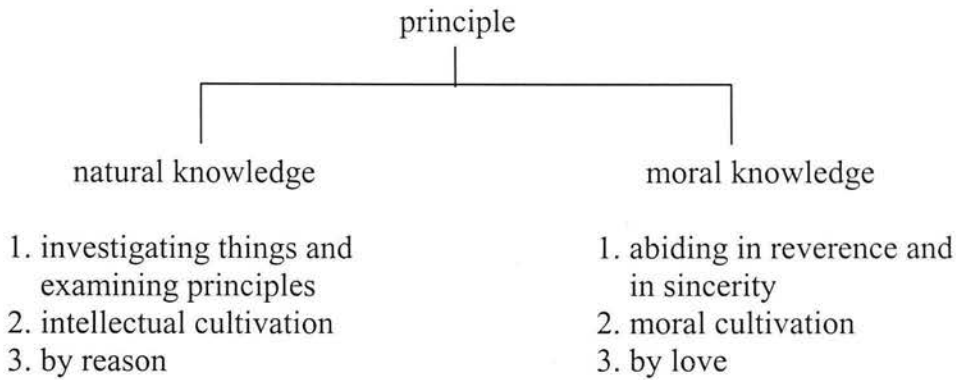
<sup>118</sup> Chan, 1987:111-2.

<sup>119</sup> Chan, 1987:112.

<sup>120</sup> Kim, 1980:17.

<sup>121</sup> Kim, 1980:17.

realm and belongs to moral knowledge. The way to investigate things and to examine principle is by reason. The way to prepare oneself (to investigate) and actualize oneself (with principle) is by love (*ren*). The harmony and oneness of reason and love is what humanity really is.



The human being was the crown of the universe. He received his own excellence from principle and *qi*. Through intellectual cultivation, the human ultimate could be examined by reason. Through moral cultivation, the human ultimate could be fully actualized by practicing love. Chang Chungyuan said, ‘One of the great contributions of Chinese philosophy is the theory that man perfects himself through the cultivation of egoless selfhood... to open out what is hidden within. It is directed toward answering the call of our higher inward qualities’<sup>122</sup>

Based on Mencius’ ethical theory, Xunzi’s social theory and Zhuzi’s cosmological theory, an analytic account of what *qi*, principle and reason means are given with respect to my proposed seven-ladder model of the self:

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<sup>122</sup> Chang, 1963:77.

<i>qi</i> <sup>123</sup>	<i>Principle</i>	<i>reason</i> <sup>124</sup>
1. life basic-stuff	principle of security: food	objective reason
2. life force	principle of survival: life-seeking	natural reason
3. life intent	principle of pleasure: sex	common reason
4. life principle	principle of utility: profit-making	human reason
5. life sequence	principle of righteousness: reason	moral reason
6. life-producing mind	principle of benevolence: love	cosmic reason
7. life creativity	principle of one-ness: harmony	heavenly reason

According to the Confucian tradition, the first four levels of self are what a small man aims at and the last three levels of self are what a great man lives for. A man who lives in the first three levels is like a beast. A man who reaches the fifth and sixth levels is called a gentleman and a man who harmonises reason and love is called a sage. In sum, a man should live according to heavenly reason (reason and love) and by subordinating human desires (food, life-seeking, sex, and profit-making).

According to Zhuzi's doctrine of 'principle is one and its manifestations are many', the principle of rites is the most important because the principle is 'above shape' and it is eternal and unchangeable. On the contrary, the rites are less important because the rituals are 'below shape' and they are transitional and changeable. In 1911, the rituals of Heaven and Earth were abolished because: (1) they were the royal prerogative; (2) they symbolized a feudal dynasty; (3) they

<sup>123</sup> The Chinese name for these seven levels of *qi* are: (1) *shengwu di cailiao*, referring to the five elements, (2) *shengqi*, (3) *shengyi*, (4) *shengli*, (5) *shengxu*, (6) *shengwu zhi xin*, and (7) *shengsheng buxi*. Kim, 1980: g-15.

<sup>124</sup> The Chinese name for these seven levels of reason are: (1) *wuli*, (2) *ziran zhi li*, (3) *changli*, (4) *ranli*, (5) *yili*, (6) *daoli*, and (7) *tianli*. Zheng Hao ambiguously used these terms in his writings with no attempt to determine the definite and specific meaning of each. He maintained that 'one hundred sorts of reasons are all there, spreading before us.' Fang, 1986:377-8.

represented a traditional agricultural society;<sup>125</sup> and (4) they were associated with superstitious beliefs and practices. Based on Paul's stumbling-block principle and Zhuzi's doctrine of principle and reason, it is unwise and inappropriate for the Christian to re-enact, promote and perform the rites of Heaven and Earth publicly or privately.

### 3. The Great Ultimate: love

If principle and *qi* are inseparable, then reason and love are also inseparable. Analogically speaking, principle is reason and *qi* is love. The linking bridge between *qi* and love is the idea of creativity which was fully developed in Zhuzi's philosophy. Firstly Confucius turned the particular virtue of *ren* the sense of benevolence into a general and universal virtue of love of humanity.<sup>126</sup> Secondly, Mencius defined *ren* as human-heartedness. Han Confucians taught it as love and Han Yu (768-824) described it as universal love.<sup>127</sup>

In neo-Confucianism, the ethical term of *ren* became metaphysical. Zhang Cai interpreted *ren* in a physiological way meaning 'communication'.<sup>128</sup> As *qi* was the ultimate reality, he declared that man and the cosmos were brotherhood because they both shared the same 'blood' (*qi*).<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, Zheng Yi interpreted *ren* in

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<sup>125</sup> During the New Year, there was the ploughing ceremony. The emperor ritually turned the earth with a plough on the ground of the sacred field. This gave an example to his subjects who depended on agriculture. This custom greatly impressed Jesuit missionaries who wrote back to Europe. Both the French and Austrian courts imitated the Chinese practices in 1768 and 1769 respectively. See Ching, 1997:28.

<sup>126</sup> Chan, 1987:56, 119.

<sup>127</sup> Chan, 1987:56, 119.

<sup>128</sup> One of the original meanings of *ren* is 'not paralyzed' in a Chinese physiological context. Its extension meaning is 'communication'. Hence, man could communicate with the cosmos and vice versa.

<sup>129</sup> Zhang Cai said, 'Heaven is my father. Earth is my mother. And even a small creature as I find an intimate place in their midst. That which extends through the universe I regard as my body, and that

a biological way meaning 'seed'.<sup>130</sup> On this basis, he treated *ren* as the natural ability to grow, the power to give life and the ability to produce.<sup>131</sup> All these ideas were reiterated by Zhuzi.

In emphasizing the communicative and creative character of *ren*, Zhuzi defined it as the character of the mind and the principle of love.<sup>132</sup> He understood the principle to be the mind of Heaven and Earth to produce and reproduce things cyclically and creatively, i.e. in a reasonable way. In explaining the character of the mind, Zhuzi said,

'The mind of Heaven and Earth is to produce things.' In the production of man and things, they receive the mind of Heaven and Earth as their mind. Therefore, with reference to the character of the mind, although it embraces and penetrates all and leaves nothing to be desired, nevertheless, one word will cover all of it, namely, *jen* [*ren*].<sup>133</sup>

*Ren* was unceasing production and reproduction. It was origination and the starting point of creation.<sup>134</sup> With regard to *ren* as the principle of love, Zhuzi compared it to the root of a tree or the spring of water.<sup>135</sup> He said,

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which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions. The great ruler (emperor) is the eldest son of my parents, and the great ministers are his stewards.' Ching, 1997:108.

<sup>130</sup> One of the original meanings of *ren* is seed. Chan, 1987:119.

<sup>131</sup> His brother Zheng Hao said, 'The great characteristic of Heaven and Earth is to produce.... This is what is meant by origination being the chief quality of goodness. This is *ren*.' Chan, 1987:119-20.

<sup>132</sup> Chan Wing-tsit said, '... By way of refinement, he [Zhuzi] defined *jen* as "the virtue (or character) of the mind and the principle of love." In this he went beyond Ch'eng I whom he followed in the opening passage of the *Treatise*.' Chan, 1987:56.

<sup>133</sup> Chan, 1987:56. For details, see Chan, 1987:56-7, 119-20.

<sup>134</sup> Chan, 1987:120.

<sup>135</sup> Chan, 1987:57.

*Jen [ren]* is principle of love and love is the function of *jen*. It is called *jen* before it is aroused. It is without any shape or shadow. It is called love only after it is aroused. Love, however, has shape and shadow. Before it is aroused, *jen* can include righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. As it is aroused, commiseration can include respect and reverence, deference and compliance, and the sense of right and wrong. The Four Beginnings are like sprouts. Commiseration is the sprout that emerges from *jen*.<sup>136</sup>

In other words, *ren* became a principle of creative creativity. The mind of Heaven and Earth was to produce and to create. The upshot was to provide a metaphysical basis for Confucian ethics. Reason and love were harmonized into one -- the power to create creatively. Reason was the thinking power to produce things reasonably while love was the vital force to actualize principles of ‘above form’ to things of ‘below form’.

Based on Zhuzi’s principle of love, an analytical account of what love is and what principles are involved in an existential inter-relationship is given below and it is proposed as a seven-ladder model of love.

<i>Context</i>	<i>Love</i>	<i>Principle</i>
1. self: outer-inner	self love	principle of reverence
2. age: old-young/parent-son	kinship love/parental love	principle of obedience
3. gender: husband-wife	true love	principle of respect
4. status: friend-friend	fraternal love	principle of trust
5. rank: ruler-minister	national love	principle of duty
6. created order: man-things	cosmic love	principle of creativity
7. spiritual order: man-God	divine love	principle of sincerity

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<sup>136</sup> Chan, 1987:57.

When the Han Confucianists stressed the three bonds and five virtues, it was the second to the fifth levels of the love model. When the neo-Confucianists emphasized moral cultivation and intellectual cultivation, it was the first and sixth levels of the love model. Self cultivation from the first to the sixth level is called graded love -- from near (micro-self) to afar (macro-self). The love attained in the sixth level is called ungraded love or universal love. The interchange between the self and the other is a dynamic process of embodying an ever expanding network of human relatedness.<sup>137</sup> This interchange defines Confucian self-cultivation in terms of personal, communal and cosmic self-transcendence.

Theoretically speaking, the Confucian model of reason-cultivation and love-cultivation must be expanded to a spiritual realm because there are three realms of existence namely the natural, the cultural and the spiritual. The Confucianists developed the first two realms and advocated intellectual cultivation and moral cultivation respectively. Zhuzi clearly stated, 'Heaven and Earth cannot speak, and rely on the sage to write books for them. Should Heaven and Earth possess the gift of speech, they would then express themselves better.'<sup>138</sup> From a Christian perspective, this is where natural theology ends and revealed theology begins. The seventh level of the model of love is divine love (*agape*) -- the good news from Heaven above.

Analogically speaking, the virtue of intellectual cultivation is the virtue of hope: to understand (oneself) in order to believe (God). The virtue of moral cultivation is the virtue of love: to love (your neighbours as yourself) and to be loved (by God). The virtue of spiritual cultivation is the virtue of faith: to believe (the oneness of

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<sup>137</sup> Tu, 1995:192. For details, see Tu, 1995:186-93.

<sup>138</sup> Zhuzi further said that the River Chart and the Book of Lo were examples of what Heaven and Earth had themselves designed. Ching, 1997:116.

reason and love in Jesus) in order to understand (the harmony of reason and love in God).

Based on II Peter 1:1-11, a model of spiritual cultivation is proposed to show how the one-ness of reason and love can be harmonized and integrated in a Christian context and meaning. When one receives the good news from Heaven, one bears the fruit of joy.

<i>Spiritual cultivation</i> <sup>139</sup>	<i>Explanatory notes</i>	<i>Fruits of Holy Spirit</i> <sup>140</sup>
1. faith	door to spiritual cultivation	faithfulness
2. moral excellence	moral cultivation: love <sup>141</sup>	goodness
3. knowledge	intellectual cultivation: reason <sup>142</sup>	peace <sup>143</sup>
4. self-control	spirit cultivation	self-control
5. perseverance	spirit cultivation	patience
6. godliness	Christ-like cultivation: cultivate divine nature/ imitate Christ	gentleness
7. brotherly kindness	Christ-like cultivation: love God's people/ love Christ's Body	kindness
8. love ( <i>agape</i> )	God-like cultivation: love all people/ love the world <sup>144</sup>	love

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<sup>139</sup> New American Standard Bible, II Peter 1:4-11.

<sup>140</sup> New American Standard Bible, Galatians 5:22-24.

<sup>141</sup> This refers to the first six levels of the seven-ladder model of love.

<sup>142</sup> This refers to the first six levels of the seven-ladder model of reason.

<sup>143</sup> According to the Confucian tradition, righteousness sprouts out of reason. Whoever actualizes reason fully, has peace of mind.

<sup>144</sup> 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' John 3:16.

#### 4. The sacrament of transcendence

Confucius was not the founder of Confucianism as Jesus was the founder of Christianity. Contemporary sinologists prefer to use the term 'Ruism' rather than Confucianism. The Chinese term *ru* literally means the family of scholars. Qian Mu (1895-1990) insisted that the *ru* were experts in the six arts of rites, music, archery, charioteering, writing and mathematics. They were first employed by aristocrats during the Zhou dynasty but gradually became independent practitioners.<sup>145</sup>

The history of Confucianism is divided into four phases. The first phase is called early Confucianism or ethical Confucianism. It is parallel to the orientation period of ancestor practice. The Duke of Zhou (d. 1094 BC) was said to establish rites and music which enabled the Zhou dynasty to survive in peace and prosperity for more than five centuries.<sup>146</sup> He was also said to be responsible for the teaching of the Mandate of Heaven.<sup>147</sup> The Duke of Zhou was deeply admired by Confucius, who believed that the Duke even appeared to him in dreams. Mencius and Xunzi represented two rival schools of early Confucianism.<sup>148</sup>

The second phase is called medieval Confucianism or political Confucianism. It is parallel to the de-orientation period of ancestor practice. The book-burning fiasco

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<sup>145</sup> Chan, 1956:9-11.

<sup>146</sup> Rites and music were thus identified as the two pillars of feudalism in Confucian thought. For details, see Tu, 1995:149-51.

<sup>147</sup> *The Book of History* preached the Mandate of Heaven. King Wu (and his father King Wen) used this doctrine to justify their conquest of the Shang dynasty. *The Book of History* plainly implied a belief in a single personal high God who ruled the world. His name was called *Di*, *Shangdi* or *Tian*. King Wu and the Duke of Zhou taught that Heaven placed the Yin (Shang) dynasty on the throne. However, the Yin kings misgoverned the people. The high God took the mandate away and gave it to the Zhou kings. They were ordered to overthrow Yin rule and govern the country benevolently and righteously.

Such a doctrine does not necessarily imply monotheism. On the contrary, there were the ordinary gods (*shen*) and the ancestral spirits (*gui*). They were treated as the messengers of the high God and were worshipped in the Zhou royal court. Dubs, 1960:165-6.

<sup>148</sup> According to Han Feizi (d. 233 BC), eight distinct schools emerged shortly after Confucius' death. Each of them claimed to be the legitimate heir to the Confucian legacy. Tu, 1995:155.

of the Qin made the Confucian tradition an integral part of the emerging political ideology.<sup>149</sup> During the reign of Han Wudi (140-87 BC), Confucianism became an officially recognized imperial ideology and state cult.<sup>150</sup> And Dong Zhongshu's theory of correspondence offered the Confucian literati an interpretative power with far reaching political implications.<sup>151</sup> Another prominent figure of medieval Confucianism was Han Yu who strongly advocated the revival of Confucianism against Buddhism<sup>152</sup> and redefined the Transmission of the Way.<sup>153</sup>

The third phase is called modern Confucianism or cosmological Confucianism. It is parallel to the re-orientation period of ancestor practice. The Song dynasty was militarily weak but culturally strong. The commercial revolution and the technological advances of the time characterized this period as the beginning of 'modern' China.<sup>154</sup> The decline of the aristocracy, the widely availability of printed books, the democratization of education and the full implementation of the examination system produced a new social class called gentry.<sup>155</sup> They were interested in social consciousness, political participation and cosmic awareness. They

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<sup>149</sup> Tu, 1995:161.

<sup>150</sup> See Tu, 1995:161.

<sup>151</sup> See Tu, 1995:163-4.

<sup>152</sup> Han Yu was a great writer and poet of the Tang dynasty. He attacked Buddhism from the perspectives of social ethics and cultural identity. Tu, 1995:166.

<sup>153</sup> The concept of *Daotong* (Transmission of the Way) may be traced back to Mencius. He declared the doctrine of the sage was transmitted from sage-kings Yao, Shun, Yu, through King Tang, King Wen, King Wu to (sage) Confucius. A thousand years later, Han Yu repeated the theme but: (1) added the Duke of Zhou to King Wen and King Wu, (2) added Mencius and declared the transmission terminated with Mencius, (3) eliminated Xunzi and Yang Xiong (53 BC - 18 AD) as neither 'refined' nor 'thorough' enough to be worthy of the transmission. Chan, 1987:121. For the completion of the concept of *Daotong*, see Chan, 1987:121-30.

<sup>154</sup> The commercial revolution produced social patterns such as flourishing markets, densely populated cities, elaborate communication networks, theatrical performances, literary groups and popular religions. Technological advances in agriculture, textiles, lacquer, porcelain, printing, maritime trade and weaponry were unrivalled in the world of the time. Tu, 1995:168.

<sup>155</sup> Tu, 1995:168.

contributed to the third movement of Confucianism. The representatives of two main schools were Zhuzi and Wang Yangming<sup>156</sup>.

The fourth phase of Confucianism is contemporary Confucianism or philosophical Confucianism. It is from the fall of the Qing dynasty to the present. The political revolution of 1911 deprived the Confucians of imperial patronage.<sup>157</sup> The literary revolution of 1917 overthrew the Confucian classics.<sup>158</sup> The social revolution of 1949 cast aside most of the rituals, and the Cultural Revolution made Confucianism taboo.<sup>159</sup> In spite of all these, a quest for a new wave of Confucianism has been addressed since 1911. Some of the prominent contributors were Fu Yulan,<sup>160</sup> Tang Jungyi<sup>161</sup> and Mou Zongsan.<sup>162</sup>

According to Toynbee's theory, the four phases of Confucianism reflected four major crises in Chinese history and four challenges in intellectual history. They are:

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<sup>156</sup> Wang Yangming's philosophy may be called a protest philosophy because of his criticism of Zhuzi. His school of thought is described as the school of mind in contrast to Zhuzi's school of principle. Wang Yangming spoke of the mind as absolute. However, the mystical and subjective mind could not be easily controlled. Zhuzi began with the world, then the self and the harmony of the cosmos and self. Wang Yangming began with the self, then the world and the one-ness of the cosmos and self. Ching, 1993:162-4; Tu, 1995:178-80.

<sup>157</sup> In 1907, the termination of the civil service examinations had already ended the monopoly of Confucianism. Chan, 1987:31.

<sup>158</sup> In the new school system the Four Books and the Five Classics are no longer required texts. Chan, 1987:31.

<sup>159</sup> Chan, 1987:31.

<sup>160</sup> Fu Yulan (1895-1985) reconstructed neo-Confucianism in a westernized way. His four major concepts of principle, material force, the substance of *Tao* and the Great Whole were all derived from Zhuzi. Chan, 1987:32-3. For details, see Chan, 1963:751-55.

<sup>161</sup> Tang Jungyi (1909-1978) was primarily engaged in formulating his own philosophy of the foundation of the moral self. He adopted Hegelian dialectical logic in his philosophy. He was inspired by Wang Yangming rather than by Zhuzi. Chan, 1987:33; Ching, 1997:121; Ng, 1995:25.

<sup>162</sup> Mou Zongsan (1909-1995) adopted Kantian metaphysical ethics in his philosophy. He was like Tang Jungyi being inspired by Wang Yangming rather than by Zhuzi. Chan, 1987:33-4; Ching, 1997:121; Ng, 1995:25.

<i>Political Crisis</i>	<i>Cultural Challenge</i>	<i>Confucian Response</i>
1. disintegration of rites and music	egoism and altruism	ethical Confucianism
2. book-burning of Qin dynasty	<i>yin yang</i> and <i>wu xing</i>	political Confucianism
3. alien rule by ‘barbarians’	Buddhism and Daoism	cosmological Confucianism
4. colonialization by western powers	democracy and science	ontological Confucianism

China has always been proud of its Great Wall<sup>163</sup> and the Yellow River.<sup>164</sup> The Great Wall symbolized a closed kingdom and the Yellow River represented constant change.<sup>165</sup> It is a fact that the Yellow River must finally flow into the Great Peace Ocean (the Pacific Ocean). The past three movements of Confucianism had absorbed the ‘alien’ and ‘heterodox’ ideas and expanded the system to a new level.<sup>166</sup> It is a wish that contemporary Confucianism must break down its own barriers and absorb new ideas in order to become a global Confucianism.<sup>167</sup> If Tang Jungyi adopts a Hegelian dialectic and the Lotus School in constructing his spiritual

<sup>163</sup> The only human construction that could be observed by astronauts from the moon. Tang, 1993:245.

<sup>164</sup> The last great and continuous ‘river civilization’ of the world is still existent. The others have either disappeared or lost their living glory. Tang, 1993:245.

<sup>165</sup> ‘Lost soil from the western mountains is deposited as the river flows down the great plains. As a result, it changes its course every seventy years, flooding several provinces and causing enormous loss of life and widespread famine.’ Tang, 1993:245.

<sup>166</sup> The orthodox Confucianists do not recognize Han Confucianism as part of *Daotong* because it ‘deviated’ from Mencius’s teachings. Hence, they call neo-Confucianism the second wave and see contemporary Confucianism as the third wave. Tang Jungyi and Mou Zongsan are treated as orthodox and Fung Yulan as heterodox.

<sup>167</sup> Very often, ‘orthodox’ Confucianists stress the *Daotong* and reject other forms of Confucianism as ‘heterodox’ or ‘deviant’ Confucianism. The two trends of Confucianism are as follows:

	<i>Orthodox</i>	<i>Heterodox</i>
early Confucianism	Mencius	Xunzi
medieval Confucianism	Han Yu	Dong Zhongshu
modern Confucianism	Zhuzi	Wang Yangming
contemporary Confucianism	Tang Jungyi, Mou Zongsan	Fung Yulan

However, Zhuzi’s philosophy strictly speaking followed the line of Xunzi while Wang Yangming’s philosophy followed the line of Mencius. Secondly, Tang Jungyi and Mou Zongsan followed Wang Yangming and Fung Yulan followed Zhuzi.

philosophy, then a Christian can adopt Paul's ethics and Peter's theology in constructing his 'Confucian' spirituality. If Mou Zongsan uses Kantian ethics in re-interpreting and expounding Confucian thought, then a Christian can use John's theology to re-interpret and expound Confucian ideas too.

In *John's Gospel and Epistles*, the apostle told us that: (1) God is reason, (2) God is love, and (3) God is one.<sup>168</sup> Analogically speaking, John's idea of God is equivalent to Zhuzi's principle or the Great Ultimate. Secondly, John announced that

*In the beginning was the Word (logos),  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.  
He was with God in the beginning.*

*Through him all things were made,  
without him nothing was made that has been made.  
In him was life,  
and that life was the light of men.<sup>169</sup>*

In this prologue to *The Gospel of John*, the description of the Word consists of reason and life. Philosophically speaking, the Word is parallel to Zhuzi's principle and *qi*. Thirdly, John declared that 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.'<sup>170</sup> Cosmologically speaking, man is the crown of creation in such a way that the Word became flesh. This idea of incarnation symbolically matches the main tenet of Confucian thought. However, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to expound Confucian ideas in terms of John's theology and

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<sup>168</sup> John 1:1; I John 4:8.

<sup>169</sup> John 1:1-4.

<sup>170</sup> John 1:14.

discuss these issues in detail. The point is that Jesus Christ can provide an ontological basis for Confucian humanism<sup>171</sup> and cosmic renewal:

<i>Christ's 'great ultimate'</i> <sup>172</sup>	<i>Christ's 'cosmic renewal'</i>
1. pre-requisite level: love oneself	1. daily: from morning to morning
2. ultimate level: love others	2. weekly: from Sunday to Monday
3. great ultimate: love God	3. yearly: from lunar to solar / BC to AD

In pre-revolutionized China, a five-day week (or a ten-day week) and a lunar year were the official calendar. Since 1911, the Chinese government has adopted a seven-day week and a solar year as the official calendar. This is a significant 'cosmic change' in Chinese calendar history and it is thus worthwhile for the non-Christian Chinese to realize and be aware of the cosmic impact of Jesus Christ on their daily lives.

Hence, Christians should keep using BC and AD as a sign of Christ's cosmic renewal and as a 'bridge' to preach the good news to their neighbours. Secondly, Christians should have a Sunday's rest as a contemplation of nature and a witness to God. For Sunday is associated with the creation story by declaring the sabbath to be a divine as well as a human rest day. Thirdly, the Christians should observe the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of the new creation and practice the Christian 'Great Ultimate' daily -- love your neighbours as yourself.

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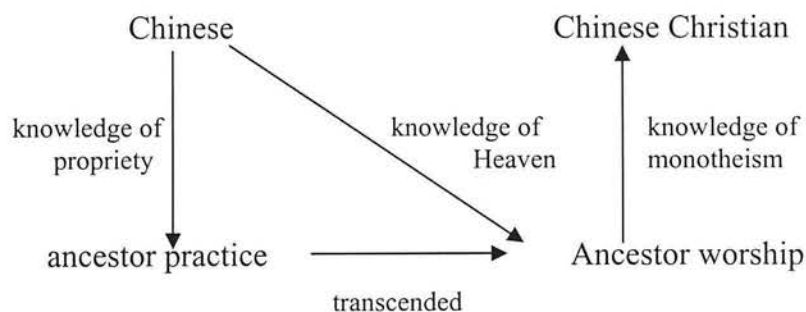
<sup>171</sup> In a search for a universal understanding of the 'human' as the ground for human values and relations, Liu Xiaofeng declared himself a Christian (*Jidutu*, a follower of Christ) but not a 'church Christian' (*Jidujiaotu*, a believer of Christianity). Tang, 1993:247.

<sup>172</sup> A lawyer asked Jesus which commandment was the most important. After Jesus' reply, the man said, 'You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.' See Mark 12:28-34.

If the most important event is the Passover event for the Chosen people under the Old Covenant, then it should be the Creation event for the non-Chosen people. If the most sacramental event is the Lord's Supper for the Christian under the New Covenant, then it should be Sunday's rest for the non-Christian. Hence, it is a missiological and theological strategy to observe and promote Sunday rest in the non-Christian community rather than to perform and propagate the traditional rites of Heaven.

So understood, the Sunday becomes more than a social and political institution but rather a contemplation of nature and its divine Creator, a listening to the heartbeat of the cosmos, a devotional and spiritual exercise. The Lord's Supper thus becomes a commemoration of the creation of the Word, a reminder of cosmic renewal and a remembrance of the new Adam (Ancestor) Lord Jesus Christ.

A contemporary Christian can make a response to Chinese ancestor practice and establish an Ancestor Theology.



For instance: (1) The cosmic Christ is our original ancestor because he created the world and he is the head of all creation. (2) Historical Jesus is our proto-ancestor because he was the second Adam and he is the first-born from the dead. (3) Jesus

Christ is our historical ancestor because he is the founder and the head of the Church.<sup>173</sup>

This three ancestor-identity of Jesus Christ parallels to the threefold meanings of 'ancestor' (*zu* and *zong*) in Confucianism. Firstly, it is the cosmological sense which refers to the origin and source of beings. Secondly, it is the historical sense which means the birth and death of a person. Thirdly, it is the ethical sense which denotes the meaning of 'contribution' and 'virtue'. In addition, the Lord's Supper becomes the ancestral meal through which the life of the faith community is nourished and renewed.

It is possible that the Chinese Christian could also develop a Filial Theology based on: (1) Alouben's threefold loyalties, (2) Ricci's threefold filialty, and (3) Jesus's threefold love. For in *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Ricci wrote:

To determine the meaning of filial piety, we must first determine the relationship between father and son. In this world a man has three kinds of father. The first is the Lord of Heaven, the second the sovereign of his state, and the third the father of his family; to disobey these three fathers is to be unfilial. When all men follow the Way the wills of these three kinds of fathers will not be in conflict since the father of a lowest rank will command his own son to serve the senior fathers and he who is a son will observe all three kinds of filial piety by obeying his one father. When the Way does not hold sway in the world, however, the commands of the three kinds of father will conflict with each other; the father of the lowest rank will fail to obey the senior fathers, will seek to benefit his own selfish ends, and will instruct his sons to serve himself and to ignore his other fathers. A son ought to obey the commands of his most senior father even if they run counter to those of his father of lowest rank. In so doing he does not violence to his filial conduct. If, on the other hand, he obeys his father of lowest rank and thereby disobeys his senior fathers he will naturally be reckoned the most unfilial sons.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> For the relationship between historical Jesus and cosmic Christ, see my Mak, 1992:33-47.

<sup>174</sup> Ricci, 1985:433-6.

It is well-known that ancestor practice in its diverse forms are not uniquely a Chinese phenomenon.<sup>175</sup> In this dissertation, I have constructed a seven-ladder model of self to tackle the Chinese issue of ancestor practice. This model can be used for comparative studies of the different ancestor practices of different nations. Moreover, I have developed three other models: the reason-cultivation model, the love-cultivation model and the spirit-cultivation model. These three models can be used for intra-faith dialogue between western Christianity and Chinese Christianity,<sup>176</sup> and inter-faith dialogue between contemporary Confucianism and Christian faith.<sup>177</sup>

In this final section of the dissertation, I shall sketch a new horizon in which the seven-ladder model of self can be developed into a model of Christian theology, a model of world religion and a model of dialogue theology.

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<sup>175</sup> There are for example African ancestor worship, Israel ancestor commemoration, Korean ancestor worship and Japanese ancestor worship.

<sup>176</sup> For instance, what do we mean by claiming that we are the sons of God? When we say a relational relationship between I and Thou, it does not mean that we are independent of each other. Rather, both sides are mutually dependent on each other. (This suits our Chinese way of thinking.) In other words, it allows both sides to be changed by the other side, not one side only. (This would be totally different from Platonism: what is real cannot be changed.) Hence, God *changes* himself and incarnates. He becomes God and man at the same time.

What about man? Can we *change* and transcend ourselves (through the power of Jesus Christ) and become divine and human at the same time. For we are the sons of God. Mak, 1989:11-2.

<sup>177</sup> The three models with the seven-ladder model of self cover the agenda for dialogue between Christianity and China which basically covers nine points.

<i>Christian faith</i>	<i>Chinese culture</i>
1. the original sin of mankind	1. the goodness of human nature
2. man as a creature	2. man as a co-creator
3. the disunity between God and man	3. the unity of Heaven and man
4. the gracious act of God	4. the human capabilities (freedom)
5. between faith and works	5. between knowing and doing
6. between theory and praxis	6. between morals and religion
7. between God and man	7. between transcendence and immanence
8. the mystical union with God	8. the harmony of man and universe
9. the <i>agape</i> of the Christians	9. the <i>ren</i> of the Confucians

See Kung, 1989:261-2.

Throughout its history, Christian theology has developed by external encounter and internal reflection.<sup>178</sup> In human consciousness, Transcendence pre-existed humankind so that awareness of nature, awareness of humanity and awareness of the supernatural are all part of human consciousness. Based on their own reflective consciousness, thinkers of the past and the present have built different types of theological systems.

<i>Consciousness</i>	<i>Explanatory Note</i>	<i>Theology</i>
1. body-consciousness	matter-consciousness	liberation theology
2. nature-consciousness	species-consciousness	ecological theology
3. feeling-consciousness	mind-consciousness	feminine theology
4. truth-consciousness	reason-consciousness	philosophical theology
5. goodness-consciousness	act-consciousness	moral theology
6. beauty-consciousness	cosmic-consciousness	process theology
7. spirit-consciousness	divine-consciousness	revealed theology

The first three consciousnesses are called natural consciousness and the next three consciousnesses are called cultural consciousness. The last level of consciousness is called spiritual consciousness. Hence, theologies can be divided into three types: (1) natural theology: based on natural consciousness, (2) cultural theology: based on cultural consciousness, and (3) spiritual theology: based on spiritual consciousness. Chinese Christians should be aware of the limitations of each

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<sup>178</sup> See Whaling, 1986:13-15.

level of consciousness and the merits and demerits of each kind of theology. We have to work out our own Chinese theology.<sup>179</sup>

If anyone says that all religions are the same or that each religion remains the same, he is lacking in historical sensitivity and in any understanding of comparative religious studies.<sup>180</sup> Every world religion has evolved distinctively and developed creatively.<sup>181</sup> Based on the seven-ladder model of self, a model of world religions is proposed:

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Elements</i> <sup>182</sup>
1. economic being	economic development
2. political being	socio-political involvement
3. social being	faith community
4. rational being	myth, scripture, beliefs
5. moral being	ethics

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<sup>179</sup> When Hans Kung gave suggestions for a Chinese theology, he wrote, ‘There must be a clear reorientation to the *original, Biblical faith* and not to some confessional, Western-ecclesiastical doctrine such as has caused so much division in Chinese Christianity over the centuries. The Christian message that came out of Judaism does not need a traditionally Hellenistic, Roman, Germanic, or Anglo-Saxon garment. It can and should be clad -- postmodern means postcolonial and postimperialistic! -- in Chinese garb.’ Kung, 1989:256-7.

<sup>180</sup> See Whaling, 1986:28-9.

<sup>181</sup> Christianity and Buddhism are missionary religions while Confucianism and Daoism are non-missionary religions. In each religion, we need to work out the different paradigms (the original, the ancient, the medieval, the modern and the contemporary paradigms). For instance:

	<i>Christianity</i>	<i>Buddhism</i>	<i>Confucianism</i>	<i>Daoism</i>
paradigm 1	Jewish-Christian	Indian	ethical	philosophical
paradigm 2	Greek-Hellenistic	Central Asian	political	religious
paradigm 3	Latin-Roman	Chinese	cosmological	political
paradigm 4	German-Reformation	Japanese	ontological	syncretic
paradigm 5	non-Western Christian	Western	global	?

<sup>182</sup> I have modified Whaling’s model for understanding world religions. In Whaling’s model, there are eight elements. In my model, there are twelve elements grouped into seven dimensions. In this thesis, I have applied these twelve elements to describe the religion of ancestor veneration. For details of Whaling’s model, see Whaling, 1986:37-47.



To complete the model, there are three major ingredients: Transcendence, the mediating focus and immanence. Transcendence refers to transcendent reality and immanence lies within humankind within the self itself. The mediating focus refers to the essential dimension (or element) each religion focuses on.<sup>186</sup>

Lastly, the seven-ladder model of self can be developed into a model of dialogue theology. The criteria for intra-faith dialogue and inter-faith dialogue are not true or false, right or wrong, good or bad. Rather, the criteria are: (1) presence or absence<sup>187</sup>, (2) appropriate or inappropriate,<sup>188</sup> and (3) relevant or irrelevant.<sup>189</sup> The model of dialogue theology will be the same as the model of world religion.

The followers of each and every religion are encouraged to participate in dialogue in the domain of natural religion. Such dialogue is called natural friendship for mutual trust, mutual co-operation and mutual benefits. It is the responsibility of every citizen in a pluralistic society to work corporately for the betterment of his own country. They will also be encouraged to participate in dialogue in the domain of cultural religion. This is called cultural exchange for mutual respect, mutual

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<sup>186</sup> Compare Whaling's model: Transcendence, mediating focus and eight elements, see Whaling, 1986:46-7.

<sup>187</sup> This refers to the Presence Theology. China is a pluralistic society. It is quite natural to be both Confucian and Daoist, both communist and capitalist. As a matter of fact, Chinese Christians live with other faith-followers and make daily contact with them (verbal or non-verbal). It has long been the practice for a Chinese Christian to be entirely Christian in religion and entirely Chinese in culture.

<sup>188</sup> This refers to the 'appropriate' domain a dialogue should engage. In the late nineteenth century, Zhang Zhidong was the top ideology-fixer in China. He put forward his famous formula 'Chinese learning for the substance (*ti*, the essential principle) and Western learning for function (*yong*, the practical applications)'. In Chinese philosophy, substance and function refers to correlative aspects of any single entity. Thus, Chinese and Western learning each had its own substance and function. Such a slogan 'Chinese ethics [cultural religion] and Western science [natural religion]' is an 'inappropriate' dialogue. Fairbank, 1994:258.

<sup>189</sup> This refers to the 'relevant' issue of the dialogue. For instance, the respective Confucian and Christian fundamentalists denounced each other and seldom met before the Boxer Uprising. After the settlement, reform-minded Chinese had built up education in the New Learning while liberal Christians stressed the social gospel to address the social concerns. As a result, they succeeded in friendly co-operation for the betterment of China. Fairbank, 1994:260-1.

understanding and mutual witnessing. And it is the right of each citizen to exercise his freedom in understanding the faiths of his fellow countrymen.

The third level of dialogue is in the domain of spiritual religion. Such a level of dialogue may involve interchange at an internal spiritual level. It may deepen our own theological understanding and spiritual awareness. It may also recast some of our theological ideas in the contemporary situation and open our spiritual horizon in an existential situation.<sup>190</sup> This dialogue is called spiritual encounter. Every human being should engage and develop spirit-cultivation (after reason-cultivation and love-cultivation) and pursue spiritual excellency. However, only those who are committed to their own faith and who have the experience of natural friendship and cultural exchange may engage. Otherwise, it will be quite dangerous for a new convert to participate in such a level of uncertain, mysterious and unknown inter-faith dialogue.

Why do I envisage these three models as a new horizon in China? There is an ancient motto: 'Every ordinary citizen is responsible for the nation's rise and decline.' This spirit can be crystallised vividly in dialogue theology. Natural friendship and cultural exchange would help by a solid foundation for establishing a real and equal spiritual encounter between faiths (or denominations). Dialogue between two parties (or more) should be multi-leveled, multi-channeled and in multi-forms. Such a multi-lateral dialogue system will enhance understanding between followers of different faiths and traditions. Hence, it will create a favourable atmosphere for economic development, socio-political involvement and cultural co-operation.

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<sup>190</sup> Whaling listed six goals in an inter-faith dialogue. Bosch marked seven perspectives of the inter-relationship between dialogue and mission. See Bosch, 1993:483-9; Whaling, 1986:89-95.

After 1997, Hong Kong became a part of China. Christianity lost its 'state' status and privileges. This is a time of crisis and change.<sup>191</sup> And this is the time to make a response. We need to have an indigenized Chinese theology<sup>192</sup> and we need to have a proper understanding of contextualized Chinese communism.<sup>193</sup> Moreover, we need to engage in dialogue with the various religious traditions in our country.<sup>194</sup> If we want to share the gospel with our Chinese fellows, we have to know their religions properly<sup>195</sup> and know how to make friends and dialogue with them appropriately.

Since 1949 and above all since 1997, the fourth encounter between Christianity and China has begun. If contemporary Chinese Christians fail to make a proper and constructive response, the blood of our fellow Christians has been in vain. It is our responsibility to finish the final part of the relay race in the history of the Christian faith in China.

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<sup>191</sup> The Chinese word for 'crisis' denotes the meaning of 'change'.

<sup>192</sup> In the past, I have published an article (in Chinese) on Chinese Christology which is based on the seven-ladder model of self. This article is in the domain of spiritual theology. In addition, I have written an essay (also in Chinese) on 'Modernization: Christianity and China'. It is in the domain of natural theology -- how Christianity can play a role in the four modernizations in China. The present thesis is in the domain of cultural theology.

<sup>193</sup> Jesus said, 'No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.' If communism is a religion, capitalism is also a religion. China is now developing communism with a market economy.

<sup>194</sup> Owing to Deng Xiaoping's theory of praxis (one country, two systems), dialogues are taking place between China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The table on p.233 n.185 shows the following:

old China =	Confucianism + Daoism + Buddhism	(developed )
new China =	Capitalism + Communism	(developing )
Taiwan =	Capitalism + Confucianism	(developing )
Hong Kong =	Capitalism + Christianity	(developed )
unified China =	Capitalism+Communism+ Confucianism + Christianity	(developed)

<sup>195</sup> The major and official recognized religions in China are: Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. In addition, the Chinese authority recognize and respect different folk religions of different ethnic minority groups. There are 56 ethnic groups in mainland China.

In this section, Zhuzi's theory of principle has been discussed. For he is an important contributor to the cultural model of ancestor practice. Based on his cosmological theory, I have argued from the knowledge of Heaven and the knowledge of principle to the knowledge of monotheism. I have proposed three models for intellectual cultivation, moral cultivation and spiritual cultivation. Moreover, I have reconstructed traditional Heaven-related ancestor practice into a modernized social and civil rite in accordance with Christian faith: Sunday's rest for the Chinese and the Lord's Supper for the Christians. Chinese ancestor practice is then transcended into Christian Ancestor Worship.

#### Summary

In this chapter, Heaven-related ancestor practice has been studied. The rite of Heaven is good in itself because it is potentially transcendent. It points towards the God-on-High according to the strong Chinese. However, the rites have been fallen and deteriorated into the worship of natural objects, spiritual beings and heavenly bodies. The weak Chinese see the practice as idol worship. In reforming and transforming traditional Heaven-related ancestor practice, Sunday's rest is proposed to substitute the rites of Heaven. For there is no emperor in China after 1911 to perform the traditional rites. On the other hand, the Sunday's rest has the similar transparency meaning and reference towards the God-on-high as the rites of Heaven did. Moreover, every Chinese citizen can observe and participate in such a modernized form of Heaven-related ancestor practice.

The Chinese can have the Sabbath rest as Ancestor Remembrance and the Christian can have the Lord's Supper as Ancestor Communion. Hence, traditional ancestor practice is reformed and transformed into Christian Ancestor Worship.

### **Summary of Part III**

In this final Part of the dissertation, I adopt a holistic approach and the 'third way' to construct an approach to ancestor practice for Chinese Christianity today. The plan of Part III is to apply some Biblical principles to the issue of ancestor veneration and work out a theological model with Chinese characteristics to tackle it. Three suggestions are proposed: (1) a biblical-theological perspective towards its socio-political dimension, (2) a pastoral perspective towards its religious dimension, and finally (3) a missiological perspective towards its cultural dimension.

In chapter 6, the question of whether ancestor practice is idol worship has been discussed. The answer to the question is both affirmative and negative. It depends on the kind and type, the form and level of ancestor practice the question is being asked. In general, nature-related ancestor practice is idol worship. Man-related ancestor practice can be idol worship. Heaven-related ancestor practice ought not to be idol worship.

In chapter 7, three different forms of man-related ancestor practice were studied. The Confucian form is a civil act ancestor remembrance and ancestor honour. Daoist form is a religious act in which there a major elements of the worship of Nature and the worship of spirits. The Buddhist form is also a religious act merged with manes worship and demon worship. In reforming and transforming traditional ancestor practice from a Christian perspective, a modernized civil form of ancestor practice is proposed and a Christian form of ancestor practice is suggested.

In chapter 8, Heaven-related ancestor practice has been analyzed. Its nature is seen to be potentially addressed to a transcendent God-on-high. After 1911, there is no emperor in China to perform the rites of Heaven. A Sunday's rest is proposed to substitute the rites of Heaven. Christians have the Lord's Supper as Ancestor

Communion and non-Christians have the Sabbath rest as Ancestor Remembrance. For the origin of ancestor practice is an ancestor quest. In such a reconstruction of ancestor practice in Chinese Christianity, Chinese ancestor practice has become Christian Ancestor Worship and Respect.

In short, I believe in the possibility of the acceptance of the veneration of the ancestor by Christians. However, we need to transform traditional ancestor practice and demythologize the beliefs of ancestor veneration. If one asks whether ancestor practice is idol worship, we need to help the inquirer to clarify the question. It is only when the question is put into a specific context and well-formulated that we can give a proper and appropriate response.

## Conclusion

The main objective of this work is to discover if it is possible to outline a Christian solution to the vexed issue of ancestor practice in China. In this concluding chapter, I shall firstly give an overview of the whole thesis. Then, I shall discuss the aim of the thesis. Lastly, I shall explore the new horizon the present thesis points toward.

### 1. An overview

In Part I, it was shown that the origin of ancestor practice was a quest for ancestors. The primal people perceived nature as their ancestor and conceived Heaven and Earth, beast and hybrid, and woman and man as their ancestors. When civilisation began, the rulers and literate conceived heroes and sages as their national and cultural ancestors. Non-blood (mythical and cultural) lineages co-existed with blood (matriarchal and patriarchal) lineages.

Through a complex process of development, different forms of ancestor practice emerged simultaneously. During the orientation period, a socio-political model of ancestor practice was established to consolidate the aristocratic hierarchy. This comprised national sacrifices, clan sacrifices and household sacrifices. During the de-orientation period, a religious model of ancestor practice emerged. Three teachings were formed and were supplementary to each other: the Confucian tradition for the education of the masses, the Daoist tradition for the protection of the living and the Buddhist tradition for the consolation of the dead. In the re-orientation period, a cultural model of ancestor practice was propagated for cultural imperialism. Man as a moral being had to respect his ancestors and return to the roots of his

existence. The idea of returning to the origin and the feeling of gratefulness comprised the foundation of filial piety.

In Part II, the entries of Christian missionaries were described as three encounters with Chinese culture. The first one was a religious encounter. Nestorians assimilated Chinese ideas and contextualized patriotic loyalty and filial piety with Christian faith. They accommodated Buddhism so far that they shared the persecutions and failures of the Buddhists. The second was a cultural encounter. The Jesuits accommodated the Confucian tradition of ancestor practice but after one hundred years Rome changed course, rejected their views and banned the Chinese Rites. As a result, the Chinese emperor banned missionary work. The third one was a socio-political encounter. Protestant missionaries disagreed among themselves about how China should be changed. Liberals opted for gradual social change and tolerated ancestor practice. Evangelicals looked for spiritual regeneration of the whole nation and condemned all ancestor practices. After 1949, all missionaries had to leave China when the People's Republic of China was born.

In Part III, three suggestions were outlined to give shape to a contemporary Christian response to ancestor veneration: (1) a biblical-theological perspective towards its socio-political dimension, (2) a pastoral perspective towards its religious dimension, and (3) a missiological perspective towards its cultural dimension. Hence, four biblical guiding principles were drawn from I Corinthians to tackle ancestor practice: the self-understanding principle, the stumbling-block principle, the self-restraint principle and the self-transformation principle. Based on Mencius' ethical theory (self-realisation, self-cultivation and self-creativity), a seven-ladder model of the self is proposed to provide a possible solution to the issue.

Theoretically, I admit the good nature of ancestor practice but practically I disapprove the 'fallen' state of traditional ancestor rites. In transforming traditional ancestor practice, I firstly adopt Xunzi's social theory and propose a ritual transcendence to demythologise the beliefs of ancestor rituals (myth elimination, myth preservation and myth re-interpretation) and transform traditional practices into Christian practices. Secondly, I adopt Zhuzi's cosmic theory of principle and *qi* and use it to propose a sacrament of transcendence to replace the rites of Heaven: Sunday rest for non-Christians and the Lord's Supper for Christians. For God is the origin of our existence and Jesus Christ is our new (non-blood) ancestor.

## 2. Its significance

Very often, the rites controversy of the sixteenth century is regarded as the first encounter between the Christian faith and ancestor practice. In chapter 3, I have shown that the first encounter between Christianity and China and the first possibility for a contextualized Christian theology with Chinese characteristics should have rested with the Nestorian missionaries of the seventh century. The later rites controversy is fascinating in both its opportunities and its failures while the earlier Nestorian attempt has attracted hardly any attention in the past.

Secondly, the French sinologist Jacques Gernet described the difference between the European and Chinese views of humanity and the world as being so fundamental that the Christian missionaries (the Jesuits after 1583) had to fail.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Gernet wrote, '... In the Christian view, the only truth and perfection lie outside this world; man must fight against his own nature, against his body and all its temptations, for the only thing that matters is the salvation of his soul. Chinese morality, in contrast, is founded upon the idea of an immanent order that is present not only in the cosmos and society, but also in man himself. Thus, for each person, to act correctly means to develop the aptitudes for good that that individual possesses and to integrate himself into the order of the world. There is no true goodness nor true wisdom if man's place in society and the universe is disregarded. Pure spontaneity, not yet vitiated by the reactions of

decisive factor was not political oppression but the essential difference between Chinese and Christian morals and religions.<sup>2</sup> In chapter 8, I have illustrated how Chinese culture and Christian faith can be supplementary to each other especially in the moral and spiritual perfection of self-cultivation.

Finally, the thesis is about a contemporary Christian response to a threefold question. The first question is what view a Chinese can hold towards the nature of ancestor practice. My response is that the origin of ancestor practice is an ancestor quest and its nature has socio-political, religious and ethical dimensions. The second question is what lesson a Christian can learn from missionaries in dealing with ancestor practice. My response is that we need to hold a holistic ‘both... and’ approach and adopt a ‘yes and no’ option to the issue. The third question is what response a pastor can make to ancestor practice in today’s China. My response is to reform and transform traditional ancestor practice into a modernised social and civil form of ancestor practice in accordance with Christian faith. My reconstruction of ancestor practice in Chinese Christianity is as follows:

<i>Traditional ancestor practice</i>	<i>Reconstruction 1</i>	<i>Reconstruction 2</i>
1. nature-related	N/A	N/A
2. man-related	a civil practice	a Christian practice
3. Heaven-related	Sunday rest	Lord’s Supper

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the egotistical self, is valued above all else.’ Gernet, 1987:192. For details, see Gernet, 1987:141-92.

<sup>2</sup> Kung, 1989:232. For details, see Gernet, 1987:193-247.

### 3. New horizon

The contemporary sinologist Patricia Ebrey has said, 'Exactly how ancestor worship developed in China has never been adequately studied.... More research needs to be done on the development of ancestor worship.'<sup>3</sup> In Part I, I have applied the twelve elements to describe the religion of ancestor veneration. I have proposed the origin of ancestor practice as an ancestor quest and the development of the practice as three periods. The three models I have put forward in a historical development are a pioneer contribution to this study.<sup>4</sup> According to the model of world religion, Chinese ancestor veneration is the only developed religion among the world major religions.

The thesis is about a contemporary Christian response to ancestor practice in China. The pre-requisite to make an appropriate and fair response to the issue is that we must have a proper and holistic pre-understanding of what ancestor practice is in China. The phenomenological approach I have adopted and the model of twelve elements I have proposed in studying ancestor veneration have yielded a promising result. It is my wish that a similar approach can be used towards other traditions in order to deepen indigenous Christian theology in China.

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<sup>3</sup> For details, see Ebrey, 1991a:81-2.

<sup>4</sup> In describing and explaining the development of ancestor practice in China, I have macro-paradigm, meso-paradigm and micro-paradigm shifts in my mind. The macro-paradigm shifts refer to the socio-political model, the religious model and the cultural model. With each macro-paradigm, there are meso-paradigm shifts. For instance, there are Han Confucianism, religious Daoism and Chinese Buddhism within the religious model. Lastly, there are micro-paradigm shifts. Under the theme of burial practice, there are human sacrifice to human figurine, underground mausoleums to ground mausoleums, graveyard worship to shrine worship. However, it is beyond the scope of the present thesis to discuss and expand them in detail.

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