APPROVAL SHEET

Title of Dissertation: An Ethnography of Traditional Rural Folk Funeral Practice in Northwestern China

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Doctor of Philosophy, 2014

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EDUCATION

Ph.D.	University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) Language, Literacy and Culture To be confirmed August, 2014
MA	Southwest Missouri State University (Now Missouri State University) Religions Studies: 1998
Graduate courses	Minnesota State University, Mankato & Frostburg State University English, TESL track, 95% towards MA degree, interrupted by illness
BA	Ningxia University, China English language & literature: 1982

PUBLICATION AND PRESENTATIONS

Published Papers

Zhang, Z. (2013). A Discussion on English-Chinese Poem Translating Techniques through Two Translations of a Short English Poem, *Journal of Ningxia Teachers University,* 34(1), 42-48.

Zhang, Z. & Zhang, Y. (2012). A discussion on the loss and return of Pip's humanity in *Great Expectations* and Charles Dickens' social morality, *Journal of Ningxia Teachers University,* 33(2), 31-35.

Zhang, Z. (2010) A sociolinguistic view of the formation of Donggan language, in Guo Ning (ed.) *Anthology of Xinjiang Reclamation Culture Research Institute (2008)*, Beijing: China Agriculture Press. 338-350.

Zhang, Z (2010) Review on the Developmental History of Islam in the United States. *The Chinese Hui Nationality Studies, Vol. 4*. 198-207.

Zhang, Z (2009). Guidance Materials or Misleading Material: An Example from Guidance Material for College English. *Science and Technology Information*, *No. 11*. 265-266.

Zhang, Z, & Fang, Y. (2008). "Neglected masters of literature: A comparative study of Meng Hao-ran and Edmund Spenser," *The World Literature Criticism*, Vol. 5. Wuhan: Changjiang Literature & Art Publishing House. 264-266.

Zhang, Z & Yang, J. (Trans.) (2008). Islam and Muslims in the United States. By Irfan Omar, *The Chinese Hui Nationality Studies, Vol. 3*. 200-210.

Zhang, Z. & Zhang, Z. (2007). A brief discussion on some modules of the NCATE assessments in the USA, *Journal of Changji University,*79 (6), 83-85.

Zhang, Z. & Zhang, Z. (2007). An analysis on course offerings and training plans for MA program in TESL in the USA: Taking Minnesota State University, Mankato as an example, *Journal of Bingtuan Education Institute*, 17(3), 55-58.

Zhang, Z. (2007). Mischievous characters and wisecracks: an analysis on social functions of rhymed folk jingles in Xi-Hai-Gu area in south Ningxia, *Journal of Ningxia Normal University*, 28 (4), 96-99.

Li, L., Zhou, Y., & Zhang, Z. (Trans.) (1998). Expansion Tectonics, A New Theory for Earth Science, by Karl W. Luckert, [Pamphlet] Yinchuan, Ningxia: Ningxia Geology Prints.

Presentations

Zhang, Z. (2014). "Using Mini-Plays to Teach Chinese Conversations", Southeast Georgia World Languages Collaborative, Statesboro, GA, March 1.

Zhang, Z. (2013). "Methods and Strategies in Using Films to Teach Cross Cultural Communications" Maryland TESOL: 6th Annual ESOL Graduate Student Mini-Conference, Baltimore, MD, March 2.

Zhang, Z. (2013). "An Ethnographic Study of a Traditional Folk Religious Practice in Northwest China", a presentation to UMBC Shriver Center Peace Workers Spring 2013 Colloquium.

Zhang, Z. (2011). "True Life: Varieties of Religion and Spiritualism in Asia and Pacific Islands" (May 4 session of UMBC Talks, co-facilitated with Dusty Hogenson)

Zhang, Z. (2010). "Nu Shu: A Hidden Language of Women in China" (a documentary film presentation), UMBC Shriver Center Peace Workers Fall 2010 Colloquium.

Mallinson, C., Zhang, Z. & Huang, H. (2010). "Nu Shu: A Hidden Language of Women in China" (a documentary film presentation), UMBC's LLC Fall 2010 Colloquium.

Zhang, Z. (2009). On the translation techniques of Max Weber's short poem "Night" – A discussion with Professor Gu Zhengkun. Paper presented at The Three-School Cross Taiwan Strait Foreign Language and Literature Seminar, Shihezi, Xinjiang, China, May 9-10.

Zhang, Z. and Zhang, Z. (2008). "Using Available Technologies to Assist and Enhance Learning: Experiences and Recommendations" ICWL 2008 and Workshop: The 7th International Conference on Web-based Learning (Poster Session 1) in Jinhua, Zhejiang, China, August 20-22.

Zhang, Z. (2007). "An introduction to the Amish language and culture phenomenon." A university-wide presentation Shihezi University, Shihezi, Xinjiang, China. A brief report (in Chinese) about this presentation can still be retrieved at http://new.shzu.edu.cn/show.asp?id=3090

Zhang, Z. (2007). Observations and Reflections on Assessment and Feedback in Adult English Course. Paper presented at International Conference on Language Testing, Beijing, China, November 2-4.

Zhang, Z. (2002). Challenges and Opportunities for Entrepreneurs in the 21 Century. Presentation at "Training Sessions for Entrepreneurs" organized by Science and Technology Bureau of Guyuan, Ningxia, China

Zhang, Z. (2002). Influence of Science and Technology on Higher Education in the United States. Lecture for Guyuan Teachers' College, Guyuan, Ningxia, China

Short Chapters in textbooks

Zhang, Z. (2010). "James Thurber: *The Unicorn in the Garden*", in Y. Liu and Y. Fang (eds.) Selected Readings of English Short Stories. Beijing: Peking University Press.

Zhang, Z. (2010). "Ernest Hemingway: *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place*", in Y. Liu and Y. Fang (eds.) Selected Readings of English Short Stories. Beijing: Peking University Press.

EMPLOYMENT

Year	Location
2013-present	Department of Foreign Languages, Georgia Southern University, U.S.A. Visiting instructor of Chinese: Teaching assignments include four levels of Chinese language and one course in Chinese culture
2009-2013	English Language Institute—University of Maryland, Baltimore County, U.S.A. Instructor of English (Graduate Teaching Assistant): Courses taught include (1) Reading, Writing, Vocabulary and Grammar for Academic Purposes and (2) Cross Cultural Communication. Administered placement tests for new students every semester and tutored over 30 students, including 12 deaf students
2005-2009	Faculty of Foreign Languages—Shihezi University, China Associate Professor of English and Cultures: Courses taught include (1) Advanced English, (2) Translation, (3) Introduction to Linguistics, (4) Thesis Writing, (5) History of European Culture (6) Syntax in English (7) Bible Stories and (8) Business English. Associate dean of the English department in 2005-2006
2001-2004	Faculty of Foreign Languages—Guyuan Teachers College, China Associate Professor of English: Courses taught include (1) Advanced English, (2) Oral Translation, (3) Survey of English-speaking Countries, (4) Linguistics and (5) Thesis Writing
2000-2001	College of Education, Frostburg State University, U.S.A. Graduate Research Assistant, working on NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) project of the university
1999-2000	College of Education, Minnesota State University, Mankato, U.S.A. Graduate Research Assistant, working on NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) project of the university
1997-1998	Religious Studies Department, Southwest Missouri State University, U.S.A. Graduate Assistant, main responsibilities included research and translation work on history of religions under the auspices of Professor Karl W. Luckert; also re-translated the professor's pamphlet *Expansion Tectonics* into Chinese
1993-1996	Faculty of Foreign Languages, Guyuan Teacher's College, Ningxia, China Assistant Professor of English: Courses taught include (1) Advanced English, (2) Extensive English, (3) History of American Literature, (4) Teaching Theories and Methods in English and (5) English Grammar
1988-1993	Education Bureau of Guyuan County, Ningxia, China Research fellow of language teaching methodology, major responsibilities

	included data analysis and database construction for educational research section, elementary and high school course assessment and teaching evaluation, and research work on second language learning/acquisition Test paper designer and writer of the course of English for junior high graduates.
1986-1988	Second High School of Guyuan County, Ningxia, China Senior high school teacher of English
1986-1987	Waynesboro Senior High School, Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, U.S.A. Exchange teacher of American Field Service (AFS) International/Intercultural Exchange Program. Taught World Cultures in the high school and basic Chinese in Summitview Elementary School of Waynesboro, PA
1982-1986	Second High School of Guyuan County, Ningxia, China Senior high school teacher of English (70%), Chinese (30%)
1975-1976	Zhangyi, Guyuan, Ningxia, China Village school teacher (taught elementary level Chinese and math)

SERVICE

Community Service

Year	Location
2006-2007	Travel-and-talk to 21 high schools along the northern slope of the Tianshan Mountain on English learning strategies
2005-2006	Summer teacher training work: lectures include student-centered teaching, communicative teaching and task-based learning/teaching
Fall, 2002	Judging panel for province-wide competition in "Poverty-Alleviation with Science and Technology" organized by Department of Science and Technology of Ningxia

Professional Service

Year	Location
2008-Present	Peer-Reviewer of Educational Journal of Living theories (EJOLTS)
1988-1996	Member, Board of "Evaluation Committee of Professional Titles for School Teachers", Guyuan Prefecture, Ningxia, China
1987-1995	Supervisor of TEFL teachers of over 50 high schools, Guyuan Prefecture, Ningxia, China. Organized training workshops for in-service high school English teachers.
1990-1993	Member of Examination Setting Committee of Ningxia Educational Department
1988-1993	Executive Leader of the English Division of "Evaluation Committee of Professional Titles for School Teachers", Guyuan County, Ningxia, China

University Service

Year	Location
2008 – 2013	Member of Dictionary and Translation Research Institute, College of Foreign Languages, Shihezi University, China
2006 – 2009	Official examiner of Business Foreign Language Test (BFT), Xinjiang Production & Construction Corps, China
2005 – 2009	Chair of Linguistics Teaching & Research Committee, College of Foreign Languages, Shihezi University, China
2006 – 2009	Education Supervisor, College of Foreign Languages, Shihezi University, China
2005 – 2009	Member, Board of Student Academic Paper Writing Supervisory Committee, College of Foreign Languages, Shihezi University, China
2006 – 2009	Member of Academic Enhancement Committee, College of Foreign Languages, Shihezi University, China
2001 – 2004	Student Academic Paper Writing Supervisor, Foreign Languages Department, Guyuan Teachers College, China

Chinese Language Internship and Tutoring Activities

Year	Location
2012-2012	Internship in the Asian Studies Department of University of Maryland, Baltimore County (under the supervision of Dr. Anna Shields). With responsibility for (1) offering mini lecture sessions; (2) tutoring Chinese face-to-face via a "Chinese Table" and (3) writing a blog to help enhance the students' learning
2004-2005	Private tutor of Chinese to foreign teachers (Tasha Bleistein, Dr. Moira Laidlaw and Terisida) at Guyuan Teachers' College (ca. seven weeks)
1999-2000	Voluntary Internet Chinese language tutor to Yani Etjitra from Indonesia
1999-1999	Private tutor of Chinese to my professors (Dr. Patricia Welcox-Peterson and Dr. Harry Solo) at Minnesota State University, Mankato (three months)

Chinese Language and Culture Related Activities

Year	Location
2009-2013	Chinese language consultant for English Language Institute of University of Maryland, Baltimore County (for student recruitment and advertising)
2007-present	Keep two blogs: Zhang Zuotang's Chinese & American Culture (in Chinese) and Zuotang Zhang's Chinese Folk Culture (bilingual)
2009-2010	Chinese language consultant and translator for Dr. Claudia Galindo's research on "Parents' Beliefs about Children's Math Activities" (Surveys and interviews)
1979-2002	Published 15 prose essays and 92 poems in national, provincial and local level newspapers, magazines and collections. Two prose essays were

	broadcasted in the local radio station in Guyuan, Ningxia, China
1986-1987	Spent 10 days as short-term resident lecturer at the Saint James School in Hagerstown, MD and gave three presentations on China - Chinese literature, educational system and farmers' life in my hometown
1975-1977	One of the main actors in a migrating opera team – gave about 50 performances in three counties within three years (performances were done only in winters)

TRANSLATION SERVICE

Voluntary translating Service

Year	Location
1982-present	For Ningxia, Xinjiang and English Language Institute at University of Maryland, Baltimore County: **From English to Chinese**: Manuals of electric and electronic products for companies, hospitals as well as individuals; student recruitment materials **From Chinese to English**: academic papers, legal documents, manuals and advertisements of local products such as herbal teas, potato noodles and Sea buckthorn beverages (I am still doing these via e-document transferring)

Paid translating Service

Year	Location
1982-2008	For Ningxia, Gansu, Xinjiang Taiwan and Shandong: **From English to Chinese**: manual of medical equipment, investment letter of intent and oral interpretation for professors from foreign countries **From Chinese to English**: Dr. Guo Wanshou's (郭萬壽醫師) three research articles on Acupuncture treatment – two of the papers were for international presentations in San Francisco, USA; Mr. Zong Guanyun's (宗關雲研究員) research article on Komarrovii – an ideal nectar plant – for an international research fund; product manual and advertisements of a thyme tea company in Ningxia; project planning books of Jingning Cement Group Co., Ltd. in Gansu (甘肅靜寧縣水泥集團有限責任公司) for applications for investment – five book-length documents; wheelchair product manual of a company in Taiwan.

In addition to the above-mentioned translation work, I have been translating several yin-yang (a male farmer who is trained for folk religious activities that call for a synthesis of Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian and shamanic traditions) scriptures from traditional Chinese to English for my dissertation, which is about a folk religious practice in rural northwest China.

ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study will analyze data collected through field-based observations, primary ritual texts, and locally conducted interviews of the yin-yang practitioners in the three small villages of Fanmagou, Qijiazhuang, and Wangdazhuang in northwestern China. The practice referred to as yin-yang in this region is part of an archaic folk religious system that can be traced back to at least the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Despite its deep cultural roots, it is becoming endangered due to the impact of national policies (governing religion and culture) and the general adaptation to modernity in China. Due to the localized nature of this cultural system, the main research method used will be qualitative ethnographic description, with a Geertzian "thick description" approach to interpretive analysis. The collected data is roughly divided into three categories: (1) transcriptions of interviews with yin-yang practitioners and other local villagers; (2) video tapes, photographs, and field notes of local religious rituals, specifically memorial and burial rites that are led by the yin-yang practitioners, and (3) my own translations of yin-yang scriptural texts that are used in leading the rituals themselves, as well as for the teaching and training of young yin-yang apprentices. The interpretive ethnography that is produced from these rich primary sources will also be considered for its curriculum applications in two primary higher education contexts: 1) As a rich primary source for courses in Chinese culture and language – conducted in either Chinese or English language context, and 2) As a source of engaging and culturally relevant texts for courses in content-based ESOL for Chinese students (in China presumably).

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF TRADITIONAL RURAL FOLK FUNERAL PRACTICE IN NORTHWESTERN CHINA

By

Zuotang Zhang

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Doctor of Philosophy

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This dissertation reflects my two-decade-long journey traveling in and out the folk culture that nurtured me. For every stage along this journey endless thanks gush forth from the bottom of my heart.

My deep thanks go to Dr. Karl W. Luckert, a very well published historian of religions, a patient mentor, and a personal friend. I impressed him with my water melon eating capacity during one of his field expeditions to Northwestern China; but after I graduated under his auspices from the Religious Studies master's program at Southwest Missouri State University, he impressed me greatly by continuing his mentorship during eight summer field work tours together, in the Xi-Hai-Gu region in Ningxia, China and beyond. Without his non-stop encouragement—his personal curiosity about Chinese religion—this work would probably not have been done.

My deepest thanks go to the yin-yang masters who not only allowed me to observe their services in various rituals and to interview them time and again in a variety of contexts, but also enthusiastically permitted me to hand-copy or photo copy their textbooks and scriptures – such as Master Meng and Master Dong. My special thanks go to the late Master Ma Zhonghuai, whose profound knowledge of the yin-yang practice significantly widened my view and has made huge contributions to my research.

I am indebted to the villagers in Fanmagou, Qijiazhuang and Wang-Dazhuang in Guyuan Municipality, especially those who shared with me their knowledge, their beliefs, ideas and opinions on the folk religious practices that had been inherited from their

forefathers. Their enthusiastic attitudes at each and every of my field visits reminded me of how fortunate I have been to be one of them. Of course, sometimes they did feel my pursuit of scholarship as the strange way of outsiders, but they would never actually treat me as an outsider. They shared their knowledge and opinions with no hesitations or reservations.

Heartfelt thanks go to Dr. Joby Taylor, who not only made possible my coming stateside again during my mid-50s, but also helped me to stay focused on my primary goal. His friendship, and that of his family, has been heartwarming, and his mentorship has been instrumental in making me into an indigenous scholar who can look at the subject of my study with both insider and outsider eyes. With his help and recommendation I was able to obtain a research grant from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. The grant enabled me to do crucial field research in the summer of 2010.

I am very grateful to Dr. JoAnn (Jodi) Crandall and Dr. Beverly Bickel who taught me research methods at the beginning of my doctoral journey and have been reading and helping me improve my drafts ever since. Their professional ethics have given me tremendous enlightenment and help toward shaping my own.

My special thanks go to Dr. Anna Shields, a mid-Tang poetry scholar, who has been central to my developing knowledge and gave me critical advice on wisely selecting my bibliography.

During my research, especially at the comprehensive exam and dissertation writing stages, Dr. Li Shengzhu, a former student of mine, provided several dozens of

Chinese articles and unpublished essays and dissertations that have been critical for my literature review. This young folklorist deserves a thousand thanks from me.

Between summer 2013 and spring 2014, medical doctor Dong Yonghong, an amateur novelist in Ningxia, photocopied several rare yin-yang books that her great grandfather hand-copied about 100 years ago; she also conducted clarification interviews on my behalf with one of her uncles who is a yin-yang practitioner in Haiyuan, a county that belongs to the Xi-Hai-Gu region. I owe her and her uncle many sincere thanks.

I also owe a great debt of gratitude to my family. My brothers Dr. Zuochen Zhang and Mr. Zuowen Zhang took a great number of pictures for me to use either as descriptive aids or illustrations in the text of my dissertation or in the appendices; my two daughters offered their selfless help in transcribing some of the interview records and quite a few yin-yang books. They also spent significant amounts of time proofreading the transcripts I had made. I owe thousands of thanks to Guilian, my wife, who wholeheartedly supported my work during many years and took all the “homework” as her personal duties and tasks, so that I did not have to spend a minute worrying about my meals and laundry.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. The Problem of Culture Loss and a Sketch of Research on Folk Cultural Practices

On February 1, 2014, *The New York Times* published a brief report online by Ian Johnson: "In China, 'Once the Villages Are Gone, the Culture Is Gone'." The report introduces a dozen amateur musicians who meet once a week under a highway overpass on the outskirts of Beijing, carting with them their drums, cymbals and the collective memory of their destroyed village. Their village, which previously consisted of about 300 households near the overpass, was torn down in 2009 to build a golf course. The residents were re-settled among several housing projects, some as far as a dozen miles away. Johnson highlights that "….Across China, cultural traditions ….are under threat" and that "rapid urbanization means village life, the bedrock of Chinese culture, is rapidly disappearing, and with it, traditions and history." Inasmuch as "Chinese culture has traditionally been rural-based, once the villages are gone, the culture is gone" and the rate at which the villages are disappearing is stunning: In 2000, China had 3.7 million villages; …by 2010, that figure had dropped to 2.6 million, a loss of about 300 villages a day. (Johnson, 2014) The driving force behind this massive government-forced migration is the fact that "China's top leadership has equated urbanization with modernization and economic growth" and the local governments are very willingly involved in promoting the policy because this is a safe and quick way to fill their pockets with development funds (Ibid).

Going against the stream of this rapid urbanization movement are some Chinese scholars, who in recent years, "have begun to recognize the countryside's vast cultural heritage" (Ibid). Forced urbanization is only one of the many measures the Chinese government is taking to modernize the country. Ironically, among these is the government's effort to catalog, among all identified cultural heritages, as much as possible, the "intangible cultural heritage" – including fragile traditions like songs, dances, rituals, martial arts, cuisines and theater. The Chinese government is clear that UNESCO was right to point out that "For many populations (especially minority groups and indigenous populations), the intangible heritage is the vital source of an identity that is deeply rooted in history" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004). However, despite this recognition of valuable cultural heritage, it remains inescapable that when villages are destroyed, cultural heritage and the practices that embody it are threatened to its very roots.

Especially vulnerable and insecure in this rapid social transformation are the traditional folk religious practices nested within the larger cultural heritage; it is therefore necessary to present an outline of the present situation of folk religions. Lin Guoping (2007) is correct in summarizing that from ancient times, folk beliefs have been unrecognized by the government in China. In fact, quite to the contrary, they have frequently been officially suppressed, attacked, or even banned. He reminds us that up to this day although the situation of folk religion has improved to an extent, these traditional beliefs are still not included in the laws governing the protection of religion. A number of [government] officials actually regard folk religions as great scourges, and they go so far as to equate "folk beliefs" with "feudal superstition." They could not wait to sweep folk

beliefs off the stage of history overnight (p. 5). Even in the years before the Communists took power in China, folk religions began being categorized pejoratively as superstitions. Furthermore, especially since 1949, the word and category of "religion" itself has been painted and projected to Chinese people in a very negative way. Within such a hostile environment, no sincere or objective scholarly research was done regarding religious beliefs and practices for the first thirty years in communist China. Research for a full generation after 1949 was conducted purely based on Marxist theoretical assumptions and overt political goals, and with the aim of diminishing and destroying religious practices altogether.

Ethnographic studies of religious practices in China have been active and prolific however since 1978, when the rigid Mao era ended and when the Chinese government decided to take a more moderate course toward the subject. The new policy has produced a much higher tolerance of religious practice than the one from 1949 to 1978. As a result, in recent years, the academic community has been giving increasing attention even to non-institutionalized religions and folk traditions (Yu, 2012; Hu, 2012). However, with millions of villages in this category that are home to vast numbers of culturally unique folk religious practices, this is a massive ethnographic undertaking. Furthermore, with the rapid trend of urbanization and the cultural loss it inevitably brings, these scholarly projects become a race against time. In cultural terms, the stakes are high in this ethnographic effort. In the case of this dissertation research, it is important to begin by noting that with the exception of two short non-scholarly articles (Ma, 2010 and Wang, 2011) published in the magazine, *Xungen* (寻根, Looking for Roots), no scholar in China has turned research eyes toward the yin-yang tradition and practices which I am

documenting and interpreting. While my direct ethnographic study focuses on three small villages, this yin- yang system is a typical folk religious practice found across the Shaan-Gan-Ning (陕甘寧) border region where the population of Chinese Han exceeds 17 million (as of 2010), and is particularly concentrated in the Xi-Hai-Gu (西海固) area, the heartland of the cultural region.[1] In short, this study will be the first scholarly ethnography of practices that are at the core of the cultural life of millions of Chinese villagers in a region that, like many other rural areas, is already experiencing dramatic loss of heritage to urbanization and modernization.

2. Yin-Yang Practitioners Are the Core of My Research

To clarify from the outset, the yin-yang practitioners studied in this research are not the yin-yang scholars (陰陽家) or the Naturalists whose origin can be traced back to the Warring States Period (475-221 BCE, a time when the 陰陽五行 Yin-Yang and Five Elements were intuited). Those yin-yang scholars were highly educated and belong among China's theorists and thinkers. What I am examining in this research under the similar name of "yin-yang" are actually lay religious practitioners who have no profound knowledge of Chinese theology or philosophy; in fact some of them are barely literate. They are referred to, in some parts of China, as "yin-yangs" but are addressed as "Masters" (師), followed by their surnames – though, in Chinese language the order is actually reversed.

[1] Xi-Hai-Gu is a mountainous region that used to be known for its poverty and in the 1970s it was identified by the United Nations as one of the most uninhabitable zones in the world (http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2012-11/06/content_15878681_2.htm).

While the yin-yangs of this study are not those elite scholars of the Chinese academic community, it is important to begin by noting that despite their modest level of education as recently as a few decades ago, they were quite respected as elites in the countryside because they were at least able to read and explain the yin-yang texts. In a rural society where almost 100% of the people were fully illiterate, anyone who could read and write at any level was attributed a loftier reputation. In addition to being among the most literate members of their local society, these yin-yangs are also entrusted with the authority to conduct important liturgical rites, which, to the Chinese people, are central to fulfilling their basic filial duties and achieving their ultimate goals such as health, fortune and future. Because they are entrusted and able to lead proper ceremonial rites – rituals that are believed to help mitigate disasters and bring peace to the minds and fortunes to families or to an entire village – yin-yangs hold a special position in the countryside social order. Within this context of important social status and role, however, it is important to keep in mind that a yin-yang himself is often just an ordinary peasant farmer when not performing his ritual role.

3. Who Am I? And Why Can I Do This Research, and How Much Have I Done in Preparation?

Given the remotely located and highly contextual nature of this research, my own personal accounts and observations will be presented throughout the study as I position myself as both an insider and an outsider to the cultural practices I describe and interpret. My positioning (and status) as an indigenous researcher is critical to even the possibility of this project. As a cultural insider who grew up in the region I have had full and open access to observing local practices and also benefited from first-hand knowledge of local

language and culture. Additionally, as someone who has pursued graduate studies and professional life outside the village and abroad in the U.S. for many years, I bring a broad comparative lens to this scholarship and training in diverse theory and methods of research. Therefore, before providing a detailed introduction to the yin-yang practitioners themselves and the region in which the practice is most active, I will provide some background description of how I became interested and engaged in this research. These personal notes and reflections imply why I think such research is important and necessary, as well as why I believe I am uniquely situated to conduct this project.

I was born in October 1957 into a farmer's family in Fanmagou, one of the poorest villages in the Xi-Hai-Gu area. Like most of the villages in China at that time, the illiteracy rate of the villagers was close to 100 percent. There was one man in the village that had a ninth grade education but he was working in a city, for the government. There was no hospital within 40 kilometers; a very small clinic was established the following year (1958) in Zhangyi Township, which was about seven kilometers from Fanmagou. In the clinic there were two medical workers who played combined roles as both doctors and nurses. "There was no guarantee that a doctor would be available because sometimes they were invited to pay house calls" and "chances are, there was none of the needed medicines available. You would have to go to Guyuan city to buy the medicine" (W. P. Chang, personal communication, February, 2007).[2] There was a dirt road that connected the village to Guyuan city, but there was no bus service until about ten years later. The fastest means of transportation was riding a donkey. When a villager got sick, the family would first perform a simple healing ritual themselves; if that did not work, they would

[2] "Personal communication" in this dissertation includes field-based face-to-face interviews, telephone, Skype or QQ interviews, field observations, as well as email communications. This is based on the Purdue Owl APA citation style (6th edition, https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/03/).

then seek help from a local doctor. Should these efforts fail, they could then choose either to send the patient to the hospital in Guyuan about six hours travel away, or they could choose to hire a yin-yang to do a professional healing ritual. For the villagers of my home region, the yin-yang ritual option was often preferred because it was both much cheaper and much easier. Even as late as the 1980s three of my relatives died in the village due to the lack of reliable medical service and efficient transportation.

I lived in this village of Fanmagou for my first nineteen years, until I was admitted to a two-year teachers' training school in 1976. Three months after graduation, I was admitted to Ningxia University. I was the first person in the history of Fanmagou to continue my formal education beyond the high school level. During these six years of higher education, I always returned to my home and family in Fanmagou during my vacations. After completing university studies, I became a high school teacher in Guyuan where I had my own apartment in the city and my visits to Fanmagou became less frequent. Nevertheless, I have always considered myself to be one of Fanmagou's villagers and life there is my first and full cultural heritage. Whatever else I have become, I remain a local.

Returning to my years in Fanmagou, from early childhood forward I often witnessed the healing practices that were arranged by family members, by other villagers, and I occasionally witnessed additional special rites led by yin-yangs. During most of that time I was too young and untrained to be a true participant observer; however, there are several incidents that, for illustrative purposes, deserve particular mention because of my direct engagement.

In early 1970s, because of my literacy, 1 was invited on two occasions to act as a yin-yang substitute to help two families in Fanmagou. In the first case I read an apology letter at Mr. G. H. S.'s father's graveyard, because there had been constant sicknesses in the family and a yin-yang said it was caused by the soul of the villager's father. The yin-yang actually wrote the letter himself, but he dared not come to our village because the Cultural Revolution was at its climax; so he recommended that I should read the letter on his behalf. Prior to that day, I had actually made many visits to the yin-yang and I had also learned some yin-yang texts from him. Sometimes his grandson, who was secretly, but officially, learning the yin-yang rituals from the master, came to my house and we would sneak out to find a place to read the yin-yang textbooks together. In those days I was fascinated by the yin-yang texts and was even interested in learning to become a yin-yang; but my plan was not ultimately approved by my father, who insisted instead on my going to school for an education. The second incident occurred when I was called upon to help cure a child from a shock. It was the summer after I graduated from the ninth grade and I was working with other villagers in the field. Suddenly a young kid ran up for me and told me that I was needed immediately to "save" an infant boy of Mr. G. H. C. Since, at the time, I was the most knowledgeable and literate person in the village, they wanted me to perform an emergency ritual to rescue the child. Following what I had learned and observed from the yin-yang, I used a combination of acupuncture and rooster-head-chopping ritual. The child recovered from the shock, so my credibility in this role was to some extent confirmed.

My personal involvement in the folk religious practice was more completely cut off once I became a college student. However, in the winter of 1980 when my fifth brother

died, a yin-yang was hired to do a house-cleaning ritual. I happened to be at home for the winter vacation and participated in the rite as a helper, but by that time I no longer had an interest in formally learning to be a yin-yang. Similarly, in the summer of 1996 my mother passed away and funerary rites were held for two days. As a primary mourner, I was a direct participant and went through all the ritual procedures associated with her funeral. However, I did not do any formal observation with research purposes in mind.

In summer 1997 I became a graduate student in religious studies at Southwest Missouri State University where I worked as a graduate assistant to historian of religions, Professor Karl W. Luckert. This was the turning point at which I began moving from a straightforward insider of my home culture to an indigenous scholar with both insider cultural awareness and outsider questions, observations, and scholarly tools. I first met Professor Luckert in Guyuan, China, when he was conducting some field work there, and I served as his interpreter at a local poet's house. From this point on, I started moving from my experience as an insider in the village to an outsider who looks at the folk religious practice with an eye of someone like an indigenous anthropologist.

In January 1998, I was present in a class when Dr. Luckert played a video he had personally produced titled "Muslims in China." It was about field research he had done in China, and a portion of it pertained to my very hometown. This video intrigued me immensely. I had grown up in that region but had never previously thought that common practices could be utilized for scholarly research. Inspired by Luckert's field research, I decided to do my Master's thesis on the shamanic elements of yin-yang religious practices in Fanmagou. Soon I asked my brother, Zuowen Zhang, to get the materials I needed from a yin-yang, who happened to be a relative of his wife. Then in August 1998,

I prevailed upon my brother to interview the yin-yang on my behalf to obtain answers to my questions. The questions were mostly for clarification about healing rituals that a typical yin-yang conducts. My brother completed the interview and transcribed the answers for me. Based upon this long distance field work, I wrote my Master's thesis "Yin-Yang Healing Rituals and Shamanic Practices in the Village of Fanmagou" under the supervision of Dr. Luckert and I defended it in December of 1998.[3]

In January 2002, a year after I returned to China, Dr. Luckert suggested he would help me develop my Master's thesis into a book. We also discussed additional research with a new focus on more fully understanding the yin-yang masters themselves, rather than just the shamanic healing practices of the villagers. This project would require extensive and direct fieldwork interviewing the yin-yangs, arranging for direct participatory observations of the yin-yang practices, and cultivating a deeper appreciation and understanding of the scripture texts the yin-yangs use in their rituals and daily consultations. This was the beginning of the current dissertation research project over a decade ago. Luckert came to China in the last week of June 2002 and the next day, with the help of his connections in China – with the Party Secretary and Vice Governor of the province – we obtained an introduction letter (the Chinese version of IRB approval) that not only granted us permission to conduct field research, but also requested that relevant local government officials – especially the security personnel – assist us in any ways they could. Some communications between provincial and local officials apparently proceeded by telephone without us even being aware.

[3] After graduation from SMSU, I continued to study at two other universities in the United States. In January 2001 I returned to China to teach English. But I never stopped communicating with Dr. Luckert, and Dr. Joby Taylor, who also studied at Missouri State.

We obtained local cooperation very smoothly not only because of this official governmental support, but also because almost all the local participants were in one way or another related to me. For example, five of the seven local yin-yangs are related to each other as cousins, and as a group they are related to one of my brothers, who is brother-in-law to one of the yin-yangs. I was thus not only a local insider with outside approval; I was also in many cases, a family member. In this way I was soon able to adopt a full participant observer role for the funeral ritual and the reburial rites performed for my grandmother, as well as for the third-year memorial ritual for my father's brother. I obtained this consent with no difficulty owing to the fact that I was sent by the government and I was related to the people being researched.

From 2002 to 2009 Luckert and I interviewed five yin-yangs and conducted participatory observations of a funeral ritual, a reburial ritual and a full-scale and a grand-scale memorial ritual.[4] We also conducted two additional ritual observations (without participation): an exorcism ritual by fire, and a yin-yang initiating ritual. The actual time spent in direct rituals and primary interviews consisted of more than 90 hours of direct field observation. Besides the joint fieldwork with Luckert, I also conducted numerous follow-up interviews with villagers and the yin-yangs; I also did a small-scale survey with the villagers in Fanmagou on their attitudes toward spiritual healing. The data I obtained included still pictures, audio recordings, field notes and transcriptions of the interviews. Importantly I also obtained several dozen hours of video footage[5] and over a

[4] Both of these rituals were sponsored by Luckert. In an ordinary memorial ritual, only one yin-yang is hired; in a full-scale ritual, a head yin-yang and 3-4 helping yin-yangs are hired; in a grand-scale ritual, not only are several yin-yangs hired, but the performance time is at least doubled. Therefore, without a financial sponsorship, farmers usually cannot afford having the latter type of ceremony.
[5] Dr. Luckert has made part of them into a DVD.

dozen of the primary source scriptural books that yin-yangs in the Xi-Hai-Gu region utilize – most of these were camera-photocopied by Luckert for my later translation work.

In addition to the specific data I obtained pertaining to ritual practice, I also obtained a significant amount of additional wide-ranging information from these interviews, participatory observations and the yin-yang books. For example, I learned about the wider duties and obligations of a yin-yang – to spread the orders from heaven so as to educate the commoners; to express good wishes to the nation and to enrich the people / citizens; to assist the virtuous and to eliminate the evil; to rescue or relieve ghosts from their predicaments. These responsibilities of the yin-yang are much wider and more ambitious than I had noticed as a cultural insider beforehand. It was also much more extensive in training and scope that I expected as an outsider scholar. As a result, there dawned on me a new realization about the importance of this research, powered by a newly found enthusiasm for the interpretive power of the humanities; this raised my sense of responsibility for conducting this research on the yin-yangs and the cultural heritage of my home village.

Another event happened in August 2005. I paid a visit to Fanmagou and I interviewed Mr. Gao, who had asked me years before, in fall 1971, to ritually read an apology letter to his dead father at the graveyard. This interview deepened my understanding of an individual villager's thoughtful perspectives on his folk religious inheritance. One of his remarks was that, "a belief is inherited from the older generation and it flows to the veins of the next generation like blood…when a suppression comes from the above, the flow seems to become stagnant at the surface, but it never stops [flowing] under the surface" (H. S. Gao, personal communication, August 2005). Mr.

Gao also shared with me the psychological effect on his family that took place after I read the apology letter to his father: "My mother and I felt a great relief and soon things began to turn positive and the disease and the depression subsided gradually, until it completely disappeared about half a year later" (Ibid). While I visited him for the interview as an associate professor from a community college who could have been considered an outsider and kept at a distance, nevertheless, his reflections at the time and the deep feelings he shared with me brought me into his inside world. I realized that we had become true partners in this particular research inquiry, since he shared information from his personal and emotional world and I too was involved personally not only in his memories, but in documenting the meaning and importance of this tradition we shared.

As the aforementioned *New York Times* report shows, traditional culture is disappearing with the lost villages. Fanmagou and its neighboring villages are right in the middle of this crisis of culture. I learned from one of my most recent telephone interviews that the local government has already made plans to relocate the villagers to some newly developed regions and the traditional culture will be "torn into pieces" in due time (H. C. Zhang, personal communication, October 2013). This difficult reality makes my research necessary and urgent. My purpose in doing the research is now more than academic and includes somehow the effort to preserve the millennium-old traditions from being totally lost. I am confident that I am excellently situated to carry on this research. My personal background, my upbringing, my educational training and my decade-long field work provide the internal conditions that should ensure my ability to conduct this ethnographic research of my own culture. Fifteen years of continued efforts, the collected data, IRB approval (there and here), the rapport and network that I have with the yin-yangs, and

particularly the help available from my mentors and colleagues, are the external conditions that will ensure that this research makes a difference in protecting a disappearing heritage practice.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON FOLK RELIGIONS AND PRACTICES IN CHINA

Over the course of some two thousand years of practice and development, three religions – Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism – have secured a dominant and institutionalized position in both the cultural life of the Chinese people and in the emphases of academic studies.[6] In the past century for example, since the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, despite repeated political interruptions and interferences, scholars and researchers have given the "Big Three" religions primary attention and have produced significant fruits of understanding both concerning each religion's individual teachings as well as their partial syncretization (Zhong, 2004). As a sharp contrast to this focused attention on these three religions, before the mid-1980s very few researchers in China gave any of their attention to the Chinese folk religions. Despite the fact that folk religions actually have a much larger number of lay practitioners in China – over several hundred million – than have the "Big Three" (Wu, 1996; Zhong, 2004; Zhu, 2009). This uneven focus was due primarily to the fact that folk religions had long been marginalized, ignored, and, in several periods, even strictly controlled by the governments in power. This was especially true when government was run by avowed Marxist atheists. As recent as the turning of the 21st century no systematic academic conceptual and analytic framework for studying Chinese folk religions had been formed (Zhong, 2004) and today Chinese scholarship in the area of folk religion remains relatively minimal and unsophisticated (Pi, 2009).

[6] In recent years, two more institutionalized religions, Christianity and Islam, have been added. Now the Big Three have been increased to five.

The primary cause of such immaturity in this field of study is that the majority of Chinese government officials and some people in academic circles as well, have not yet fully emerged from the long shadow that was cast by classical religious classification structures in China. This taxonomy held that folk beliefs completely lacked a system of scriptures or theological theories, and therefore could not be regarded as being bona-fide religions. Prior to the 21st century, folk beliefs or religions were considered to be identical to superstitions and witchcraft and were classified as such and roughly written off all together, along with other aspects of "primitive" culture (Lin, 2007). Nevertheless, some scholars in the West held that Chinese folk beliefs did actually comprise a popular or "folk" religion. For instance, about one century ago in his *The Religion of China*, the Dutch scholar Jan Jakob De Groot advocated that the Chinese folk belief system constituted a systematic religion. His argument was based on his own field research in Fujian, China. Similarly, functionalist approaches to anthropology around the same time had an impact among research circles outside of China (in Japan, for example), such that many socio-cultural anthropologists by the 1960s agreed to consider Chinese folk belief as a complete religious system (Zhong, 2004).[7]

Since the 1980s, China has gradually loosened its rigid control over actual religious practices, particularly over folk religious practices; and this friendlier social policy indirectly communicated to scholars both in China and abroad that they could carry out research work without exclusively using Marxist theories on religion as their guiding perspective (Zhong, 1999; He, 1999). In a little more than thirty years since this relaxation of social policy, remarkable achievements have been reached in scholarly

[7] Almost at the same time De Groot published his work, the Japanese scholar Masaharu Anesaki (姉崎正治) coined the term "Folk Religion," in 1897, and it has since been extensively used by other Japanese scholars (Zhu, 2009).

research regarding (1) general philosophical thought and religious practices in China, (2) shamanic practices, (3) folk religious beliefs and practices – mainly burial rituals, memorial and sacrificial rituals – and (4) issues of cultural heritage loss amidst rapid social changes and also the counter measures that the Chinese government takes to "save" some of the cultures from getting lost or from changing too much.[8]

1. Research on General Philosophical Thoughts and Religious Practices

In pre-1980s China most research related to religion focused on general philosophical thought. This focus was not because of the scholars' personal choice or preference, but because of the critical political atmosphere and socio-cultural environment. Most scholars chose not to write anything, or even were not allowed to write anything concerning religion. Only a small number of scholars were given the task to study Chinese religions, though even these few were excluded from studying folk religions, and they unanimously applied the Marxist theoretical framework for studying the institutional religions (He, 1999). The primary goal of this approach was to aim ultimately at eliminating all religions and to convert all Chinese citizens into loyal followers of Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong's thought. Consequently, up until a generation ago, the study of religion in China had an overt political agenda of undermining its real meaning and importance in social and cultural life. Even if some scholars wished to do fieldwork on religious practice, it was practically impossible because religious practices were officially banned in most parts of China and people were

[8] There are of course achievements in the study of several other aspects of religious practice in China; what I am presenting here are those that are directly relevant to the present *yin-yang* research.

justifiably scared to be interviewed or observed practicing in secret.[9] The only recourse for these sincerely interested scholars was to do what they could with existing data on religions, namely, by studying the books that were not burned in the Cultural Revolution and the scholarly literature that had been published between 1912 and 1949. Hence much of this research was confined to the narrow history of religions as contained in books and other static cultural artifacts or records (He, 1999). Among the fields of concentration in this period however was the examination of the thought and development of the yin-yang schools and the study of the development of Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism, which are collectively addressed as the *Sanjiao* (三教 three religions or three teachings or the "Big Three").

As mentioned in the previous chapter, although the yin-yang schools these scholars studied share the same two Chinese characters, 陰 and 陽, that are also used to name the yin-yang practitioners that are the focus of this current ethnographic study, these yin-yang schools actually represent different people and concepts – the concern of the yin yang schools of thought studied academically in this period was the meaning of life and the balance in nature, while the primary interest of the yin-yang practitioners described in my following chapters is to actually communicate between the yin and the yang worlds, to pacify the worries of the villagers, or to satisfy their needs of showing filial piety to their elders at times of funerals and memorials. While their names share the same Chinese words, their role and social status is quite different. The yin-yang school scholars represent the philosophical elite in the society, while the yin-yang practitioners

[9] In December 2013, before I began interviewing Master Dong, a yin-yang in Haiyuan County, I asked him if he had any concerns on my interviewing him. He laughed and said: "If you were interviewing me during the Cultural Revolution, or even a few years after that, I would definitely have turned you down; but now I don't have any concerns at all. You see, even the Communist Cadres are using yin-yangs a lot."

of my study represent the lay and common people, particularly the farmers who have received almost no schooling. With this clear distinction in mind, because the Yin-Yang School of "philosophical thought" represents an altogether different system than the yin-yangs of this ethnographic study, further review of the scholarly literature pertaining to them need not be included here. Similarly, although the yin-yang practitioners of my ethnographic study incorporate elements from each of the *sanjiao,* sophisticated discussions on the literature related to the *sanjiao* are not relevant or closely connected to understanding the yin-yang practices being described and studied here, and therefore are not included in my review.[10]

2. Research on Shamanic Practices

Research studies in shamanism and in folk religious practices of the national minorities are of particular relevance to this yin-yang study. Zhao (2012) asserts that the key component of the origin of the Chinese culture is the rise and development of political authority, the obtainment of which relies mainly on morality, on religion, and on the monopoly of scarce resources. The most important cultural aspect of this process has been gaining sole control over the means of communication between Heaven, Earth, and humankind – that is, to take the shamanic political approach (p. 12). However, the ruling classes' adopting a shamanic political approach does not necessarily mean that shamans would have received high political status within feudal societies. Actually as early as in Shang (1600 BCE-1046 BCE) and Zhou (1046 BCE-221 BCE) times, shamanic culture

[10] for example, they themselves claim to belong among the disciples of Daoism (Z. H. Ma, personal communication, July 2002) but in almost each of their scriptures there are overlaps with Buddhism scriptures or sutras, and one of their theoretical pillars is the filial piety, which is strongly advocated by Confucianism

(巫術文化) suffered a drastic decline in political status as it was rejected by priestly culture (祭司文化) as well as by ritual culture (禮樂文化) (Zhao, 1997).

After a review of ancient writings, Zhao (1997) concludes that the Shang dynasty of the 2nd millennium BCE represents a turning point away from shamanic culture when it was gradually replaced by [institutionalized] religious culture, with the status and power of the priests increasing over that of a shaman. Xia and Xia (2006) enumerate shamanic practices reflected in one of the four fiction classics, *The Dream in the Red Mansion* (紅樓夢) in which not only the purpose of the shamanic practices and the tools they used in these practices are presented, but also a close connection is portrayed between shamanism and the Manchu nationality. A particularly important aspect they present is the *sanjie* (三界, the trailokya or the three world-realms) and the *sanhun* (三魂, the three souls), which is a concept in the culture of shamanism (pp. 110-111). The concepts of both *sanjie* and *sanhun* match closely the convictions of believers who call on yin-yangs. Up to the present day, Chinese villagers with this cultural worldview believe that the yin-yangs are able to mediate among the *sanjie* and are able to take care of the *sanhun* – for both the living and the dead.

Another aspect that Xia and Xia (2006) present is the consistent use of bronze mirrors by shamans. The authors are correct to declare that shamans use the bronze mirrors to guard the houses [of their patrons] and to get rid of evil; however, they may not be accurate in assuming that the shamans hung many of those "bronze mirrors on their clothing because they worship the mirrors" (pp. 113-114). For example, my own field research has yielded a different use for yin-yangs. Mirrors are used by yin-yangs not as objects of worship, but as defensive weapons for deflection, after a house cleansing

rite. A mirror is hung over the front gate of the courtyard with a drawn-on-the-paper amulet stuck behind it, and two other amulets pasted below, for divination purposes. That is, the mirrors are utilitarian not venerated. In addition to the bronze mirrors, shamans also use waist-bells and drums in their rites, about which Feng (1998) provides an excellent discussion from an archeologist's perspective. Feng maintains that in the shamanic culture, ordinary people are not supposed to wear bells, and the bells that shamans wear are exclusively for their use as trans-earthly objects (pp. 29-30). This is drastically different from the folk culture in the Xi-Hai-Gu region, where it is a common custom to have the young children wear bells. In fact, some of the unearthed objects presented in Feng's article are identical to the ones I saw in the Xi-Hai-Gu region about 40 years ago. Research on Manchu customs and shamans (Feng, 1998; Fang, 2004; Wu, 2004; Luo, 2011) in the past two decades conclude that in Manchu custom a shaman has two main functions: One is for offering sacrifice to gods or to ancestors and the other for healing illnesses. Both of these functions can be done by the shaman who can travel between the human world and the supernatural world. A shaman therefore plays the role of an intermediary, a role that shares much similarity with what a yin-yang does, but the selection of a young shaman is greatly different from that of a young yin-yang. While a yin-yang is produced through several years of master-apprenticeship training, a shaman is produced through one of the two means: being selected among the laymen by the order of spiritual beings or by an old shaman or senior family member in a "shaman selection" meeting (Xu and Yu, 2012). Yin-yangs are trained through an instructed curriculum, while shamans are identified as possessing the necessary qualities or experiences for their special intermediary role. One is a shaman by nature, but a yin yang by training.

In the Manchu shaman culture there exists a willow tree worship tradition, which may have influenced certain yin-yang rituals in which willow arrows and peach-wood bows are used to shoot at the demons. Wu Laishan's (2004) short research gives us a glimpse of how willow worship had evolved into using an unearthly object that could be used for communication between humans and gods. He therefore asserts that willow worshiping is an indispensable component in sacrificial shamanic rites, and it is put in an important position in the natural worship (p. 121). The future of the Manchu shaman culture, according to Xu and Yu (2012) shares the same cultural challenges faced by that of the yin-yangs. The Manchu shamanism has fallen into a dilemma of decline and extinction, because "in the context of the new social situation and under the influence of new ideas, and with the passing of the already small number of shamans, a shaman culture endowed with the unique charm is facing a situation of unsustainability" (p. 47).

3. Research on Folk Religious Beliefs and Practices

As mentioned above, scholarly study on folk beliefs did not begin in China until the 1920s when some reformists turned their interest to studying and critiquing "superstitions" (Zhong, 2004; Zhu, 2009). Yet folk religion has been and remains the most important and most influential religious system in China with several hundred million followers (Wu, 1996). Long before the formation of Buddhism and Daoism, folk religion was practiced throughout China, for thousands of years, and it has been the home and hope for the Chinese common people (Zhu, 2009). Particularly China's rural areas have been a fertile ground for the development of diverse folk religions. In rural villages, farmers facing significant challenges and suffering in real life developed belief and ritual systems of turning to supernatural powers for relief and explanation. These diverse systems of

religious belief naturally cater to the practical needs of the rural societies from which they derived (Meng, 2012). The realization of this natural and contextual development of folk cultural and religious practices has encouraged more and more scholars to begin engaging in direct fieldwork in remote parts of China where these practices are better preserved and continued. Scholars have been promoting recent research in this field by highlighting the necessity and significance of folk religious practices in Chinese culture [as contrasted with the political, economic and cultural centers such as modern cities]. Acknowledging and studying folk religion as an important part of rural societies, Yu (2009) points out that "[we] should be fully aware [of the fact] that folk religion provides a way for the common people to make some mental adjustments and that it is their need to survive" (p. 85). Others have even started to protest the unfair treatment of the folk religions in modern China, arguing that the idea that folk religion is only a feudal superstition is actually a deep-rooted result of ideas specific to Communist China, and that this dominant socio-political idea has been a threat to the survival and development of folk religion (Lin, 2009, p. 88; Wu, 1996).

From 1920 to 1926 there was an active folklore culture, and the research movement that showed interest in folk beliefs and folk culture centered in what is now Beijing University; there emerged a number of prominent scholars, including Gu Jiegang and Jiang Shaoyuan. But, as mentioned previously, the main research objective of this scholarship was to teach people to distinguish science from superstition, with folk beliefs representing the second. Among these scholars, Yang Chengzhi was perhaps the first one to actually use the term "folk belief" in his 1937 paper *The Beliefs of the People in An-nan* (Zhong, 2004). Around 1926, when the folkloric movement at Beijing University

came to a pause, many researchers moved to southern provinces in China and used Guangdong and Zhejiang as their centers until 1937, when Japan invaded China. This period saw a number of high-quality research works done by such scholars as Jiang Shaoyuan (*Hair, Beard and Claws – and Their Superstitions*, 1928), Rong Zhaozu (*Superstitions and Legends*, 1929), Fei Hongnian (*Superstitions*, 1933) and Li Jiarui (*Types of Beiping Customs*, 1937). However, again one cannot fail to notice that the key word in most of these research works remains "superstition," which is indicative of the fact that these researchers were elites of the country. Their primary intention was to educate the lay people in China with modern science and technology so as to radically change the fate and future of China, which had suffered centuries of natural disasters and man-made calamities. Today these researchers' language and ideas about folk culture may seem biased and shortsighted, but in the context of their day it was well-intentioned and aimed at what they understood to be important cultural and educational developments.

During the Anti-Japanese War period (1937-1945), a great number of scholars were forced to move to the southwest and therefore the focus of research changed from the central-China Han culture to southwestern minority nationality cultures.[11] Despite the immense difficulties generated by the war, the scholars of this period managed to produce several important works. Xu Dishan's *The Study of the Superstition of Planchette Writing* (1941) and Yang Kun's *The Study of the Kitchen Gods* (1944) were the most influential. When the Communists took power in China soon after, in 1949, they adopted practices from their socialist brothers in Soviet Russia and formally banned all folk religious

[11] The geographical distribution of the ethnic groups (民族, minzu) is not evenly balanced in China. Provinces in southwestern China host more than 90% of the national minorities (shaoshu minzu). See Joniak-Lüthi (2013), "The Han Minzu, Fragmented Identities, and Ethnicity," in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 72, No. 4, pp. 849-871.

practices as unscientific and superstitious. The consequence of this policy was that for a dozen years there was no research whatsoever conducted on folk beliefs or religion in China.

What followed in the next historical period was even more destructive. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), folk religions as well as institutionalized religions like Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Islam and Christianity, were mercilessly criticized and their practitioners were publicly humiliated and persecuted. Many scriptural books were burned, the idols and icons (sculptures or portraits) were destroyed, and many temples were either converted to schools or barns, or they were simply destroyed. Mosques were sometimes used as hog-pens, and, as an added humiliation, Muslims were even forced to raise pigs, an animal prohibited from being eaten according to their religion. (J. L. Zhang, personal communication, August 2010).

Post-Mao Communist China (since 1976) has modified its attitude toward folk religion. It adopted an open door policy beginning in the early 1980s, and in the past three decades there has been wide coverage of folk religious practices in various parts of China. Since the reform and opening up and with the implementation of the progress of religious philosophy and religious policy adjustments, "not only the five [freshly identified] major religions (Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Catholicism, Islam) have taken the bright and healthy broad road, but folk religion also has been undergoing active recovery and reconstruction" (Yu, 2009). For example, between 2005 and 2012, Chinese researchers produced analyses of cultural functions of burial rituals in Western Henan province (Jian, 2011) and Eastern Henan Province (Guo, 2012), the yin-yang school's impact on burial rituals of the Miao Nationality in Western Hunan province (Wu, 2012)

and the changes of such rituals (Wu, 2011), the change of Chinese Korean funeral etiquette and custom in northeastern China (Lian, 2011), the burial rituals of the Yi Nationality in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (Lu, 2007), burial customs of suburban Wuhan in Hubei province (Fang, 2009), the burial culture of the Tu-jia Nationality in Wuling-shan region of northeastern Hunan Province (which borders four provinces – Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan and Guizhou), as well as the burial objects made up with paper and bamboo strips in Cao Xian, Shandong Province (Guo, 2012).

In addition to the scholarly journal articles, over 120 research-oriented books on folk beliefs and folk religion were published in just the last twenty years of the 20th Century and the first ten years of the 21st Century. This flowering of scholarship is so significant that it is being referred to as a "big harvest" for Chinese folk customs research. The primary characteristic of this emerging research is that the central purpose of the research has shifted away from the previous intention of actually doing away with folk customs as superstitions and toward describing these diverse traditions as a national cultural bedrock (Zhong, 2004). The year 1994 alone produced 22 books, the number of which was unprecedented for an "unpopular" topic in China. According to Zhong (2004), themes or concentrations of folk religion research are determined by political needs – for instance, between 1993 and 2000 there were five books on *Qi-gong* (气功) published as countermeasures to the fast spreading of the Fa-lun-gong, which is centered on *Qi-gong* practice – or by geographical location, as it is the case of Fujian province which, from 1987 to 1993, produced six books and several dozens of journal articles on the *Mazu* (妈祖, the Chinese goddess of the sea) belief and the *True Man Wu* (吴真人), a deity in the province that is referred to as the *Baosheng Dadi* (保生大帝, Life-Protecting Great

Emperor) and that enjoys perhaps equal status with the worship of *Mazu*. Fujian is closest in distance to Taiwan and the hometown to many people who live in Taiwan. It frequently plays the role of host to Taiwanese pilgrims who share the same deities. The central government encourages the local government to take measures, to support the religious activities, and presently Fujian is one of the most religion-active provinces in China.

In the 1970s and early 80s, when research on religions was banned in Mainland China, Westerners' research in this field was also limited, most likely due to the inaccessibility to informants and fieldwork. Nevertheless, general introductions to Chinese religions were written by some, and some field research on Chinese religion was undertaken in Taiwan and Hong Kong, where the Communist influence could not reach. Flopper (1969) analyzed Chinese religion through proverbs, and Loewe (1982) did literature-based research on the Chinese ideas of life and death during the Han Period. Although the "Chinese" in his book refers mainly to the educated elite in the Han dynasty, the cosmology and the thoughts on the afterlife he summarizes are identical to that of the villagers in present day Xi-Hai-Gu. Whether or not there is a direct or indirect lineage or link between them would require additional primary research. An additional three books are worth mentioning in this regard: *Chinese Religions: A Cultural Perspective* by Jochim (1986), *Chinese Ritual and Politics* by Martin (1981), and *Taoism and Chinese Religion* by Maspero (1981), all of which filled a gap during this time which otherwise produced little scholarship.

In his 1975 groundbreaking work, *The Religion of the Chinese People*, Granet, "a forerunner of Daoist studies in the West" (Yu, 1985), theorizes his "Peasant Religion"

which has been cited extensively in the research (Zhu, 2009; Meng, 2012). Granet discusses the beliefs in the Mother Earth, the ancestor cult, and he also gives a brief presentation of the two "rival religions" within the official religion of Confucianism: Daoism, which continued to introduce "revelations" and sectarian practices in contradistinction to Confucian conformism, and Buddhism, whose monks performed the Ullambana ceremony for the delivery of the dead from suffering in hell, thus fulfilling the Confucian concept of filial piety.

One year prior to Granet's book, Martin et al. presented a sociological study of regional religious practices based on the authors' field work in Taiwan and Hong Kong. In this book, Deglopper's "Religion and Ritual in Lukang" chapter provided a detailed observation of a fragment of Taiwanese popular culture and concluded that religion "seems the most mutable, labile, and differentiated aspect of modern Taiwanese culture" (p. 45). In the same book, Wolf, in his "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors" chapter finds that the worshipers burn three sticks of incense every morning and every evening with each of the sticks offered to a specific god: One for the wandering ghosts, one for the Stove (Kitchen) God, and one for their families' immediate ancestors (p. 131). The author also finds that when brothers in a family divide their father's household, "the eldest inherits the old stove, while his younger brothers transfer hot coals from the old stove to their new ones," thereby inviting the Stove God to join them. The reason behind this is that "the soul of a family.... is somehow localized in their stove" (p. 133).

Still earlier, in his *Religion in Communist China,* Richard Bush (1970) asserts that the hostile attitude and the means of suppression upon folk religious practice, especially the so-called "Taoist" secret societies, started with emperors of the past only to be

continued by the Communist leaders of today, because "these societies…. have been suspected of harboring men that were dangerous to the government and of being centers of dissenting thought" (p. 382).[12]

In addition to academic writings, non-academic Chinese literature (fiction and nonfiction alike) has a long history of documenting, describing or fabricating memorial and / or sacrificial rituals; for example, *The Book of Songs* that was compiled approximately in Western Zhou (ca. 11 Century BCE – 771 BCE) dynasty contains about 50 songs that originated from religious rituals related to ancestor worship (Li, 2013; Chu, 2007; Jiang, 2004; Zhao, 1988); the entire set of poems, *Nine Songs* by Qu Yuan (ca. 340 BC – 278 BCE), were about sacrificial rituals directed at ancestors and other gods (Li, 2011; Cui, 2004); Chinese classics such as *The Zuozhuan* (otherwise spelled Tso Chuan, by Zuo Qiuming in the fifth century BCE) and *The Rites of Zhou*, which was compiled in the Warring States, have numerous records of sacrifice and rituals (Sommer, 1995); and very popular classic fictions such as *The Strange Stories from a Studio* (聊齋誌異), *Pilgrimage to the West* (西遊記), *The Golden Lotus* (金瓶梅), *The Dream of Red Mansion* (紅樓夢), and a semi-fictional novel like *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三國演義), all have descriptions of folk religious rituals.

It is natural that no writings on Chinese religions fail to mention ancestral worship for the simple reason that for four thousand years, ancestral religion was central in Chinese life. Ching (1993) says that this was particularly so in China because of the virtue of filial piety which makes the male heir the foundation of the ancestral cult (p. 22).

[12] The yin-yangs I interviewed all agree that there were times when all religious practices were regarded as being potentially anti-governmental and were therefore subject to suppression, particularly from the 1950s to the1970s.

Ching also writes that the ancient Chinese had a three-tiered world view, of heaven above, the abode of the dead below, and earth, the abode of the living, in between, and she explains what happens to the *hun* (English equivalent) and the *po* (English Equivalent) when one dies. Descriptions and discussions on ancestral worship are also found in Granet (1975), Jochim (1986), Morgan (1972) and Thompson (1975).

To summarize, the writings on Chinese folk religion, whether overviews or focused on specific components, all include ancestral worship as a centerpiece because it is fully intertwined with Confucian filial piety teaching and this includes burial rites and ceremonial rites. This is especially the case with burial rites because the "traditional idea for funeral rites is to bury the dead lavishly (厚葬) so as to show the dutifulness of the children" (Fang, 2009). Of equal frequency is inclusion of worship of the Kitchen God that reinforces the concept that each household has at least one family god that constantly checks the conducts and misconducts of each of the family members. Along with these two modes of worship, numerous rites – healing, house-cleaning and the like – have to be held and therefore all writings on Chinese folk religion have sections devoted to rituals associated with these.

What is missing in the contemporary Chinese academic literature on folk religious practices, however, is the yin-yang practice, which is unique in its compilation and composition of various practices. Two short non-scholarly essays did make contributions to the literature of yin-yang research. In his 2010 essay "Yin-yang master: A perished profession", Ma Jinsheng, a resident of Beijing, states that in ancient and modern China people from high-level officers down to low-level commoners were all closely linked with yin-yang masters, whose main duty was to preside over funeral rites; however, he

declares, the practice of yin-yang masters has already been in extinction from "many years ago" and this traditional occupation no longer exists. He also asserts that "[D]ue to the limitation and fragmentation of the handed down data, it is very difficult for us to get a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the occupation" (p. 119). As a response to Ma's essay, Wang Fang, from Yulin College, Shaanbei (northern Shaanxi), which is about 600 kilometers to the northeast of Guyuan and 900 kilometers to the southwest of Beijing, published an essay in the same magazine, *Looking for Roots*, the next year. She agrees with Ma that yin-yangs' main duties lie in funeral activities, but she argues that yin-yang masters, who have special functions and play special roles in folk life, have not been in extinct. Wang briefly presents the title and social position of yin-yang practitioners and discusses how one becomes a yin-yang and what duties or functions a yin-yang has. She gives a relatively detailed treatment on a yin-yang's role in burial activities (pp. 111-112) such as writing the "disaster-narrating note," calculating the date and time of burying, determining the directional orientation of the grave to see whether the dead can be buried into the existing family graveyard (if there is one), writing the tablet and the ghost-leading banner, chanting the scriptures, thanking the earth god and cleansing the house of the mourning family as a concluding part of a burial ritual. While stating that yin-yangs are indispensable in burial rituals in Shaanbei, Wang indicates that the practitioners are always classified as at the bottom of the society and that serious people usually do not want to have any contact with yin-yangs, nor to say they would like to be related with them in marriage (p. 110). That the yin-yang is regarded as one of the humble professionals (下九流) may be true in Shaanbei, where Wang's research was done, however it is not true in the Xi-Hai-Gu region, the center of my research; because

in the latter yin-yangs are not discriminated against by other farmers and in fact they are respected for their role as yin yangs. Wang also shares the information that in Shaanbei a yin-yang family will not have their younger generation[13] to continue the profession for more than three generations because, as a folk rhyme says,

走在人前吃在後	Walk before others and eat after others
十個龜子九個臭	Nine of ten of a turtule's sons are smelly
陰陽先生定風水	Yin-yang masters determine the fengshui
不過三代斷了後	Within three generations they'll have no progeny

The folk rhyme ridicules the yin-yangs that, although they select the best *fengshui* places for their clients so their progeny will prosper, the yin-yangs will have no progeny if they stay in the same profession for three generations. This concept does not exist in the Xi-Hai-Gu region because some families can have yin-yangs for more than three generations.[14]

Brief and either incorrect or incomplete as these two short essays are, they lay the first stones on the foundation for more extensive ethnographic yin-yang research. Ma's essay presents a historical fact that yin-yang practitioners used to be instrumental in funerary rituals in Beijing but now has disappeared; Ma's over generalization that yin-yang practice no longer exists in China was corrected by Wang, whose essay presents a fairly detailed sketch of what a yin-yang master does in a funeral rite. However, Wang's

[13] This statement conflicts with the above-mentioned statement that other people would not like to be related with the yin-yangs in marriage.

[14] For example, Master Ma's great grandfather was a yin-yang, and there has been a yin-yang in each generation down to his son, who was also an initiated yin-yang. The youngest yin-yang gave up the profession in 2011 for a more "profitable" profession – house developer (Z. W. Zhang, personal communication, September 2013).

essay presents practices of yin-yangs from a particular region. Her descriptions are different from the yin-yangs in the Xi-Hai-Gu region that are the focus of my study (in villages of Fanmagou and Qijiazhuang), which shows that there is diversity of practice and status among yin-yangs in different areas.

4. Research on Issues of Cultural Loss, Rapid Changes, and the Countermeasures

Folk religion is now, fortunately, regarded as a manifestation of authentic Chinese culture as it is being practiced by the majority of the people across the country (Wang, 2012; Wu, 1996). As long as a culture is understood to be of value in its heritage and tradition, its preservation becomes a critical concern. There follows a practical matter of strategies for passing this culture down or preserving it in an appropriate way. The preservation of cultural heritage in a modernizing and urbanizing global setting is a world-wide issue, but it is particularly urgent in countries where the cultural legacy is very old and where there is a rapid influx of new ideas that may be viewed as superseding or replacing the traditional views and practices. Most of the time, there is no need for a dominant colonial-type outside influence to cause people to not value or preserve their own cultural heritage.[15] Therefore the preservation of a culture has to be supported by teaching the people who are the owners or members of the culture to sustain their heritage within the context of new cultural contact and rapid social change. The teaching task should be carried out by joint forces from all walks of life, but researchers, especially those in the humanities and social sciences, have an important role in this

[15] I am reminded of Michael Obi in Chinua Achebe's *Dead Men's Path*, who ridiculed and tried to abolish his own tradition by blocking a path that connects the village shrine with their place of burial (p. 114) but happened to go through a school compound, in which he is the newly appointed headmaster.

struggle for cultural preservation and adjustment. This section reviews literature on issues of culture preservation and urgent measures like documenting disappearing cultures.

When a folk practice is labeled a "cultural heritage," even this simple attribution may help give it a better chance to survive. Better yet, when this label becomes official its preservation may even be supported by the state. For example, the Nuo dance, which used to be – and still is – a typical religious practice, is now being encouraged by the local government who utilize it to attract tourists. Another example is Xumi Mountain itself, which was introduced in Chapter 1. The grottoes in the mountain were severely damaged during the Cultural Revolution, but since the 1980s, the local government has invested money to have some of the statues and paintings repaired so as to use the site as one of the local tourist attractions. Bearing the name of a sacred mountain of the Buddhist Religion, the Xumi Grottoes have already attracted tourists from quite a few neighboring countries and regions such as Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan.[16] Religious tourism across China is booming as the result of joint efforts by the central and local governments.

Literature on traditional culture, particularly on the exploration and protection of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), is growing exponentially in contemporary China. This is a good phenomenon on the one hand, as it reflects a more tolerant and appreciative policy of the Chinese government on traditional culture; but on the other hand, it also reflects the fact that there is a noticeable trend of losing some elements of the traditional Chinese culture. The research workers, whether hired by the government or self-

[16] When I was working in Guyuan, when there was a government delegation or a tourist group from a foreign country, the local government would make sure that the foreigners saw the Xumi Grottoes. Even as of December 2013, the Culture Department asked me to translate some brochures into English to cater to Western tourists.

motivated, are doing the research with the aim of preserving or rescuing the elements from mental and material loss. There is an implied awareness of the threat of cultural loss. From the villagers, to scholars, to government officials, there is a general awareness of the threat of cultural heritage loss.

When talking about the preservation of a cultural heritage, one cannot afford to ignore the presence of a government in society. In societies where the state controls all sectors of social life, it is always a key factor. To avoid being banned, cultural practices have to perform in accordance with the will of the state. One of the measures the practitioners take, of a culture or subculture, is to legitimize themselves by way of finding sound reasons for their existence. In a classic ethnographic example, a local Balinese community, reported by Geertz, 1973, p. 414, tried to use the excuse of raising funds for a local school project to organize a cockfight in a public place. A similar strategy is being used by local governments in China, where folk religion is still to be maintained under careful control, to rationalize their proposals to the central government (Yu, 2012; Zhu, 2009; Meng, 2012; Hu, 2012; Zhao, 2009).

There are two polarizing trends that coexist in today's China. One is that some traditional cultural practices are reviving (Lagerwey, 2010; Palmer, 2011; Oakes and Sutton, 2010; Ashiwa and Wank, 2009; Yu, 2012; Meng, 2012; Zhao, 2009); the other is that some traditional cultural practices are disappearing (Chau, 2011; Yu, 2012; Meng, 2012; Zhao, 2009). Those that have managed to survive or revive have found ways to integrate with the state policy (Chau, 2011; Zhao, 2009). This practice has much to do with the role that the state does play in society. Therefore it is safe to say that the power

dynamic between local culture and national social structure, or political emphasis, are key issues in the discourse.

Cao (2003) reports two cases through which we can see religion-oriented tourism already had become a source of revenue as early as ten years ago. When a great statue of the Buddha was unveiled in November 1997 in Wuxi, Jiangsu, to which almost 100,000 believers and tourists made a special trip, and a stream of "vehicles extended over 20 kilometers." In 2002, the scenic area of the Putuo Mountain in Zhejiang received 1.67 million tourists, which made a fifteen-year sequence of receiving over a million tourists per annum. Also, the Potala Palace in Tibet received 200,000 tourists in the first half of 2001; in the same year, in Guangzhou, an exhibition of ancient Chinese rare Buddhist statues attracted 100,000 residents from the city alone; and, under a strong public demand, the Buddha exhibition was extended by one week (p. 219).

Among all the strategies that the lay people use nowadays is claiming their cultural heritage as an "intangible heritage" – a term sanctioned recently, with UNESCO financial support. This is almost like making it an international secular talisman or amulet for self-protection. What goes hand-in-hand with this "intangible heritage" is the symbolic implication that interacts with cultural capital to produce such concepts as religious tourism, a practice that has been highly encouraged by local governments. Wang and Wei (2003) find that "religious attractions are the most distinctive, charming and influential cultural tokens in a specific area. Accordingly, religion turns out to be an important part and an indispensable factor for regional tourism development" (p. 1). However, this practice has at the same time sparked numerous controversies, as it is purely for the sake of money, not for the preservation of the culture (Cao, 2003). Tourism, while arguably

protecting and preserving certain aspects of culture, threatens their authentic continuation and performance in other ways because of the economic priority it establishes and the constant influx of cultural outsiders it brings into contact with the valued heritage.

As is evident from this review, in the past thirty years a growing number of scholars in China, and outside, have done impressive work in ethnographic studies, but their research only recognized small aspects of the peoples' religions – i.e. souls, afterlife, totems, polytheism, animism – all fragments of larger systems of "folk religion."

All research occurs under specific socio-political circumstances and interests. A good example is that Gu Jiegang and other researchers who did their ethnographic studies in China soon after the Nationalist party overthrew the last feudal empire in Chinese history. That was the time the [Han] people in China needed to learn about themselves and not be ruled by the Manchus who had been taking advantage of the common people's illiteracy and ignorance to govern. Lin Guoping (2003; 2007) has conducted extensive research on folk beliefs and folk religious practice in Fujian and other southeastern coastal provinces in China to be in line with the government's policy on utilizing folk beliefs to resist against foreign religions, such as Christianity.

So the picture is clear: All this highlights the need for direct and nuanced ethnographic studies of Chinese folk religious practices and beliefs. What is recorded in the field, directly from the people, will endure at least in documentary record. What is described and explained can be remembered as a historical datum from the moment that it is recorded. It becomes and stays as a benchmark in history and in our understanding of our general evolution. Especially within the context of Chinese scholarship that has had a history of strongly politicized motives, these straightforward documentary ethnographic

records are the kind of studies that may remain insightful and useful a hundred and more years from now.[17] It is this kind of direct ethnographic study of as yet undocumented yin yang practices from my home region that is the core of this dissertation. It is at once an effort to fill a gap in the scholarly research and to provide at least a record of this threatened cultural heritage.

[17] An instructive example is William Whyte's *Street Corner Society*, which was first published in 1943 and the fourth edition in 1993. The republication of the book celebrates the model for urban ethnography for fifty years. Whyte did his study in the 1930s in a poor Italian community – "Cornerville" – in Boston where the inhabitants were mainly 1st and 2nd generation immigrants from Italy. Although the place was considered dangerous and crime-ridden, Whyte moved in and lived in the district for three and a half years (1936-1940). The significance of Whyte's research is multifaceted, of which I am just mentioning one: A research result of an outsider author can honestly presents life of a marginalized group of people to the outsider readers, so as to let them see that these people in "the street corner society" are just like anyone of us, with flesh and blood as well as feelings; that is, they are some such who sometimes do bad things but never give up hope for the good.

CHAPTER 3: THEORY AND METHOD OF RESEARCHING TRADITIONAL CULTURE AND FIELD-BASED ETHNOGRAPHY

1. Research Questions

Before my main research questions were formulated, I brainstormed a few smaller, methodological queries, the answers to which will help lay some corner stones to develop larger, more profound questions. For example, what rituals are performed by yin-yangs in Xi-Hai-Gu region where Fanmagou belongs? Why are these rituals needed? Who wants or requests these rituals to be done? Who are the people that are qualified to do the rituals? Who are the best – well-informed, knowledgeable – people I should direct my questions to and what are the best ways for me to get the answers? Soon I realized that, in order for my research questions to be answered, the following three sources were crucial: (1) the villagers in Fanmagou that hire the yin-yangs; (2) the yin-yangs who conduct the rituals and have the ritual scriptures; and (3) literature that discusses folk religious practices. The following is a table of the questions and the people (informants or participants) that have served to answer the questions.

Table 1 Questions and people that might answer the questions

Questions to be answered	People that might answer my questions
What rituals are performed by yin-yangs?	Most of the old villagers (40 years or older) know the answers; all the yin-yangs know the answers.
Why are these rituals needed?	Some of the villagers know; all the yin-yangs are supposed to know as a result of their training.

Who wants or requests these rituals to be done?	The villagers – most likely for individual families, but some rites may be for the benefit of the entire village.
Who are the people that are qualified to do the rituals?	Older villagers (i.e., elders) are qualified to do some small-scale and non-text-based rituals; all the yin-yangs are qualified.
Who are the best people I should direct my questions to?	The village elders; the experienced yin-yangs.
What are the best ways for me to get the answers?	To ask – that is, to interview them in a semi-structured way that asks specific questions but allows room for them to comment and expand their answers through natural conversation.

Of course there were other questions such as "Whom to contact first?" "What procedures must be followed?" and "What permissions must I get?" but these were procedural technical questions, not methodological questions. Due to the fact that most of the old villagers in Fanmagou are illiterate, I ruled out large-scale surveys that use printed questionnaires; what I designed was a simple table into which I could fill in the participants' coded names, and from which I could choose an answer to circle, such as a participant's age, level of education and whether or not he or she believes that yin-yang healing rituals are effective. (See Table 4 in Chapter 4.)

The above "inventories" enabled me to determine that my research was going to be to a considerable degree qualitative and the two research questions are:

- What is the yin-yang practice and what is the meaning and importance of this ongoing folk cultural practice in Fanmagou, China within the broader context of Chinese history and culture?
- What challenges is this practice facing and what might be done to document and allow this practice to evolve unencumbered?

2. Theories and Paradigms in Researching Traditional Cultures

It is widely accepted that all modern sciences – social and natural – have their own theoretical frameworks under which specific research can be done because, as Wilson and Chaddha (2009) remind us, in the absence of theory, the validation of ethnography is rather problematic (p. 270); but it may not be true that all researchers in the same discipline will strictly stay within such frameworks, or dogmatically follow the rules prescribed by forerunners in the field.

Generally speaking, research theories and methods are dictated by the subject matter of the research. Nevertheless, it would certainly not be realistic to assume that any researcher would ever be able to approach fresh subject matter without being predisposed to certain favorite methods or angles of approach that he or she has learned or used in the past.

The theories/paradigms and methods of studying a traditional culture like a folk religious practice will differ among researchers from different disciplines. Historians are frequently interested in the developmental stages over time or original traces of a folk religion, while policy makers, as it is the case in China, may be interested in similar developmental patterns and trends but with the purpose of harnessing their power and influence in the present society. Sociologists, such as Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, were interested in finding out the meaning of religious practices and the social functions of such practices; psychologists may be primarily interested in discovering the beliefs of a folk religion as well as the internal reactions of these believers towards rituals. Traditional folklore will base itself on the heritage of folk religions, and will concern a folk religion's customs as historical and living subjects; anthropology and ethnography

will be focusing on the main body (or person) itself through deep description of context or interpreting a culture (for example, Clifford Geertz) and reflecting on the daily religious life as a whole. Most anthropologists will be interested in doing a good number of things: (1) "to understand another way of life from the native point of view" by describing a culture (Spradley, 1979); (2) to attempt to "reconstruct the history of culture" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1958); (3) to describe a culture, or a piece of culture and to collect data that describes a culture (Bernard, 2004). If a scholar (of any discipline) aims at cultivating and preserving a traditional culture by way of studying and documenting one of its components, such as folk religious practice, ethnography furnishes an ideal framework for doing such a research.

What must be kept in mind is that even very well established theories and paradigms have to face challenges, regardless the insider or outsider status of the researcher; although an insider researcher has much more advantages in terms of rapport and familiarity of the subject matter. In conducting ethnographic field research on traditional cultures, an insider researcher has to step out of the familiar domain to enable him or her to see the picture holistically; an outsider, on the other hand, has to make him-/herself into an insider to a certain degree so as to see the nuances of the subject. My personal experience tells me that an indigenous researcher is the most ideal to conduct folk culture that is facing threats of lost amidst a backdrop of rapid social change.

In their book, *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research*, LeCompte and Schensul (1999; 2010) present several paradigms that are commonly used in social science research and evaluation: (1) positivism; (2) critical theory; (3) interpretive, phenomenological, or constructivist theory; (4) ecological theory; and (5) social network

theory. Each of the five paradigms has its concentrations and it is sufficient for a researcher to employ one of them to do an ethnographic piece of research; but due to the characteristics of certain subject matters a mixed use of any two or three of the paradigms is not uncommon. In fact "sometimes an ethnographer's perspective on culture is situated in a synthesis of all five paradigms" (LeCompte and Schensul, 2010). Among these paradigms interpretive theory is most meaningful to my research since I am doing an insider / outsider interpretation of the meanings of the rituals in the villages of Fanmagou and Qijiazhuang.

According to LeCompte and Schensul (2010), in order to observe social dialogue and interaction, or the process of creating constructs, ideas, and meanings as they occur, researchers must have an active involvement in the life of research participants (p. 70). The authors maintain that when researchers and the researched are mutually involved in an interaction, it blurs the distinction between researcher and the researched, subject and object, bringing all parties together as equal partners in the process of generating and interpreting data (p. 70).

Due to the fact that religious practices are frequently inseparable from rituals, most, if not all, research on religions involved ethnographic description and interpretation of rituals. Theories about rituals and methods for doing research on rituals are more relevant to my study than those about other aspects of culture. On the one hand, as religion has a close association with ceremonies, the activities of folk religions always include certain rituals and concepts which have been strengthened through the ritual performances. On the other hand, the operations of rituals are continually taking shape during religious practices, and they continue to generate transformation along with a

political fine tuning of the state. So it is easier to look at the nature of folk religions from the view of rituals that are deemed necessary under a variety of circumstances. For example, regarding burial rituals, Jian (2011) maintains that although one's life is finished, his or her souls have not yet entered the netherworld (or "the *yin* world" in the vocabulary of my informants); therefore help from the living is needed before the souls can smoothly enter the hereafter. Thus it begs a series of rituals (p. 68). In this context, a theory of doing research on burials has to be concerned with theories of souls and afterlife – especial the theories from the subjects / informants of the study, because scholastic theories from another cultural milieu may not be relevant.

3. Primary Methods Used in Ethnographic Studies and How I Have Been Using Them

In the fourth edition of *Approaches to Social Research*, Singleton, Jr. and Straits (2005) list several methods commonly used in social science research, among which "field research" that includes field observation and field interview, "research using available data" and "data processing and elementary data analysis" are of important guiding objectives for my own research.

(1) Observation. The first and the most important method in ethnographic study is observation. Seeing is not only believing – except for being intentionally deceived by something like the eye winking in Geertz classical example, but also learning. Observation is a systematic method of data collection that relies on a researcher's ability to gather data through his or her senses. This method provides researchers with the opportunity to document – seeing with naked eyes (Singleton and Straits, 2005), jotting down interesting points, and recording the audio sounds or visual actions – actual

behavior, rather than responses related to behavior. At the same time, two points to which attention should be paid: the first is that, for various reasons, the observed may act differently during an observation, and the second is that the researchers' observations are likely to be biased by their own worldviews or belief orientations, especially if the observation is of a religious ritual and if the observer has in the context of his home culture become allergic to things defamed as "religious."

As I mentioned earlier, all explicitly manifested religious practices in this local system I'm studying are inseparable from rituals, and it is impossible to do research on rituals without observing them. In fact, direct field observation is done by both the participants – including both the practitioners (yin-yang) and the villagers – as well as the researchers. Believers of a folk religion observe their rituals from early childhood and they keep on observing them – for quality checking and self-reflection, and more – until they can no longer do so. Formal scholarly researchers observe rituals of a folk religion in order to see the exact procedures and try to interpret meaning in the symbolism these express. Confined by such conditions as time, money or other restrictions, researchers are able to observe only some of the rituals, but without some level of direct observation, ethnographic field work cannot be done.

In field observation, a researcher can be either a nonparticipant observer or a participant observer. The former is defined by Singleton, Jr. and Straits (2005) as being "an eavesdropper, someone who attempts to observe people without interacting with them and, typically, without their knowing that they are being observed" (pp. 314-315) but this may not be totally possible, as sometimes a nonparticipant observation means a researcher is a bystander. The advantages and disadvantages of the two methods depend

on such variables as the observer, the observed, the location, and the time of observation. What needs to be specially highlighted for the purposes of my study, because of my insider/outsider status and the fact that many of the observed rites involved my own family members, is the tradition of participant observation.

Except for two field observations in which I had no direct personal involvement – an exorcism ritual by fire and a yin-yang initiating ritual – all other field observations I have conducted to date have been conducted in the participant observer tradition. I paid particular attention to setting, action / behavior and communication. The setting varied from family shrine, to tomb yards, to Daoist and Buddhist temples. As the memorial and burial rituals were all held for my relatives (my uncle and my grandmother) I had to be one of the mourners and thereby a participant to begin with; but I knew what else I was doing. I participated as a split self. I was also a researcher, an "outsider" in a sense. Through many of my participant observations, Luckert was also doing two things at the same time: observing and filming. Occasionally as collaborators we would make quick eye contact, but that was done without being noticed and it did not affect my primary participation as an insider who was involved in the ritual itself.

From my experience, observing a memorial ritual in this participant observer role is easier than a burial ritual. In a memorial ritual, the family shrine is set and the procedures or sequentially ordered activities are predictable and always the same, so I could just kneel down in a back corner of the setting, and I could see the actions and behavior of both the yin-yangs and my fellow mourners by slightly turning my head. When observing a burial ritual, I knew I was going to observe the main portion, which was the actions and behavior of the yin-yangs and of the mourners that were present at the scene; but a lot of

the surrounding movements of the fellow villagers' actions and behavior had to be missed. Take my grandmother's burial ritual for example: My grandmother died at my aunt's house in Guyuan, so my relatives took her prepared coffin from the village of Qijiazhuang to Guyuan to get her corpse back to Qijiazhuang. All this time, Luckert and I stayed in the house of an uncle of mine because the family shrine was set up there, so we could observe the family mourners and the village mourners at the shrine, and at the same time we could observe the activities of the yin-yang. What we missed were: (1) Before we got to the village the yin-yang and his apprentice carried an apology letter to the backside of the hill and read it and burned it before the 3-4 villagers dug the grave; (2) the villagers of each household who prepared a bundle of hay waiting to be burned when the coffin passed their houses; (3) the relative and villagers who prepared the straw braids, the rafters, the ropes and the spades that were going to be used; and (4) the relatives who prepared vinegar, sand grains and dregs of a decoction of Chinese herb medicine that were to be used for the house cleansing the evening after the dead was buried.[18] These are elements that I couldn't directly observe, but my insider knowledge made me aware of them as elements of the ritual and I could therefore explore them through questions and interviews.

A burial ritual is multi-sited and multi-functional, because it involves the family, the relatives, the fellow villagers and the yin-yang and his helpers. These activities and behavior patterns add up to the total scope of the ritual. Unless several researchers work simultaneously at each setting, it is impossible to record all the actions and behavior that

[18] Originally a house cleansing was planned by Chang Wanliang's family; but it was cancelled after discussing with the head yin-yang. That fact is that the coffin was not brought into the house and that even her clothes were not brought in to visit the house for the last time, representing her souls. This was all because of the heavy rain that delayed the arrival of the coffin movers (W. P. Chang, personal communication, August 2010).

are taking place concurrently. Again, an insider-outsider dual perspective is key to understanding much of what is going on in such complex cultural and ritual contexts. An outside ethnographic observer would simply not know what was happening out of view or what questions to ask to gather a more complete cultural and ritual record of what was happening.

(2) Interview. Almost as important as field-based observation in ethnographic study are in-depth interviews with key informants (Singleton & Straits, 2005). Such interviews generally progress from questions about concrete situations to more abstract and interpretive questions that probe an informant's experience and interpretation of events (ibid). I have conducted at this point 13 face-to-face semi-structured interviews and, additionally, ten interviews using telephone and Skype with the yin-yangs and the villagers in Fanmagou and Qijiazhuang; some senior villagers and all the yin-yang practitioners have been my key informants and their personal experiences and interpretation of the practice are very valued data for my research. All my interview questions (prepared by myself and Luckert) have been composed in Chinese language and the interviews themselves were conducted in Chinese.

Interviewing is a method of data collection that involves researchers asking informants different types or series of questions. Interviews can generate both standardized quantifiable data, and in-depth qualitative data. Among the three interview structures – structured, semi-structured and unstructured, the first one usually does not work properly in rural areas where the informants prefer more open chatting rather than being bombarded with set strings of questions. The best strategy I found and developed

over my years of fieldwork, has been to begin open informal conversations and then, when the time was ripe, insert my memorized formal questions into the conversation.

Prior to each interview, some guidelines of questions were prepared. Most of them were short, direct, and easy to remember. The typical difficulty I encountered was in directing my informants to the questions from a casual style conversation. Sometimes they would talk "about" it for a good length of time before they landed on the question. This kind of difficulty was particularly present when I conducted the interviews by myself in a face-to-face setting. While these direct conversations are invaluable for many reasons, nonetheless, I have found that my telephone interviews or Skype interviews were very effective and have the advantage that my informants are not interrupted by others as often and therefore give their answers right away. In this way, multiple styles of interviews have complemented each other as tools for ethnography.

As for the interview styles, both formal and informal are applicable to "talkative" informants, but for non-talkative informants, an informal style is more productive. In terms of interview formats, both one-on-one interviews and group interviews are important and useful, but the former is ideal for in-depth series of questions and for personal questions while the latter is appropriate for matters about which people have general knowledge or vague memories or to discover differences in points of view. A group interview – sometimes called a "focus group" – is also good for on-the-spot triangulation checking for accuracy. I conducted one such interview with three yin-yangs in front of a running camera. Their arguments among themselves were fascinating to observe and the specific meanings of their responses and arguments were easily analyzed later, with the help of the video.

An interview is never done separately from observation; it is part of a researcher's task to observe during an interview, but it is absolutely not the task to interview during the observation of a ritual, as it would be an intrusion and disturbance. Nevertheless, brief clarifying questions are possible during a participatory observation. Through observation and interviews a researcher hopes to understand the heritage of traditional customs in modern society and to describe the modern "folk" changes and developmental trends by comparing with how things were in the past.

(3) Content analysis of existing data. Content analysis refers to document and archival analysis and secondary data analysis. It is an unobtrusive method that involves any form of studying human behavior that does not rely on asking people or on observing people directly. Content analysis may involve the systematic description of either verbal or nonverbal materials. One of the most frequently used type of content analysis is the one that analyzes the data that a researcher – be it the analyzer him/herself or another researcher – has collected through observations, interviews, surveys or any other means. The analyzing of the data may include word frequency count or coding and categorizing and developing themes, but one needs to develop systematic and objective criteria for transforming written text into highly reliable quantitative data to avoid issues in objectivity, reliability and validity (See Singleton and Straits, 2005). Some of the most important or sacred words in a ritual may be mentioned least, and reliance only on word-use frequency could be quite misleading.

If a content analysis means that a researcher analyzes his or her own data, it can be taken as a continuation of the data collecting. In my research, I analyzed (1) scholarly literature relevant to my study, (2) yin-yang texts (Daoist and Buddhist texts included), (3)

data collected from field-based observations, and (4) transcriptions or footage of face-to-face and telephone and Skype-interviews.

From the scholarly literature I learned what researchers have recorded about folk religions and how they have done it. A major trend I noticed is that those who published in English in the Western countries, Taiwan or Hong Kong, are mainly field-based ethnographical work, while those that published in Chinese, by Mainland publishing companies in China, are mainly based on government policies or government statistics. Only a small fraction of the latter were field-based research articles, most of which are only three-to-four page brief reports. From the yin-yang texts I learned about the hierarchical structure of the yin and yang worlds – especially the *yin* world – and the manners of addressing problems and issues to the gods. For example, an amazing aspect I found from one of the yin-yang books is that, not only the wandering demons will snap at a chance to afflict a human being so as to cause sickness or accidents or even death, but also the gods, including the kitchen gods or the ghosts of a family's deceased relatives, whenever they are not happy. They will collude with alien ghosts to cause trouble to the house in which they are worshiped! From our own field work, I learned the inside views of my participants and informants about their concepts of cosmology, their knowledge or belief in the three souls and the seven spirits, and their trust in the yin-yangs. (Z.J. Meng & W. P. Chang, personal communication, March 2011; September 2012; February 2013).

As few yin-yang rituals are held without some kind of written texts; in addition to the observations and interviews, I have obtained many primary documents such as ritual texts used by yin-yangs and have for the first time translated and interpreted these texts as part of the ethnographic research for this project. The translations of these texts are

particularly valuable given the fact that many of the finest examples of ritual texts have already been lost. I continue to consult local informants on questions of interpretation in the translation of these texts.

Because these practices involve many ritual objects, customs, and types of behavior that are regionally specific and hard to describe, I have also obtained about 60 hours of documentary film footage to record and preserve these rites before they vanish. These films and photos are utterly unique in the ethnographic record, providing a first outside glimpse of these yin-yang practices for a wide audience interested in traditional cultural expressions. They are also invaluable in my ongoing interpretive work for this dissertation.

In the past two years I have also conducted ten additional follow up interviews with both the yin-yangs and the villagers using telephone, Skype or on-the-ground contacts to get further interpretations or answers to questions that have emerged in my analysis. To provide a quick glimpse of the ethnographic field trips I made over the past 10 years, I have made the following table:

Table 2 Field trips to the Xi-Hai-Gu area of Ningxia and Jingning, Gansu, 1998-2010

Time	Activities	Duration	Data Obtained
Jan 1998	Inspired by Dr. Luckert's field research on the Muslims in my hometown, I decided to do my Master's thesis on the shamanic yin-yang religious practices in Fanmagou, my home village in northwest China. I asked my brother, Zuowen, to get some materials from a yin-yang, who is a relative of his	52 m	Two yin-yang books (*The Book of the Kitchen God* and *The Book of the Big Dipper*) hand-copied by my brother; a cassette tape that recorded the chant of the yin-yangs; a few photo pictures of the things (such as hand-drum and bell) the yin-

			yangs use in rituals
Aug 1998	Entrusted my brother to ask the yin-yang to explain about 30 questions for me	About 75 m	Got about 12 pages of answers
Dec 1998	Defended my Master's thesis - *Yin-Yang Healing Rituals and Shamanic Practices in the Village of Fanmagou*. My supervisor was Dr. Karl Luckert, Professor of Religious Studies at Southwest Missouri State University		My thesis included Fanmagou villagers' daily religious practices at childbirth, marriage and in child-naming. The main part was the shamanic healing rituals practiced by the villagers without a yin-yang.
Jul 2002	Visited my colleague Mr. Zhang Juzhi's brother who showed us about 20 yin-yang books; had a brief conversation about yin-yang practices	About 30 m	Copied the names of 11 books that I had never seen before
	Visited Master Gao, did an [unexpected] nonparticipant observation of a fire exorcism ritual; interviewed him, during which he demonstrated procedures of amulet drawing	1 h 44 m	Video footage; still pictures; notes
	Interviewed Master Ma and Master N. Z. Meng at my brother's in-law's house; Master N. Z. Meng is a cousin of Master Z. J. Meng, my 2nd primary participatory informant, who was to be initiated two years later	1 h 31 m	Video footage; still pictures; notes
	Did a complete participatory observation of my uncle's third-year anniversary ritual (sponsored by Dr. Luckert), which took one and half days. Interviewed Master Ma for clarification of texts written to the deceased and to the earthly god.	9 h 47 m	Video footage; still pictures; notes; audio records
Jul 2003	Invited Mr. Meng to my apartment for a one day interview; he drew amulets and explained the functions	6 h 12 m	Video footage; still pictures – camera copied 5 in-yang books; notes
	Did a complete participatory observation	5 h 36 m	Video footage; still

	of my grandmother's funeral ritual, which was a one day ritual		pictures; notes
	Interviewed the head yin-yang, Master Ding, who presided over the ritual	43 m	
Jul 2004	Did a complete nonparticipant observation of a yin-yang initiation ritual for Master Z. J. Meng at West See, Hongzhuang; did a group interview of yin-yangs	4 h 17 m & 27 m	Video footage; still pictures; notes
	Did a complete participatory observation of my grandmother's re-burial ritual and a grand-scale Shishi (施食) ritual, sponsored by Dr. Luckert. This was a two-day event	13 h 28 m	Video footage; still pictures; notes
Oct 2004	Visited Dazhuang, Piancheng, Xiji County, Guyuan. Interviewed a Fanmagou villager who was married into that village. She had undergone a yin-yang healing treatment in Fanmagou 12 years before	4 h 6 m	Audio record; notes
Jul 2005	Invited Master Z. J. Meng to our apartment; he showed us more yin-yang books. I interviewed him with more questions regarding the yin-yang texts that we copied in the previous years	2 h 22 m	Video footage; still pictures; notes
Aug 2005	Interviewed Mr H. S. Gao of Fanmagou. In fall 1971, he asked me to read an apology letter to his dead father at the tomb side. The letter had been written by Master Wang, a half-yin-yang	1 h 15	Audio record; notes
Jul 2006	Worked on yin-yang texts; Karl Luckert helped me with my translation drafts		
Jul 2007	Visited Fanmagou, interviewed MS Wei, the oldest female villager, about moxibustion, a healing method that is always accompanied with prayers. MS Wei is a life-long practitioner of healing that combines medical and shamanic means	1 h 22 m	Video footage; still pictures; notes
	Interviewed H. C. Zhang's wife on the	About 30 m	Video footage; still

	calling back of lost souls and spirits with seven red-paper-cut figures		pictures; notes
	Visited Xixiang, Jingning, Gansu (about 80 km from Fanmagou). Interviewed Mr. Cao who inherited the family business of paper handicrafts for funeral and memorial rituals. Mr. Cao showed Dr. Luckert and me their village temple. Mr. Cao's father was number 1 master in funeral handicraft making and in village god and ancestral god painting	2 h+	Video footage; still pictures; notes
Jul 2008	Visited Jingning, Gansu. Purchased an uninitiated yin-yang seal; chatted with the seller about the functions of the seals. But the plan of interviewing some local yin-yangs was ruined because of intensified restrictions on foreigners around the time of the Beijing Olympic Games.	About 25 m	Field notes
	Invited Master Meng to our hotel. He brought along two more yin-yang books and a stack of tablets of gods that are usually invited during rituals; camera copied all the materials and I interviewed Master Meng on the materials	2 h 26 m	Video footage; still pictures; notes
Aug 2008	Partial observation of a house-cleansing ritual in Fanmagou – I was too much in a hurry to get a camera, but I was able to record some of the voices and the next day I had a chance to dine with the yin-yang, so I had a good chance to interview him afterwards for about an hour	About 2 h	Notes
Jul 2009	Uighur rebellion in Xinjiang; much of my time was devoted to communicating with UMBC and Xinjiang. The remaining time was devoted to studying the yin-yang texts – no field trips		Revised translations of some yin-yang texts
Jul 2010	No yin-yang interview; interviewed two villagers in Fanmagou, Mr. Zhao and Mr. Li, who used to practice healing rituals when a yin-yang was not available	2 h 44 m	Audio record, notes
Aug	Did a group interview with five villagers,	2 h 12 m	Audio record, notes

2010	including my father, about shamanic yin-yang healing practices over the past five decades		
	Interviewed my sister-in-law whose son died in an accident and her house had been cleansed twice and her son's tomb side had been changed once, due to the fact that one of the villagers had been constantly possessed by the dead	3 h 52 m	Audio record, notes

CHAPTER 4: THE VILLAGE, THE RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF THE VILLAGERS AND THE ROLES OF THE YIN-YANGS

1. Geographical Location of the Village and Daily Religious Life of the Villagers

(1) The geographical location of Fanmagou and the religious centers that have impacted the villagers' religious beliefs and daily practices. Fanmagou (笵馬溝, pronounced FAN-mah-go) is located in Yuanzhou District, of Guyuan City in southern Ningxia; it is a Chinese Han village surrounded by over a dozen Muslim villages within five kilometers. There is only one other village – Qijiazhuang – within this general area that is predominantly inhabited by the Han. When the Communists took power in 1949, there were 20 families in Fanmagou the large majority of whom had immigrated there earlier from the Gansu Province – their ancestors fled from Gansu to seek a better life some three to four generations back.[19] As of summer 2010, the population of Fanmagou was 248.

The geographical area around Fanmagou, including the ancestral hometowns of the villagers and various religious sites and centers that are relatively close-by, have great significance to this research. These include places of mythic significance and spiritual worship where Fanmagou villagers make pilgrimages for three main purposes in their lives: to treat a disease, to beg for a child, or to pass an examination that would pave the road to the promotion of social status. Therefore, it is instructive to investigate closely the

[19] Mainly from the three counties Jingning, Zhuanglang and Qin'an where life used to be very hard for almost everybody.

geographical location of the village as important context for understanding the villagers' religious beliefs and their social activities.[20]

The following five places are of particular importance for understanding the backdrop within which the folk religious beliefs and practices involving yin yangs occur: (1) Jingning County, Gansu; (2) Wangmu Niang-niang (王母娘娘) Palace in Huizhong, Jingchuan County, Gansu; (3) Mount Kong-tong (崆峒山) in Pingliang City, Gansu; (4) Mount Xumi (須彌山) and (5) Xi-hai-zi (西海子, Western Lake) near Guyuan City, Ningxia. The first of the five, Jingning, is the specific ancestral home for 70% of Fanmagou's villagers, while the other locations are religious centers that have shaped or impacted the religious life of villagers in Fanmagou and others villages over a wider area.[21] I will describe and explore each of these important locations.

(a) Jingning County. To the southwest of Fanmagou, about 60 kilometers away, is Jingning County, in the Gansu Province. Jingning is not a religious center per se, like the others; it does include nevertheless a group of several small-scale places of worship that have influenced the Fanmagou villagers, most of whose ancestors were from Jingning. Interestingly, this county is one of several places claiming to be the birthplace of Fuxi (伏羲, also spelled as Fu Hsi), who is the "first mythical emperor" in ancient China and "is credited with being fully informed in all the mysteries of the heavens and to have given to man the knowledge of divination of elements, planets and curious arbitrary symbols"

[20] Perhaps an assurance should be added here, that even though I was present at the holy sites, none of my research regarding such pilgrimages can be applied as credit toward the divine blessings that the villagers expect from such pilgrimages.
[21] This conclusion is based on my field research 2002-2005.

(Morgan, 1972). In October 1997 the government of Jingning built the "Chengji Culture City" (成紀文化城) to commemorate Fuxi.[22]

Figure 1 Statue of Fuxi at Chengji Culture City in Jingning, Gansu[23]

Figure 2 A satellite view of Chengji Culture City[24]

There are over 30 temples in Jingning devoted to not only the three large religious traditions – Buddhism, such as the Temple of the Goddess of Mercy, Daoism, such as the Western Rocky Temple (西岩寺) built during Northern Wei (386-534) and Confucianism, such as *Wen-miao* (文廟, Confucian Temple, built in 1543), but also to other deities like the King of Medicine (藥王廟) and the God of Crops (八蜡祠). It is important to the people of Fanmagou then not only as the home area of their ancestors, but also as a place with much mythic and religious significance in its own right.

(b) Wangmu Niang-niang (王母娘娘) Temple in Jingchuan County. To the southeast of Fanmagou, about 200 kilometers away, lies Jingchuan County, Gansu

[22] The culture city was first planned to bear the name of Fuxi, but the name was already taken by a temple in Tianshui (天水, also in Gansu province), which was favored by Jiang Zemin, former president of China. This anecdote shows how much politics can influence religious and cultural centers.
[23] Photo by Z. Zhang, Austust 2006.
[24] Retried from https://maps.google.com/.

Province where a temple, Wangmu Palace, was built during the Han Wu-di (110 BCE-105BCE) regime for worshiping a female deity, Wangmu Niang-niang who, over the years, has been upgraded from Xi Wangmu (西王母), a primitive image, to Wangmu Niang-niang, a civilized royal image (Bu, 2010; Liu, 2008; Lin, 1980; Shen, 1997). Xi Wangmu was believed to be one of the first female deities found in ancient Chinese legends and folk religion. In one of the oldest mythological books, the *Book of Mountains and Seas*, which was written prior to 221 BC, Xi Wangmu was described as a half-human-half-animal deity.

> In the Jade Mountain dwells Xi Wangmu. Xi Wangmu is like a human being, she has a leopard's tail and a tiger's teeth. She is good at screaming. Her hair is disheveled and she wears a beautiful [feather] hood. She is the deity who in heaven takes charge of pestilence and punishments (*The Western Mountains* in *The Book of Mountains and Seas*, vol. II, p. 13).

Perhaps it is because of the proximity of Xi Wangmu's temple to Fanmagou that the legends of Xi Wangmu—more often referred to by the villagers as "Wangmu Niang-niang,"—are known in every household in the village. Translated literally, "*Xi Wangmu*" (西王母) means "the Queen Mother of the West" while "Wangmu Niang-niang" (王母娘娘) literally means "the Queen Mother Goddess."[25] Despite centuries of elaboration, Wangmu Niang-niang remains a primitive image – ferocious in appearance with hair disheveled – in the minds of the villagers of Fanmagou and adjacent villages. The legend holds that Wangmu Niang-niang punishes mean people, but bestows immortality on good

[25] Owing to her great popularity in Chinese mythology and legends, Xi Wangmu is also claimed to have been associated with Mount Tai, the first among the Five Marchmounts (五嶽) in China (Dott, 2010).

people with her elixir of life that was a wine enhanced through alchemical procedures. Despite the liquid form of this elixir, more villagers, especially villagers aged 50 years and above, in and around Fanmagou, believe that Wangmu Niang-niang's elixir of life actually refers to her peaches. They say that it takes five hundred years for her peach trees to bloom and it takes another five hundred years for the fruits to ripen. Whoever eats these peaches will become immortal.[26]

Figure 3 A relief of Xi-Wang-mu in Jingchuan, Gansu, China[27]

There are variations regarding the number of years that it takes Wangmu Niang-niang's peach trees to bloom and to bear fruit. Some villagers say it takes five hundred years to bloom and one thousand years to grow fruit. *Bowu Zhi (*博物志*)* has another version that says it takes three thousand years to grow the peaches. This version is also

[26] The villagers also plant peach trees, and they use the wood of the trees in healing rituals and other spiritually protective measures, but they make no connection between their peach trees and those of Wangmu Niang-niang. One may speculate that during the Cultural Revolution, the fury that was vented against peach and apricot trees was the ancient mythological link of these fruits with this ancient goddess who, according to the perpetrators of the Cultural Revolution, was not supposed to exist.
[27] Retrieved from http://culture.gmw.cn/2011-04/06/content_1792108.htm.

found in Li Bai's poem: "Xi-Wangmu peaches planted in my home, it takes three thousand years to bloom once." (西王母桃種我家，三千陽春始一花). According to Morgan (1972), peach trees "bloom only once in 3,000 years, and 3,000 years later the fruit of eternal life appears" (p. 111). While the specific number of years vary, the general understanding is that the peaches have a mythic spiritual quality and hold the power of immortality.

It is a shared cultural narration that Wangmu Niang-niang uses her extraordinary peaches to entertain the other gods at her annual Peach Assemblies at *Yaochi* (瑶池), her dwelling place. In Fanmagou, this is generalized into a traditional saying in response to when someone shows off some good food in front of others, people often taunt by saying: "Do you think you are eating Wangmu Niang-niang's peach?" There are other sayings that also reflect the good reputation of the peaches – even the peaches that humans grow. For example, 桃飽杏傷 (Peaches can feed you well, while apricots can hurt your stomach.), and "寧吃仙桃一口，不吃梅李子半背篼" (One bite of the celestial peach is far better than eating up half a basket of plums.). These are both very common sayings in Fanmagou and in Jingning. Of background interest for this ethnography, this property of divinity in the peaches also makes the wood from peach trees significant in the fashioning of ritual objects. People use 桃符, peach wood charms, to guard their houses, for example. Of particular relevance to this study is the fact that peach wood bows and willow wood arrows (桃弓柳箭) are among the yin-yangs' ritual tools and ritual tools for warding off or driving away demons during healing rituals.[28] In his discussion of Chinese symbols,

[28] See in Morgan (1972): "The willow is also a symbol of spring, emblematic of meekness and supposed to possess power over demons" (p. 112).

Morgan (1972) says that the peach tree has a very important place in the "superstitions" of the Chinese. The wood of the tree was used by the Taoist priests to make seals for their talismen and amulets. In general, the peach tree is therefore the symbol of spring, emblematic of immortality, marriage and long life. Morgan emphasizes that amulets made of peach-wood or peach-stones are "the most powerful" tools employed to ward off evil spirits" (p. 111; p. 133). Whether the presence and utility of peach trees gave rise to the mythology or the other way around will be another research question for the future (Z. Zhang, 1998).

(c) Mount Kong-Tong. Mount Kong-Tong is in southeastern Gansu, about 130 kilometers from Fanmagou. It is one of the oldest centers of Daoism in the region and has gradually evolved into a host site of the three dominant traditions. When Guang-Cheng-zi (廣成子), a legendary Daoist disciple, obtained his immortality, he chose to move to Mount Kong-Tong. According to *The Record of History* (史記), Huang Di (黃帝, the Yellow Emperor), one of the two forefathers of the Chinese people, visited the mountain and asked Guang-Cheng-zi for the Way[29] and legend also has it that both Qin Shihuang (秦始皇, 259 BC – 210 BC) and Han Wu-Di (漢武帝, 156 BC – 87 BC) visited the mountain because they were inspired by Huang Di. The mountain features many Daoist buildings and, later on, a significant number of Buddhist buildings were added. This syncretism is touted as a perfect example of the harmonious merging of Daoism and

[29] Huang Di (黃帝) means the "Yellow Emperor." The word "yellow" perhaps stands for the earth. The other earliest father of Chinese people was Yan Di (炎帝), the Fire Emperor. Chinese people claim with pride that they are 炎黃子孫, the descendants of Huang Di and Yan Di. The tomb of Huang Di is in Shaanxi, a neighboring province of Ningxia. The "Way" in Chinese language is 道, which means a broad range of things such as path, road, method and doctrine.

Buddhism, the two dominant religions of China.[30] What is worth mentioning in particular in this site is the Cave of Three Religions[31] which was added when the religious resort area expanded even wider to embrace Confucianism. For many generations, students from Xi-Hai-Gu region (to which Fanmagou belongs) who wished to pass academic or official selection examinations traveled to the Cave of Three Religions to burn incense sticks for blessings from the three deities. These purpose-driven pilgrimages enjoyed resurgence when China restored the college entrance exams in 1977[32] and particularly when the government loosened its control over religious practices in the subsequent years (Z. Zhang, 1998).[33]

Figure 4 Red cloths strips are widely used in sacred places like Buddhist and Daoist temples.[34]

[30] http://www.kongtongtour.com/
[31] The Chinese character 教 means both "teaching" and "religion," therefore 三教 can be rendered either as three religions or three teachings.
[32] From 1966 to 1977, China's higher education was almost completely destroyed by the Cultural Revolution. During these 11 years, colleges students were selected not by examinations, by but recommendations, which was mainly based on the applicants' revolutionary attitudes rather than their academic potential or performance. For example, an elementary school graduate could be recommended to a college or university.
[33] Going to the Cave of Three Religions to pray for success in provincial or national examinations was interrupted during the Cultural Revolution because such examinations were banned. The resurgence of this pilgrimage practice had not begun by the time I took the nation-wide entrance examination for college in 1978.
[34] Photo by Zuochen Zhang, Chifeng, Inner Mongolia, China, May 15, 2014.

Of equal importance as the Cave of Three Religions is the Temple for Posterity in the Kong-Tong religious building clusters, a Daoist temple where people pay homage to beg for offspring. The child-seeking visitors would go to the Temple for Posterity to pay a tribute, to offer their sacrifice, and then to tie a piece of red cloth to a leg or foot of one of the child statues in the temple.[35] The term for this conduct is "to tie a child."[36] Thus, the cultural influences of the yin-yang practice in Fanmagou include among other things, the blended traditions of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.

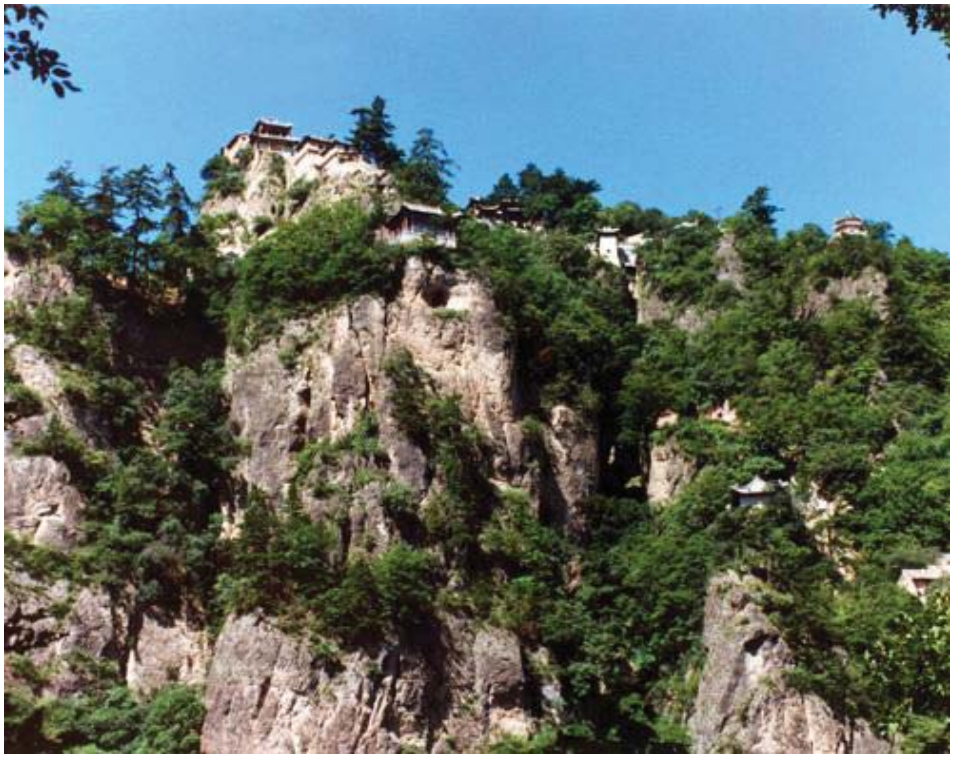

Figure 5 Many important Daoist temples are built on the peak of the Kong Tong Mount.[37]

[35] Red is the color for celebration, congratulation or good luck. Red cloth strips are widely used in Buddhist and Daoist temples in the Xi-Hai-Gu region as sign of good luck or protection from the divine beings.
[36] My mother's sister told me that people in Qi-jia-Zhuang, a village less than two kilometers from Fanmagou, all have good faith in the Zi-sun Gong in Kong Tong because Mr. Ding Zeying, born in 1948, was begotten the second year after his parents paid a pilgrimage to the mountain. His parents had been married for several years and could not have any children.
[37] Retrieved from the official website of the mountain: http://www.kongtongtour.com/kts/fjmt/0194864.html.

(d) Mount Xumi. The name of Mount Xumi originally comes from Sanskrit "Sumeru" which means "mountain of treasures" or the "sacred mountain," and the mountain is believed to be at the center of the world in ancient Indian mythology. This most famous and original Xumi is thought to be part of what are today's Himalayas.[38] However, the Mount Xumi in this research while holding a similarly mythic title, refers to a mountain that is about 90 kilometers to the north of Fanmagou. It is one of the famous scenic and historical resorts of the Guyuan Municipality. The mountain has 132 Buddhist grottoes and dozens of sculptures built about 1,500 years ago. The building of the Buddhist center lasted from the late Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534) to the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581-907).[39]

Similar to the Mount Kong-Tong, among the Mount Xumi buildings there is a temple for offspring and posterity. This is historically significant for all the peasant farmers, including those from Fanmagou, because conditions for surviving used to be extremely difficult, and infant mortality was a great threat to the people. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that there has always been a driving force for them to seek spiritual assistance in having more children. It is not only for prosperity (as more children will make a larger labor force and hence more production of such basic necessities as food and clothes) or for controlling power (as the strength of a family or clan is usually determined by the number of people), but also for more chances to keep their family names going amidst the very real threat of infant mortality and other forms of premature death. Until recent decades, the majority of the villagers in Fanmagou and adjacent places held the core belief that one of the greatest failures of human life would be not to have

[38] http://www.hudong.com/wiki/%E9%A1%BB%E5%BC%A5%E5%B1%B1
[39] For detailed information of the mountain, visit: http://www1.chinaculture.org.

descendants. If a couple does not have a descendant, it means at least the following three consequences follow: (1) They will have no one to look after them when they get old; (2) they will be looked down upon by other villagers in their life time and will experience great shame upon seeing their ancestors when they go to join them in the afterlife. (The backdrop of this fear is the Confucian notion that to not have posterity through children is the most serious infraction of filial piety, Mencius, 2012); and (3) when they die, there will be nobody to hold memorial rites for them. For people who firmly believe in an afterlife, this is horrible to think about, because it is through rituals that a person's souls can be released from hell, unless he or she has never committed sin in the *yang* world. This last consequence illustrates the importance of the funerary rites documented and interpreted in this ethnography. The cultural loss of these kinds of rituals is much more than a cosmetic change; it opens wide gaps in the cultural system and peoples' overall worldview.

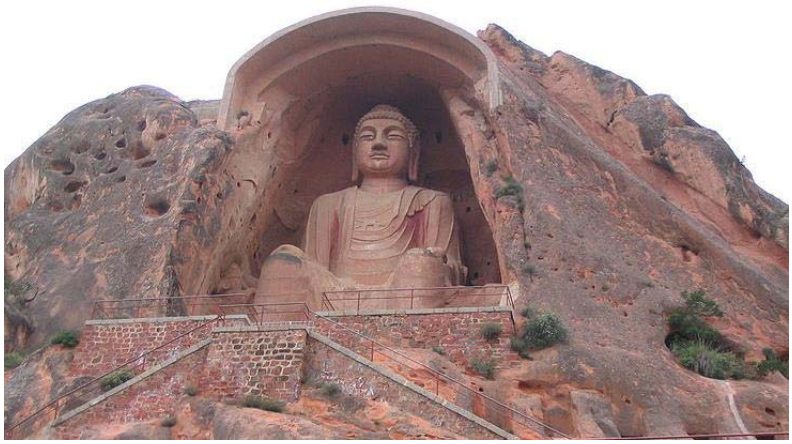

Figure 6 The highest statue of Buddha (67.59 feet) in the Xumi Mount Grottoes in Guyuan.[40]

[40] According to my father who worked as a reservoir builder for about half a year at the foot of this statue, Red Guard militias used the statue as a target for shoot training during the Cultural Revolution. Retrieved from http://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:%E5%9B%BA%E5%8E%9F%E9%A1%BB%E5%BC%A5%E5%B1%B

One thing that should be pointed out regarding childbearing is that modern explanations of sterility did not reach these villagers until the last two decades of the 20th century, and therefore until very recently, it was a common belief that if a couple did not have children, their virtue was put into question, rather than some physical complication or medical issue. This practice and belief inevitably added a psychological burden to barren couples and drove them to seek help and intervention by means of religious practices (Z. Zhang, 1998).

(e) The Western Sea. The "Western Sea" (西海子), is actually a small mountain lake approximately 24 kilometers west of Guyuan and 25 kilometers northeast of Fanmagou. What makes it an awe inspiring site is that for many hundred kilometers in the surrounding region of Guyuan, to which Fanmagou belongs and which is notorious for its arid climate, there is not any other lake at such a high elevation and of similar large size. It is therefore natural for such a unique lake to have mythic stories of dragons, tutelary deities in agrarian societies, and thus, over time, to have become a place of worship. On the east and west slopes by the lake, a Daoist temple and a Buddhist temple were built. Between these two stands a Chin opera stage; the performance there adds a secular attraction for the pilgrims during the grand occasion every year, on the 12th day of the sixth month of the lunar calendar. People flock to this place on pilgrimages. Of particular significance, as context for this ethnography, is the fact that new yin-yangs in the area come to this place to be initiated (Z. H. Ma, personal communication, July 2004).

1%E7%9F%B3%E7%AA%9F%E7%AC%AC5%E7%AA%9F%E5%A4%A7%E4%BD%9B%E6%A5%BC.JPG

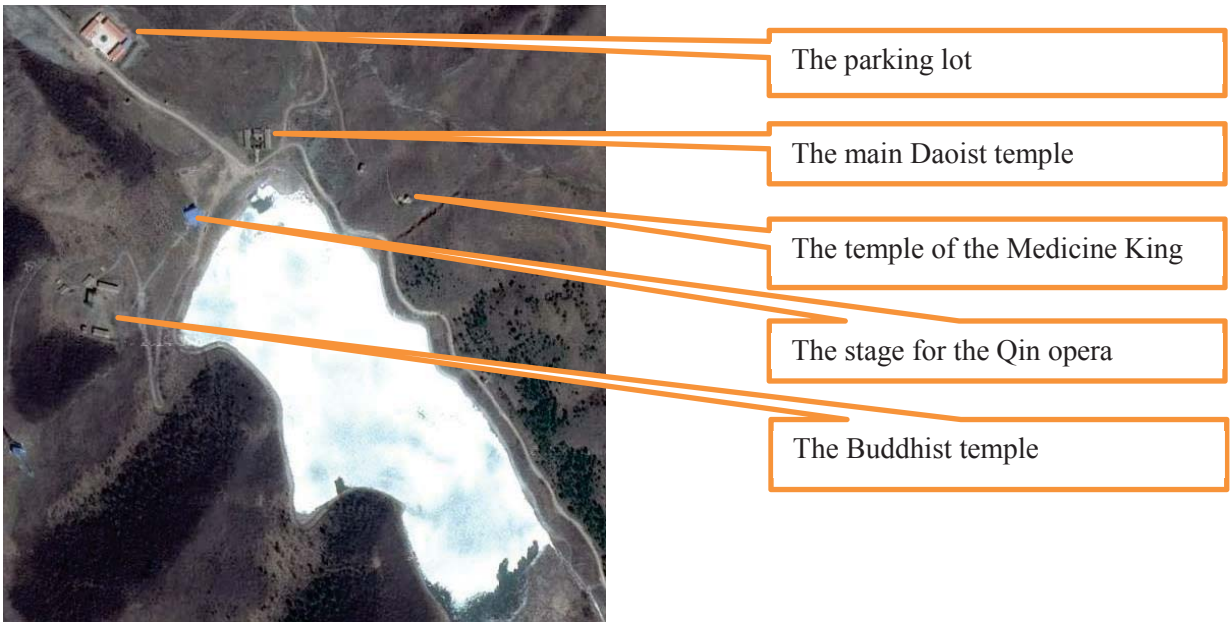

Figure 7 A satellite view of the Western Sea.[41]

(f) Two other holy places. In addition to these five sites described above, there are two other places that may have contributed their influence to the formation of the villagers' religious beliefs and require at least a brief mention. The first is the source of River Jing (涇河), in Jingyuan County, Ningxia. This place is central in two legendary stories. One is a chapter in one of the four Chinese literature classics *Journey to the West* in which Mr. Wei Zheng (508-643), a famous statesman of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) beheaded the Dragon King of the River Jing in his dream, and the other a drama in which a young examinee volunteered to help an entrapped princess (a then-abandoned daughter-in-law of the Dragon King of River Jing) and later on he married the princess. Since all villagers in Fanmagou and the neighboring villages are dragon believers[42], the dragon

[41] Retrieved from: https://maps.google.com/.
[42] For generations, when there was a drought, villagers would go down the ravine to dig a "dragon spring" in a clean spot so as to "elicit" the rain; or they would hire a yin-yang to beg rain from the Dragon King on the top of the highest hill.

stories from this 70-kilometer-away river source might have added some elements to their belief.

The second site is Huoshi Zhai (火石寨, Fire-Stone Fortress), about 75 kilometers from Fanmagou. The place has three major clusters of Buddhist grottoes which used to total over two hundred shrines before the Cultural Revolution, and used to welcome thousands of pilgrims. Since my field work interviews began only in the summer of 2002, I was too late to harvest important stories of these sites from the memories of the older generation of villagers. Therefore the influence of this particular Buddhist center on the religious life of Fanmagou remains my unverified hypothesis, mostly based on the short distance from the village high likelihood of its awareness and influence.[43]

It would be too limited to conclude that the religious beliefs of Fanmagou villagers were formed only by the above-mentioned sites and the stories and beliefs associated with them. To a Han villager in the Xi-Hai-Gu area, "sectarian differentiation is not an important question" (Elliott, 1990, p. 27). The religious beliefs of people in this region are mostly inherited from their ancestors, but since they have to make certain cultural concessions to the new environment, their beliefs brought from home are reformed, enriched and also reinforced by the influence of the religious centers that are available to them. So, these influences are important, but not exclusive, factors to consider as a cultural and spiritual backdrop for yin-yang ritual practice.

(2) The cosmology in rural China – a backdrop of religious beliefs in Fanmagou. Here in Fanmagou, like many cultures and places around the world and across time, human beings hold, more or less, a binary view of the world: One

[43] Of course, I cannot rule out at this point the possibility of different oral traditions existing in the village.

consideration is for this temporal and material life, and the other, for an afterlife. For the Chinese people, the world of afterlife blends in with the world of gods and ghosts, simply because in their belief system, people become ghosts or gods when they die (some believe this is the case for animals as well). For example, villagers in Fanmagou hold that "there has to be a place where the dead can dwell" and that "the reason why we living people cannot see the world of the dead is due to our current limitations, because the dwellers in that other world are spiritual beings and they are not supposed to be seen. But in one way or other, seen or unseen, the dwellers of the two worlds constantly "interact with one another" (Y. M. Shen & Z. X. Wei, personal communication, July 2002).

Inasmuch as the spiritual beings cannot be seen by the living, their world is thereby referred to as the *yin* world (*yinjian*, 陰間) because in Chinese, the word *yin* (陰) means "hidden", "secret" and "sinister" while the world of the living that can be seen by human eyes, is referred to as the *yang* world (*yangjian*, 陽間) and the word *yang* (陽) has all the opposite features of *yin*. As to why the *yin* world is "sinister" is a debated and controversial topic among the Fanmagou villagers. While almost every villager believes that the *yin* world is "very similar to the *yang* world" it is nevertheless a dangerous world to the living; "if someone is mean in the *yang* world we may be able to see it or sense it and thereby be able to avoid or to fight back; but if there is a mean ghost in the *yin* world, it is hidden and invisible; that is why it is a lot more dangerous [than the *yang* world]" (D. S. Li, personal communication, March , 2014). It is its hidden, other-worldly, quality that makes it dangerous to the living.

Aside from this division (yet interaction) of these two worlds, there is another conceptual framework according to which the world is hierarchically divided into three

layers. The first layer, or the top / upper layer, is the heaven (*tiantang*, 天堂); the second layer, or the middle layer, is the human world (*renjian*, 人間); and the third layer, or the bottom layer, is the hell (*diyu*, 地獄), (W. K. Wang, personal communication, September, 2010).[44] All people in the human world live with relatively equal status. For example, the villagers say, regardless of their social status, rich or poor, every one of us has to travel the journey of being born, getting old, becoming sick and dying – but after they die or, as it is commonly said by the Fanmagou villagers, when they arrive at the yin world, they will be divided into polar groups based on their conduct and behavior in the yang world. Those who have done good deeds will be sent to Heaven; those who did evil things will be sent to Hell; and those who did neither good nor bad things will stay in the yin world, which shares a significant number of features with, and shows more similarities than differences from, the yang world.

The binary *yin* and *yang* worldview set a backdrop for a stage on which the living and the dead, as well as other spiritual beings, interact. Not like interactions in the yang world where mutual benefits may be obtained through interactions between any two parties, interactions between those in the yin and those in the yang world are not at all to the benefit of the dwellers in the yang world. According to the villagers and the yin-yangs, these kind of interactions are never happy occasions for the yang world unless in exceptional cases, such as the fairy tales or legendary stories in which human beings got help from deities in the yin world. "Those who live in the yang world will have a much more peaceful life if those in the yin world do not interfere," Master Ma said, "but, if we, in the yang world, do not violate the rules and do not provoke, offend, or affront the

[44] See Appendix 5 for a diagram of a yin-yang binary worldview coexisting with the three-layer cosmology.

spiritual beings, both worlds will have peace" (Z. H. Ma, personal communication, June 2002). However, owing to the fact that the two worlds are so closely intermingled, only "a paper's thickness apart" (Z. X. Wei, personal communication, July 2008),[45] offenses and affronts are unavoidable and "therefore illnesses, accidents and deaths occur in the *yang* world" as consequences (Z. H. Ma, personal communication, June 2002). Much like what people would do when they have conflicts with each other in the yang world--such as to negotiate, apologize, appease or fight--they similarly do to deal with conflicts with the *yin* world. The goal of much religious practice in the village then is to prevent dangerous interactions with the *yin* world, and, to mitigate the consequences when such interactions inevitably occur.

(3) The daily religious life of the villagers. In addition to their concept or perspective of the cosmology that is constructed with two opposing worlds of the yin and the yang, the three souls and the seven spirits – or collectively referred to as *hun-po* (魂魄) – and an ideological backbone that sustains their belief system of filial piety[46], the villagers do not belong to, and are not affiliated with, the two institutionalized religions: Buddhism and Daoism. Theirs is more likely to be what some scholars call the primitive or folk religion (Xia and Xia, 2006; Lu, 2007; Luo, 2011; Wu, 2011). The two categories of the villagers' religious practices are identical with the Manchu custom, which also has two main functions: one is for offering sacrifice to gods or ancestors and the other for healing illnesses (Xu and Yu, 2012). The closest relation that the Fanmagou villagers have with an institutionalized teaching is Confucianism. Albeit that Confucianism is not

[45] This notion of the closeness of the yin and the yang world is shared in many other parts of China, as Peng (2008) notes that "What separates yin and yang is thin as a sheet of paper (*yinyang ge ceng zhi* 陰陽隔層紙) (p. 6).

[46] The key point of filial piety is that children must dedicate themselves to support their parents and comply with their parents' will.

regarded by some scholars as a religion as it contains neither any gods nor scriptures and doctrines (Fang, 2002; Han, 2004); it only has philosophical doctrine on ethics, social system and political infrastructure.

Religious practices of the Fanmagou villagers are divided into two categories: festival-based rituals and issue-based rituals. Both categories of rituals are reflections of their cosmological vision of the two worlds – the *yin* world and the *yang* world.

(a) Rites for festivals and ceremonies. Ceremony-based rituals at festivals in the Xi-Hai-Gu area are fairly simple and most of them are performed during some of the traditional holidays (Table 1). Their practices on these days include sacrificial offerings at the village temple, welcoming the Spirit of Joy (喜神), offering sacrifices at the ancestral graveyards, burning paper-cut clothes to the ancestors, and seeing off and welcoming back the Kitchen Gods.[47] It is also a custom in Fanmagou to burn paper money (or "hell" money that the villagers print on white paper with carved plate and ink) to the ancestors on New Year's Eve and to offer sacrifices during the first three days of the New Year. Some families, particularly those whose elders have recently passed away, will set up a family shrine to invite the souls of deceased family members of the last three generations to sit in the house for three days so they can enjoy the nice food offered to them and take along with them a lot of paper money that is burnt for them. Continually taking good care of the deceased relatives is underpinned by the Confucian teachings of

[47] Whereas almost all the gods are either a male or a female individual, the Kitchen Gods are a couple (竈火娘娘、竈君大王) and it is also a rare phenomenon that the female goddess, believed to be the daughter of the Jade Emperor who is in charge of Heaven, is in the prayers addressed before her husband is. The Kitchen Gods "live" with each household and monitor the daily words and deeds of the family. The last week of every year,the Kitchen Goddess, along with the male Kitchen God, will have a seven-day vacation to visit her parents in Heaven, and report what they have noted during the year. Good behavior and good conduct of the family will be rewarded, while poor conduct will be punished. Severe punishments include taking some years away from a mortal's life expectation. Thereby the Kitchen Gods are also called the Life-Control Kitchen King/Queen (司命竈君).

filial piety and actualized with Buddhist and Daoist rituals. Whether or not a villager fulfills filial duty to his / her parents is constantly watched by both the deities in the yin world and the fellow villagers in the yang world.

Table 3 Traditional Holidays / Festivals in Fanmagou

Name of the day	**Tradition**	**Religious activities**
Spring Festival (春節)	Folk	Yes. Sacrificial offering at village temple; welcome the Spirit of Joy
Lantern Festival (元宵節)	Daoist/ Buddhist	A much secularized religious festival[48]
Burn-Dry Day (燎干)	Folk	No
Dragon-Head Raising Day (龍抬頭)	Folk	No
Qing-Ming (清明節)	Folk	Yes. Sacrificial offering at grave yards
Si-Yue-Ba (四月八)	Buddhist	No. Secularized
Dragon Boat Festival (五月五/端陽節)	Folk	No
Mid-autumn Festival (中秋節)	Folk	Rare, sacrificial offering to Moon
Winter-Clothes Day (寒衣節)	Folk	Yes. Paper clothes burned to

[48] According to Han (2010), the origin of the festival has been a controversial topic in Chinese scholarship; but the author believes that the origin of China's Lantern Festival is the agricultural ceremony of offering sacrifices to gods in early ancient China.

		ancestors
La-Ba Festival (臘八)	Buddhist	No. Secularized
Seeing off Kitchen Gods Day (送竈神)[49]	Folk	Yes. Farewell sacrifice to Kitchen Gods
Eve of the New Year (除夕/大年三十)	Folk	Yes. Sacrificial offerings to the Heaven, the Kitchen Gods and the ancestor gods

From Table 2 it is obvious that other than a few days reserved for folk religious practices, all the other festivals are for non-religious folk celebration. Even the three days that came from Buddhist and Daoist traditions are either not observed or have been so secularized that the majority of the villagers do not know anything about their implied religious orientations. (J. L. Zhang, personal communication, August 2010; June 2012). It is fair to say that most holidays in Table 2 are mainly for fun and relaxation. The exceptions to this lighter celebratory atmosphere are for the Qing-Ming, the Winter-Clothes Day and the Seeing-off Kitchen Gods Day, for which humility and solemn respect remain mandatory. Not long ago, the Mid-Autumn Festival was the day to offer sacrifices to the Moon God, but only as recently as the 1980s most if not all villagers stopped this religious sacrificial aspect and it is now mainly marked by family reunions and celebration of the harvest of the year. However, on occasion it is also spontaneously used by the villagers for redeeming a vow to god(s) if the family had made one vow earlier in the year, when they pleaded for help. The backdrop of the villagers, having chosen this day for such a purpose, is directly related to its agricultural origin. This is a

[49] According to Elliott (1990) Chinese people in Singapore take the next day, the twenty-fourth of the Twelfth Moon, to be the birthday of the "Kitchen God" (p. 34). This might suggest that the return of the Kitchen Gods to Heaven the previous day is for a celestial birthday party.

time during which they would have something to offer to the god, after the main crops are harvested.

(b) Issue-based rituals. Except for the activities during traditional holidays, villagers' day to day life could be described as mostly non-religious and focused on the mundane activities of living in the *yang* world. The exception to this relatively secular existence between holidays is when they face some kind of threat or danger, in which case the severity of an incident determines the extent to which the villagers become religious in their response. If the villagers believe they can control the situation themselves, they will simply take care of it; however, if they think they cannot, they will seek help from a yin-yang. For example, when a hailstorm comes that threatens their crops; they will take it upon themselves to spiritually respond by throwing rolling pins and kitchen knives out into their courtyards, accompanied by their own shamanic-styled invocations. [50] Or, when a child has stumbled and fallen, they will run to the child and try themselves to call back the souls and spirits of the child, doing this informal rite exactly at the spot of the incident – the background belief is that they are afraid that the souls or spirits may have been scared away from the child – and could have spilled – when he or she fell. When a couple is having difficulty bearing a child or, when they do not get a specifically male child some years into their marriage, they will make a long distance pilgrimage, on foot, to a religious center such as Mount Kong Tong to beg the gods for a [male] child. When they encounter a difficult childbirth they kneel down in front of the cooking stove of their home to plead mercy from the Kitchen Gods or they seek help from whatever other gods they think may help. When someone has been listless for a few

[50] The villagers as well as the yin-yangs call the rolling pins "white tigers" and the kitchen knives "black dragons." When used together, the two are thought to be powerful enough to defeat and drive away evil spirits.

days, the person as well as his or her family members may think that the person has lost the souls and spirits and they will do a ritual to call back the estranged souls and/or spirits. These are all examples of issue-based beliefs and practices that are handled without requiring recourse to a yin-yang's professional intervention.

When someone suddenly gets sick, this also is often a situation in which villagers themselves are able to act, but, depending on the circumstances, additional specifically religious measures may also be called for – especially if a doctor or a yin-yang is not immediately available. If the disease is found to be mild, the villagers will conduct the healing rites themselves. The types of rituals needed are determined by the possible causes of the disease. For example, falling sick suddenly without a visible physical cause is usually determined by the villagers to be "out of place," meaning most likely that the patient has confronted a wandering evil spirit, or has offended a god.[51] The treatment calls for a "sending off the disease" ritual, which will be one of the following:

- 送沖氣 (Send away the offended, or accidentally confronted spirits)
- 慰家亲 (Console the spirits of dead relatives)
- 谢灶神 (Speak an apology to the Kitchen Gods)
- 赔土地 (Speak an apology to the Earth God)

Each of these rituals will be accompanied with the burning of incense, a libation of wine or tea, the saying of prayers and the burning of nether world money. The "prayer" they speak is actually a one-way conversation from the villager to the spiritual being, and not a two-way shamanic interaction. Among the four rituals, the "sending away of the

[51] Here "god" refers to any spiritual being, which can imply a range of possibilities: the Earth God, the Kitchen God(s) or ancestral gods.

offender" is usually very dramatic – with all the polite prayer and sacrifice offering in the beginning, and a very violent expulsion in the end, using a kitchen knife with spitting and cursing (Z. Zhang, 1998). Far from just simple "superstitious" or token actions, it is interesting to see that local villagers in this region frequently act almost like informal yin-yangs in situations whose gravity doesn't require professional intervention. This makes sense given the fact that formally trained yin yangs (as we shall see) are really just average village farmers who have received additional training and education for more serious spiritual situations. That is, it is a difference of training, not of special priestly status or being.

Another fascinating and important religious practice I found in my primary research in the village is the child-naming tradition. This also gives important background context for understanding the villagers' worldview and the yin yang practices. In the village, child names can be roughly put into seven groups: (1) names for boys that hope for the child to be rich or brave, (2) names that show sibling connections, (3) names that record a specific event, (4) general names for girls that reveal their gender (such as pretty, tender, a flower, etc.), (5) names for girls expressing hope for a male child in the future, (6) names that may help protect a child from being harmed by an evil spirit, and (7) names that reflect a shamanic healing ritual or the avoidance of a bad luck. The first five groups are common in all parts of China where the Chinese Han reside, while the last two groups are unique in northwest Chinese villages like Fanmagou, and this child-naming practice is of great significance to our research, as it embodies the typical simple and plain beliefs of the villagers.

The regional significance of the names in category 6 and 7 derives from the historically high rate of infant mortality in places like Fanmagou. These categories of names reveal the amount of concern that was given to attempting to protect newborn children. A protective measure the villagers would take has been to give a name in category 6: for example, the names "Lock" (鎖鎖子, hinting "protected") and "Chained Child" (拴娃子, hinting "not going to be lost") were thought to give additional or special protection (Huang, 2000, p. 69; Gao and Ji, 2010, 103; Li, 1998, 122; Zhang, 2003 field notes). Additionally, if a child gets very sick and has been healed or saved by a religious healing ritual – be it done by the villagers or by a yin-yang – the healed child is often, if not always, given a new name to represent this protected status (C. H. Liu, W. K. Wang & J. L. Zhang, personal communication, July 2003; July 2004; July & August 2005). For example, the names "Chained and Averted" (拴禳子, meaning a misfortune has been averted by prayers) and "Changed to Good Fortune" (改過子) would be chosen in these types of situations where a child has recovered from an illness or threat. The new name inevitably reflects the outcome of such a ritual, and at the same time it conveys an element of blessing that, hopefully, extends the effect of the healing to the child's adulthood, when one becomes comparatively more resistant to diseases. A related practice that is worthy of particular mentioning is that names containing "chain" are always shown with various shapes and sizes of cloth, brass or silver padlocks, worn on a chain around the necks of the children to "chain them to existence" (Morgan, 1972, p. 134), that is, to bind them to this *yang* world. While names with "chain" have been discussed, others such as "changed to good fortune" have yet to be discovered or added in Chinese literature.

There is yet one more measure that the villagers take to protect their children, using a specifically deceptive or trickster type naming technique. Names of this type demonstrate strategic wisdom in dealing with malevolent divine beings. The basic theory of giving nursery names to the children with family names other than their own is that the fortunes of human beings are constantly changing. The Chinese equivalent for fortune is "運氣", literally meaning "the moving air," an equivalent to "the winds of fortune" or "tides" in English. Since the "air" is moving, and fortune is changing, virtually every individual or family will have the chance of getting good luck and bad luck at different times or in different places. When a family has a child at a time of bad luck, the child as the weakest member in the family will have a great many chances to fall ill. In order to avoid such circumstances, the villagers have found a way: that is, to either name the child with a false family name or to find a *ganda* (乾大)[52] for the child. Usually they do both. The divine powers that are sent by the heavenly court to execute the punishment of a wrong doing are thereby fooled, or the present bad luck of the family will no longer affect the child. The following is a list of examples of this kind:

- 張牛子　　Bull of the Zhang Family (His family name is actually Shen)
- 王家娃　　Child of the Wang Family (His family name is actually Gao)
- 三姓子　　Child of three Families (His family name is actually Hu)

Struggling to survive has always been a main theme of human physical and cultural life, and people who live in developing areas have had to struggle particularly hard toward this most basic objective. Villagers in Fanmagou must struggle for a healthy life

[52] 乾大 is a Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia dialect for 干爹, or 義父, which refers to male that is taken through a rite as a father.

as well as for food and clothing. Their struggle for physical health has included battles with various diseases, but this has also over time been culturally expressed as a battle with divine beings that are thought to bring the diseases to them. Trying to appease such divine beings directly by offering sacrifices such as meat and crop products with sorghum wine or tea is only one of the measures taken; sometimes the villagers practice trickery as well. For example, by naming their children with a family name other than their own, the villagers are not expecting to transfer their unfavorable fortune to the family whose name has been used. Rather, they are expecting to share the favorable fortune of that family. The point of this effect is that the villagers believe that the deity on duty will be confused by the situation and He or She will probably take the children to be those of the other family – or preferably do nothing. Perhaps it is because of this belief, and also because of the cultural belief that a boy child is more important for the family, that the villagers often have a fear of losing their male child. To prevent this from happening, they always choose not to let their neighbors know that they have given birth to a male child. Instead they will tell people that they have been blessed with a female child. This practice of hiding the gender of the newborn boys is very common in Fanmagou.[53] Since male children are carriers of the family name and stronger laborers in the farm field (more so than the girls, it is thought) they are considered to be more important to the family; they tend to think that the evil spirits would try to take them away first – as punishment of some misconduct that the family might previously have committed. To survive by

[53] Beginning from my second brother, every time I had a baby brother, my grandmother and my father asked me to tell people that we had received a female child in our family. To have a male child means you have luck. The more male children that are born, the more luck you have. Yet you have to be cautious not to show off that you have too much luck. When something reaches its extremity, it begins to move or change to the opposite direction. This philosophy of life has been another driving force for the hiding of the children's gender to outsiders, or to give false family names to them.

cheating, however, is not the preference of the villagers; they do so only because they feel forced by their circumstances.[54] As is evident in descriptions of this cultural religious phenomenon, gender inequality is a concern in this patriarchy-dominated tradition in which female children are not equally valued. However, Fanmagou villagers stop short of gender-based infanticide, which is occasionally reported in other parts of China. Fully exploring the gender aspects of local culture and its religious practices in Fanmagou and comparatively in other rural Chinese areas would be an important area of future research and ethnography.

2. The Yin-Yangs and Their Practices

Thus far, I have described some of the geographic, cultural and religious context within which the yin-yang practitioners conduct their ritual leadership; but as yet only a preliminary picture of the practitioner himself has been presented. This section will begin descriptive answers to the following questions: (1) Who are the yin-yangs? (2) What is a yin-yang's religious attribution? (3) How does one come to be a yin-yang? (4) What are the functions of the yin-yang and their significance within the context of folk belief and culture? And (5) What is the developmental history of the yin-yang practitioners? Exploring these questions will present a fuller portrait of a yin-yang.

(1) Who or what is a yin-yang? – A working definition. A yin-yang is first of all a male farmer who, when there is no request for religious practice, works in the fields just like the rest of his fellow villagers. However, this person is also to some degree literate and therefore knows how to check things in the books (such as an almanac) for other

[54] In a biblical story when Abraham was facing the danger of being killed by the Egyptian pharaoh, he asked his wife, Sara, to play tricks on the pharaoh regarding their relationship.

villagers. This used to be a unique merit with powerful access to knowledge when very few villagers were literate. A yin-yang is a healer who, by using shamanic approaches – mediating between the world of the living and the world of the dead – can involve himself in dealing with diseases that a doctor is not able to heal, or when a doctor is not available. A yin-yang can speak and write messages to the spiritual beings that, when accidentally encountered, might become a threat to human health or life. A yin-yang is a geomancer who, equipped with a sophisticated needle compass (針盤), finds the ideal locations for building a house that will bring good luck for the family, or for digging a tomb that will ensure prosperity for the offspring of the dead.[55] A yin-yang is a trained liturgist who knows how to properly lead a burial ritual and how to set up and conduct memorial rituals. A yin-yang is also a liturgical leader for grand community rituals. From these various roles, it is evident that a yin yang, while otherwise a regular member of the village, on special occasions takes on a specialized role as a spiritual leader or expert.

What makes a yin-yang unique from a ritual leader of institutionalized religions, such as a Buddhist monk or a Daoist priest, is that he is a mixture of diverse cultural influences including major religious and philosophical traditions and diverse local folk traditions. In a burial or memorial rite, a yin-yang wears a Daoist robe, and a hat that depicts the Five Senior [Daoist] Deities (五老冠)[56] and, accompanied by Daoist and Buddhist musical instruments, he humbly and peacefully chants Daoist and/or Buddhist scriptures or repentances to please gods, including ancestral gods of the family, to satisfy

[55] In Fanmagou there are no public cemeteries. A deceased villager, if he or she dies a natural death (or from old age), is buried in the family grave yard on one of the family fields, or is buried in a separate tomb if he or she dies young, or from an accident, or has committed suicide.
[56] The Five Senior Deities are representatives of the five directions: east, south, west, north and nadir.

a family's filial duty that is prescribed by Confucian teachings. However, in a house purging rite, a markedly different yin-yang acts like an angry, bold and powerful fighter, whose eyes shoot out fearful beams, whose mouth shouts incantations, and whose hands brandish a sword and a shaman's mirror, while his fellow yin-yangs or the helping villagers beat drums, gongs and other percussion instruments and wave torches and brooms. The last two "weapons" may likely come from traditions older than that of Buddhist and Daoist. In a healing rite, one will see a yin-yang that exists in a polarized world: at the first half of the rite he humbly and peacefully chants the Buddhist or Daoist scriptures and says prayers to the gods he has invited or invoked, with particular requests addressed to the Medicine God; then in the second half of the rite, he suddenly changes into the same fighting role that he plays in the house purging rite.

Thus a yin-yang appears to embody several aspects stemming from diverse religious and cultural influences depending on the situation. Nevertheless, we can come up with a tentative definition of a yin-yang: A yin-yang is a male farmer who is trained for folk religious activities that call for a synthesis of Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian and shamanic traditions. A yin-yang serves as a medium between the *yin* and the *yang* world, but does so only on behalf of those in the *yang* world (as distinct from a true "shaman" who interacts in both directions between the *yin* and *yang* worlds). A yin-yang is also a geomancer who helps the villagers to select ideal building spots – for a house for the living and a tomb for the dead. We may conjecture that the yin-yang performs an ancient role – including aspects from pre-Daoist and pre-Buddhist times – that then also gradually took on new activities and roles deriving from later religious influences. In this respect, the yin yang practitioner is syncretism personified.

Etymology research gives us explanations of the two Chinese characters 陰 (yin) and 陽 (yang), but the explanations are predominantly related to philosophical concepts or knowledge that involves two opposing elements. In *Cihai*, a well-known Chinese lexicon and character dictionary, first published in 1936, "yin-yang" is a synonym for a "yin-yang specialist" or a "yin-yang master" who," in olden days, took as his profession "date selecting," "astrology" and "*fengshui*." "The term," according to the dictionary, "specifically, refers to those who are in charge of '*fengshui*,' and 'date selecting'" (Xia et al., 1999, p. 1192).

As the yin-yang practitioners follow the dualistic interpretation of the world encapsulated in their name, they subscribe to an ancient yin-yang concept that traces back to the oldest Chinese writings such as the *Dao-De Jing* (道德經, i.e. *Tao Te Ching*) by Laozi (老子, i.e. Lao Tzu). In Chapter 42 of the book, Laozi wrote, "The myriad creatures bear yin on their backs and embrace yang in their bosoms. They neutralize these vapors and thereby achieve harmony" (Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, translated by Victor Mair, p. 9).

If we take a closer look at the structural composition of the Chinese characters 陰 (*yin*) and 陽 (*yang*), we notice that their radicals are the same: "阝" (pronounced "fǔ") is a variation of "阜" which indicated a place. That is to say, both 陰 and 陽 refer to "places" and thereby have been extended to mean "worlds" – opposing or antithetical worlds, to be more specific. Using these two characters as the name of this ritual leading profession most likely refers to the ability of a yin-yang to deal with matters in both the yin and the yang worlds. When exactly this term "yin-yang" or "Yin-yang Master" was first used as a title for the folk religion practitioners, rather than the scholars or the necromancers, remains an unanswered question, since no historical literature has been found so far. One

early reference to "yin-yang[s]" as people who study the operational law of the celestial bodies is found in Han Yu's (韓愈 768-824) *Shunzong Shilu* (順宗實錄, actual records of Emperor Shunzong), but studying the operational law of the celestial bodies is not the task of the farmer yin-yangs considered in this study, since they are only the users, or beneficiaries of the fruits of such studies. All the while, it is possible that certain yin-yangs at the higher level of the imperial court may indeed have searched for answers among celestial bodies. Nevertheless one thing is clear: That by calling the practitioners "yin-yangs," people have already distinguished the practitioners from the Daoists (道人, *dao-ren*), the Buddhist monks (和尚, *he-shang*), the lamas (喇嘛, *lama*) and the geomancers (風鑒客, *fengjian-ke*). In all my interviews with yin-yangs over more than a decade of research, without exception, they all claimed that they are Daoist disciples (道家弟子), but they also instantly distinguished themselves from the ascetic Daoists (出家道士) and lay Daoists (火居道士). They also openly insisted that they were not related to the monks or the lamas. They also acknowledged that they are only amateur geomancers. This local role and title then appears to be a rather unique tradition composed of diverse influences and particularly suited for this relatively isolated and challenging rural culture and life.

One final thought about the problem of historical sequencing should be considered at this point. It may be quite reasonable to assume that the shamanic-priestly functions of the yin-yangs preceded the philosophical formulations of the later literate philosophers. Philosophies may come into being as rationalizations of shamanic or priestly activities –

and unlikely the other way around. Shamanic words, plus lots of descriptive synonyms, become "philosophies."[57]

(2) What is a yin-yang's religious attribution? A yin-yang shares some of the elementary features associated with leaders of the three main religious traditions or teachings; but that does not qualify a yin-yang to be identified specifically with any one of them. All six yin-yangs I interviewed claim that they belong to the Daoist School, but none acknowledges being a Daoist (Z. H. Ma, Z. J. Meng, Z. B. Meng, M. C. Yang, X. Ding & S.Y. Ma, personal communication, July 2002; July 2003). Four of them declare their lineage from the Huashan faction (華山派) of the Quanzhen Daoism (全真道). This claim explains the reason why yin-yangs use Buddhist scriptures in their rituals. The founder of the Quanzhen Daoism, Wang Chongyang (王重陽 1113-1170), emphasized that the three religions belong to one school and that his followers need not be restricted to any one of them in particular (Wang, 2012, p. 46; Li, 2011, p. 50). Wang personally placed a lot of emphasis on absorbing elements from Buddhism; after Master Wang's death, his disciples completed a considerable intake of Confucian thought. During the Yuan Dynasty, the Quanzhen Daoism completely integrated itself with the other two religions (Li, 2011, p. 50). When a question was asked regarding a yin-yang's religious attributions during one of my interviews, Master Gao, who belongs to the Longmen faction (龍門派) of the Quanzhen Daoism, answered with a poetic saying: "三教原本是一家，白根青葉红蓮花." (The three religions originally belonged to one family: white root, green leaf and red lotus flower). The white root refers to Confucianism, the green

[57] This direction of development is supported by the historian of religions Dr. Karl Luckert, in personal communications.

leaf to Daoism, and the red lotus flower to Buddhism (Y. C. Gao, personal communication, July 2002). Hence it is safe to say that a yin-yang is a disciple with affinities to three religious traditions whose principal training is oriented toward Daoism. Yet this is still not a complete picture of a yin-yang. He also cultivates strong characteristics that are obviously still shamanic, originating from eras prior to these three religions.

Perhaps the two crucial differences between a yin-yang and someone more specifically identified as a shaman are first that a yin-yang humbly invites gods and ghosts, while a shaman indifferently seeks and summons them for help. This is because a shaman "treats the ghosts and souls as if they were treating non-living beings" (J. G. Frazer, 1910/1978, as cited in Zhao, 1997, p. 66). Furthermore, the gods that a yin-yang invites are detached from the yin-yang's body while the gods summoned by a shaman are attached to the shaman's body – that is, the shaman is possessed by the gods as a medium, while the yin yang is primarily an intermediary or message giver. Second, when communicating with the gods, a yin-yang is generally clear and conscious, while a shaman, being possessed, is sometimes in an ecstatic state of narcosis (Feng, 1998, p. 29).

This is how present Chinese scholarship perceives the distinctions between yin-yang and shaman, with the help of J. G. Frazer. I would modify this characterization to a degree, however, because when a yin-yang does a rite of exorcism or housecleaning, he is not a humble peasant at all. Though less learned or specialized about the ways of the gods than a confident shaman, he nevertheless behaves like a heroic warrior and defender of humankind. In fact, Luckert and I have filmed one yin-yang, of whom one of his guardian helpers was the Buddha, pointing his power stick straight at an altar of the Buddha, as he

ordered the Buddha to henceforth do his bidding. This remarkable scene shows a yin-yang that is not merely a passive one-directional messenger.

Another difference between a yin-yang and a shaman is that during day-to-day existence, a yin-yang is treated by the villagers as one of them, and thereby his life and death is not different from that of a common villager. When a yin-yang dies, he is buried exactly the same way any other villagers are buried, and he certainly enjoys the memorial ceremonies as his fellow villagers do. The death of a shaman, on the other hand, is categorized as an unnatural death and thereby does not qualify for funeral rites which are designated for ordinary people who die a natural death (Luo, 2011). When a yin-yang is buried, the musical instruments are not buried with him; when a shaman is buried, some of his tools, such as bells and drums, will be buried also (Luo, 2011). In some places, a shaman's body will be subjected to weathering and some of the shaman's remains will be collected as treasures for protection (Luo, 2011). But a yin-yang's body will never be treated in this manner as his overall person is not treated as distinct from his fellow villagers.

Nevertheless, the commonalities between a yin-yang and a shaman are greater than their differences – they are both able to establish communication between humans and the gods, between the living and the dead, and thereby provide a stage for the living and the dead to interact. In the philosophy of a yin-yang and a shaman, humans do not live all by themselves; rather, they live close to, or even among the souls and spirits of the dead who affect or even manipulate the lives of the living. The consequence of the interference between a living human being and a ghost, who owing to its power is a greater-than-human being (Luckert, 1991), is not always harmonious; rather, it brings discomfort or

danger to humans. It can be as mild as an illness or as severe as a bad accident, or even as final as death. Over thousands of years the common people of the villages of this region of China have invented various means to deal with those who live in the afterworld, such as saying nice words (praying) and offering food and money (sacrificing). When their own measures fail, the common people have to seek help from powerful gods and ancestors. But since this is a matter of great daring, it requires proper rites and sacrifices, which only a specialized person like a yin-yang or a shaman knows how to facilitate well. It is traditional need, belief and practice that keep the profession of a yin-yang and of a shaman relevant.

(3) How does a man come to be a yin-yang? To become a yin-yang, one does not go through a serious illness or a near-death experience like what many shamans go through as their originating and authorizing story. What a yin-yang needs will be an interest in the job and an intention of learning it. It is a practical matter, and not derived from some special quality or being thought of as possessing special spiritual qualities. He needs to find a master teacher and then become his apprentice. This master can be a father, an uncle, or a yin-yang that is not related to him, as long as that master agrees to teach. The curriculum of a yin-yang apprentice includes (1) the reading, learning, reciting and singing of yin-yang texts; (2) the writing of messages that properly address certain issues which can occur at certain times and directions (celestial and earthly); (3) the ability to use the needle compass correctly, to determine building sites for both the yin and the yang worlds (tombs and houses); (4) the skills of playing at least two musical instruments and (5) the four activities that Yang (2011) summarized: *fu* (符 amulet), *zhou* (咒 incantation), *jue* (訣 mudra) and *bu* (步 magical steps). These four acts are

"performed by the *gaogong fashi* (高功法師) in every properly conducted Daoist ritual" (p. 88). Yin-yang training is more of a straightforward curriculum to learn, than a status earned by virtue of special or extraordinary experiences one has undergone.

There is no formal class-room teaching in a yin-yang's course of study and there are no formal tuition and fees to be paid for the instructions. Gratitude of the disciple to his master, if not also to his father, is expressed in different ways such as helping by working in the master yin-yang's fields, carrying water from the spring or well to the master's house, helping in ritual services without taking a share from the payments and, of course, giving decent gifts to the master's family on holidays. The reading, writing and the instrument playing courses are in their nature basically independent studies. Singing skills in the exorcism rites are obtained through learning-by-doing: closely observing the master's performance in rituals and participating in all the rituals. The duration of the apprenticeship can be as short as five years or as long as ten years. A yin-yang learner graduates whenever he is able to independently preside over a big ritual; usually it is a burial ritual. Again, this shows the practical nature of the profession. Apprenticeship ends when the disciple is functionally ready. The graduation of a yin-yang is usually grand. The commencement is preferably held on a religious holiday in a Daoist temple, where hundreds or thousands of people will throng to a temple fair (廟會). All other yin-yangs or yin-yang students in the vicinity will be invited to participate in the commencement, in which relevant gods will be called upon at an altar before the four magic weapons/ tools are awarded to the graduating yin-yang disciple:[58]

[58] This section is based on the 2004 summer fieldwork of Prof. Karl Luckert, Zuotang Zhang and Dr. Xiaoyu Du.

- A heavenly canopy ruler (天蓬法尺) that is made efficacious only by a senior yin-yang
- A monster-beheading sword (斬妖劍) that is usually a gift from the master yin-yang
- Six magical seals (六款法印) that are carved on the six faces of a regular hexagon
- A powerstick (法杖) this is either inherited from his master or given by fellow yin-yangs

Having been awarded these weapons and tools, the newly graduated yin-yang has the following obligations and duties to fulfill:

- Teach education on behalf of heaven (代天宣化)
- Bless the nation and enrich the citizens (祝國裕民)
- Assist in justice and defeat the vicious (輔正除邪)
- Rescue or relieve the ghosts [from hell] (拯拔幽魂)

The completion of the religious commencement is followed by a more relaxed secular ritual during which relatives and friends will offer their gifts to the new yin-yang master. The most common gifts are bed-cover-sized red cloths tied to his neck or wrapped around his shoulders.[59] The publically held graduating ceremony has two basic functions: to gain the recognition of all the relevant gods that the new graduate will officially start his independent practice and to advertise to other people that the new

[59] Draping a band of red silk over someone's shoulders is a pervasive tradition of congratulations in China, mainly among the Han Chinese.

graduate is now able to conduct efficacious ceremonies (Z. H. Ma, personal communication, July 2004).

(4) What are the functions of a yin-yang and their significance in folk religion? The functions of a yin-yang are determined by the services that are needed by the villagers, and the significance of these functions is consistent with the villagers' beliefs and perspectives. While they are indispensable spiritual intermediaries in the Xi-Hai-Gu area, yin-yangs never voluntarily offer their service; they serve only when they are consulted (as for auspicious dates and compatibility of young people for marriage), hired (as for memorial rituals and burial rituals), or requested (as for community ritual services such as leading a beg-for-rain rite). The villagers, on the other hand, keep the hiring of a yin-yang at a minimum – they hire a yin-yang only when they have no other options. This may reduce the number of a yin-yang's engagements; but it does not at all diminish the significance of the service a yin-yang offers. There are times when a family has to make a decision that may affect or even determine their future prosperity; then the villagers are very cautious and it is likely for them to consult a yin-yang. Under such circumstances, a yin-yang functions as a consultant for daily activities. These activities include (1) the plan of building a house, for which the best *fengshui* location and the auspicious dates are required, as both the villagers and a yin-yang believe that if a house is built on a *sha-tou* (煞頭, head of an evil spirit), or if the first day of the construction work happens to be the day of *Tuwang* (土旺), on which the moving of earth is strictly prohibited, it may bring to the family bad luck or even fatal consequences, and (2) the plan of making an engagement, for which the compatibility of the two people's horoscopes as well as the auspicious dates are required. To obtain the dates and compatibilities, the villagers can

simply go to a yin-yang's house for a consultation, with or without a small gift as an incentive; but for best *fengshui* location to build a house or to dig a tomb, they must ask the yin-yang to go to the place and use his special compass to determine the location.

Although considered to be the least important among their practices, this consulting service is taken seriously by the villagers and the yin-yangs, because it is their belief that nothing is too small or insignificant when dealing with the spiritual beings. At the surface, a yin-yang's service seems to be a physical or material endeavor related to practical decisions, but in the minds of the villagers, it is basically a psychological one. The yin-yangs are the confidence providers.[60] Villagers may simply decide where to build their houses or where to bury deceased relatives, but having a confirmation from a professional yin-yang makes them feel relaxed and secure.

When an unexpected incident occurs that is beyond the control of the villagers, and particularly when the matter is between the yin and the yang world, the villagers definitely have to hire a yin-yang. Such incidents may be (1) severe disease that is somehow decided to have been caused not by physical reasons but by spiritual ones, which can only be dealt with by a yin-yang; (2) a bad accident of a member in a family or a loss of possession that leads the villagers to believe that there exists in the house a malicious being who only can be expelled by a yin-yang who has the power and knows how to apply it; (3) death of a family member, whose funeral must be presided over by a yin-yang and (4) when a family decides to host a memorial ceremony for a deceased member, for which at least one yin-yang is needed to lead the ritual and to chant the scriptures for the souls of their deceased relative, hoping to have the dead person's sins expiated and then have the ghosts / souls released from purgatory.

[60] Master Ma Zhonghuai emphasized this point several times during my 2002 interview with him.

For incidents (1) and (2), a yin-yang will be hired to pray to eliminate disasters and to remove diseases by driving away the malicious [wandering] spirits that have caused the diseases. He will arrange proper rituals that are directed specifically toward dealing with the issues. The healing ritual is highlighted with the setting up of an altar to which all relevant gods are invited to listen to the yin-yang's "case report" and prayers and then asked to offer their support to him. The yin-yang uses these rituals to plead with the gods to do three things. He asks first, to pardon the sick person for an offense he or she might have committed; second, to help the yin-yang to drive away the malicious spirits that have caused the diseases; and third, to help the yin-yang to call back the sick person's *hun* (魂, souls) and *po* (魄, spirits) that have been taken or scared out of the body due to the disease. The driving away of the malicious spirits is always done with a house cleansing, which is done immediately after a healing ritual. If a villager dies of an unexpected death (such as by an accident or by suicide), then there is also a house cleansing immediately after the burial ritual.

For incident (3), a yin-yang will be hired to lead the burial ritual for the dead. A burial ritual is by far the most important thing for both the villagers and the yin-yangs. First of all, the burial site needs to have good *fengshui* (Wu, 2012) and only a yin-yang can ensure that. Secondly, common people can bury a dead person's body; but only a yin-yang can bury, and thereby pacify, the dead person's soul through specific rituals. The manifestation of one's souls and spirits after death, as described in legendary tales, makes others feel awe or fear. That the formation of the radicals of both the Chinese words, *hun* (魂) and *po* (魄), is associated with "ghost" (鬼) explains the point. Therefore, in witchcraft and daily custom of life, a set of rituals and spells are made to appease,

venerate or control the souls and spirits (Xu, 2010). Thirdly, the burial ritual provides the last and best opportunity for the mourning children to fulfill their filial piety. Confucius said, "When (the parents) are alive, serve them with respect; when they are dead, bury them with respect, and offer sacrifices with respect" (Xing, 2012).[61] Furthermore, the funeral ceremony is the dialogue between the living and the dead; it is a yin and yang exchange of human emotions in the fantasy realm (Wang, 2010). Except that this "fantasy" is reality.

For incident (4), a yin-yang is hired to lead memorial sacrificial rituals. Memorial rituals are usually held seven weeks or 100 days after the death of a relative, and then afterwards, they are held at the first three anniversaries. Most of the memorial rituals are led by the male head of the family; only economically better-off families will hire a yin-yang to preside at a ritual. Dependent on what the family's request is, the repertoire of a memorial ritual can have a long range of different elements. It can be as simple as reading a message (文) in front of a memorial tablet or at the tomb site; it can also be as elaborate as setting up an altar and holding a seven-by-seven day (49 days in total) retrospective sacrificial rite, which is no longer practical in contemporary China. Even in the old days, according to Master Ma, "only the rich could afford such a grand-scale rite" (Zhang and Luckert, 2002, unpublished field notes). In villages like Fanmagou, a three-day retrospective sacrificial rite is considered very decent. Almost by default, a decent rite means one that includes *shi-shi* (施食), or the offering of food [to the ghosts], as its

[61] Xing Bing, Analects Commentaries, Vol. II. China Philosophy Books Electronic Plan (《论语注疏》卷二。中國哲學書電子化計劃 http://ctext.org/lunyu-zhushu/wei-zheng/zh).

main content. *Shi-shi* is almost purely a Buddhist rite; the entire notion comes from a Buddhist scripture, from *The Buddha Tells the Yulanpen Scripture*.

Yulanpen is a transliteration of *ullambana* from Sanskrit, which means to save those that are in sore straits, as being hung by their feet. The term is a metaphor for the souls that are suffering in the underworld. As *The Buddha Tells the Yulanpen Scripture* has it, Mulian, one of the disciples of the Buddha who had the highest level of supernatural power, learned from the Buddha that his recently deceased mother had become a hungry ghost in the Hungry Ghost section of the hell and was suffering there from all kinds of pains and torture. Mulian tried with all his power to save his mother, but failed. This forced him to beg the Buddha for help. The Buddha, moved by Mulian's affection and love of his mother, told Mulian that on the 15th day of the 7th moon the Buddhist monks would have a time of self-criticism and self-checking, and he asked Mulian to prepare foods for monks from all directions. The Buddha said that by so doing, one's current parents and the [grand]parents of seven generations would all be liberated from their sufferings (Liang, 1991).

In my own fieldwork observation, I witnessed a *shi-shi* rite that was conducted by a group of yin-yangs for my grandmother that was almost identical to what has been described about the Yulanpen rite in the Song dynasty (960-1279). This nearly exact following of the text suggests that this tradition may not have been affected by the passing of time and thereby has enjoyed a history of about a thousand years. The differences, however, lie in two aspects. First, the Yulanpen rite is held on the 15th day of the 7th month of the lunar calendar, while the *shi-shi* rite is held on the anniversary of a deceased person, which can be any day in a year; second, in a Yulanpen rite, a grand

meal-offering ceremony is held to feast the Buddhist monks while in a *shi-shi* rite, the meal-offering ceremony is offered to both the ghosts and the living participants.

This is one of the examples showing that the influence of Buddhism on Chinese culture is extensive and profound. Buddhist advocates and their activities greatly opened up and extended the folk customs in China; Buddhism took over almost the entire content of burial ritual of the Chinese Han (Liang, 1991).

This phenomenon confirms the difficulty of defining a yin-yang's religious attributes; but it presents a perfect example of the significance of a yin-yang in village life. Here is a Daoist trained liturgist who leads rituals that are mostly based on Buddhist concepts of good and evil and its cosmology intertwined with that of folk beliefs, to satisfy the emotional and perceived needs of the villagers who wish to embody their filial piety prescribed by Confucian teaching. What else can be a more effective (and affectionate) way of showing one's filial piety than to "save" a deceased relative's soul from hell? Inasmuch as Chinese culture is characterized by the integrity of filial piety, a ritual led by a yin-yang happily keeps the cultural tradition going.

But of course not all villagers can afford a grand memorial ritual like a *shi-shi*, since the ritual involves employing two or three yin-yangs and therefore is fairly expensive. The most commonly held ritual for this purpose is what the villagers call *nianjing* (念經, chant the scriptures). Even a *nianjing* ceremony is considered by some villagers to be a luxurious event, since at least one yin-yang must be hired to set up a family altar and chant the scriptures, which involves purchasing certain tools and articles; furthermore, a big meal must be provided by the family to feed the people of the community, who will bring sacrificial gifts.

Whether or not a memorial ritual includes a *shi-shi*, the central part is played by a yin-yang or by several yin-yangs. It is the yin-yang's service that makes it possible for the family to efficaciously show their filial piety, their regrets and their emotion to the deceased relative; and it is believed that these rituals will help reduce the sins of the relative and thereby shorten their suffering time in hell. Here is where the villagers have a dual belief in their concept of the afterlife. On the one hand they believe that when one dies his or her soul will continue to "live" in the yin world that has almost identical structures and administrative systems to the living world. On the other hand, they believe that commoners will go to hell to be judged by the King of Hell, before they are determined to stay in hell or are released from there. The conduct of the rituals will pacify the souls that are only in the yin world, not in hell, or release those that are in hell. Whichever is the case, the ritual both comforts the dead and the living, the family and the village.

As all rituals are accompanied by sacrifice, it is important that villagers believe that a yin-yang is able to make sure that their sacrifice is offered in the right manner and is properly received by the designated recipients, be they ancestral gods or gods responsible for an illness. In this sense, the yin-yang functions as a caretaker and a care provider who is trusted by the villagers.

In addition to the scripture chanting, a memorial ceremony also provides an ideal opportunity for the villagers to have free consultations with the yin-yang(s), since it is almost like an on-site service to the entire village. This adds value to the role a yin-yang plays as his service is for the common good for all in the community.

The functions of a yin-yang are not limited to providing religious comfort to individual families. There are times when a yin-yang is needed by the entire village or a community of several villages, such as conducting a rain-begging ritual. If a yin-yang happens to be among the villagers that are hosting the ritual, he will simply do the service as his community obligation; if a yin-yang is hired by other villages or communities, he does it as a service and also gets paid. In short, the functions of a yin-yang are performed in the various services to the daily life of the villagers and they are significant or even indispensable.

(5) What are the risks that a yin-yang practitioner faces in China? For generations yin-yang practitioners have been providing religious services as well as spiritual consolations to the rural people in these villages of northwest China and thereby have made significant contributions to the preservation of the inherited culture and the harmonization of the communities. But yin-yang practices do not belong among the state-recognized religions; they are by default considered folk religious practices, which are consequently faced with various kinds of socio-cultural risks. Literature on folk religions pertaining to practices under the Communist government, as well as my own years of field interviews and observations, have revealed certain risks and threats which to some extent are still present: (1) occasionally there still occur attacks from individual government officials that are dogmatically tied to Marxist ideology, to the extent that they are slow in changing their attitudes toward folk religious practices; (2) there are losses of the tradition, as the older generation of yin-yangs passes away and fewer young apprentices take their place; and (3) there is the general threat due to the impact of modernity on urbanization, mobility, new technologies and new cultural influences that

are highly attractive to young generations (Z. H. Ma & J. L. Zhang, personal communication, July 2002; July 2004; August 2010).

The first risk posed to the yin-yang practice is direct government attacks on these folk religious practices. Scholars inside and outside China have already discussed past campaigns of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) against religious practice (Yang, 1961; Bush, 1970; Zhu, 2009). As a faithful follower-entity of Marx, who denounced religion as the opium of the people, the CCP showed its hostility toward religion even before it gained control over the entire country. For example, on January 4, 1949 – ten months before the People's Republic was established – the People's government of North China banned all manner of "sects and secret societies" that were categorized as *huidaomen* (會道門, superstitious and secret societies) and the campaign against the *huidaomen* reached its climax in 1953 and 1954, during which 13 million followers cut their ties with the groups and 820,000 leaders turned themselves in or were arrested (Goossaert and Palmer, 2011). The question of how much of this was sincere turning away and how much was temporary fear-based renunciation needs to be further explored. My decade of field research (and life as a cultural insider) in this region suggests strongly that these traditions were never fully or sincerely renounced. Another example is that in 1954 and 1955 the Chinese government arrested and condemned Taoists "guilty of sabotage of agricultural and industrial production" (Bush, 1970). A fledgling political movement, with a still weakly reasoned ideology, understandingly felt threatened when simple yin-yang farmers could be community leaders by virtue of performing common rites and by providing traditional shamanic consultation and services. The political party had no

solution to explain the threat of death or to manage the extensive Chinese cult of the ancestors. An atheistic party could only increase its threat of adding more controls.

The suppression of all religious practices and the persecution of the practitioners reached its climax during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), during which temples and mosques were either demolished or converted to other uses, accompanied by a book-burning movement, in the name of doing away with the "Four Olds"[62] which would have included practices like those being researched in this study. In the Xi-Hai-Gu area, the book-burning movement became almost uncontrollable during 1968 and 1969 and many yin-yangs were forced to give their "superstitious books" to the Red Guards to be burned right in front of them, as an additional means of public humiliation to them. Some of the yin-yangs were severely beaten by the Red Guards who accused them of undermining the socialist state with feudal and superstitious practices (Z. H. Ma, personal communication, July 2002; July 2003; July 2004). During one of our field interviews, Master Ma shared how his maternal grandfather, Master Meng, who graduated from a yin-yang training school in Lanzhou during the Nationalist government (1911-1949), managed to hide his books from the Red Guards, who were all his young fellow villagers. When he learned that people in Guyuan city were burning the old books, he secretly put all the books into a bamboo basket and carried them to a safe place and then dug a deep hole and buried them. He never told anyone about this until his last day. He was then only able to mention that

[62] The "Four Olds" refer to old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits (舊思想、舊文化、舊風俗、舊習慣).

the books were safely buried but not able to tell his children and students where the exact spot was.[63]

My informants told me that over 90% of the yin-yang books were hand-copied by the disciples whose handwriting had reached a certain level of elegance. These books included, but were not limited to, the ritual Guides, Buddhist and Daoist scriptures (經), Repentances (懺) and the *fengshui* Guides. The best copied books were those that have no errors. These are the books that are highly cherished, particularly when a copy is given as a gift from a master yin-yang to a yin-yang student. It is considered a great honor. Master Meng taught four students, but none of them have been fortunate enough to get a good quality book from him. All they have now are the ones they copied while still practicing their writing brush calligraphy. While they have managed to retain much of the content of their tradition, there has been tremendous cultural loss through this government intervention.

Folk religions have enjoyed a valuable freedom after China adopted economic reform and an open-door policy in the 1980s, but the lingering fear of further intervention was still easily felt when I was chatting with and interviewing the yin-yangs. This justifiable fear comes from the past persecutions their masters had undergone, but also from the present unfriendly attitudes by some government officials. Perhaps two anecdotes from my fieldwork will illustrate this precarious situation. In the summer of 2002, after Luckert and I received permission from the provincial governor and the CCP-controlled Ningxia People's Press to study yin-yang practice in Guyuan, a local

[63] According to my telephone conversation with Master Meng, as of June 25, 2013, the books have not been found yet. This story shows another aspect of cultural loss: Someone who was trying to preserve; but the generation gap ended up getting in the way and the knowledge was never transmitted.

government official in Guyuan who was supposed to simply "turn on the green light" for us did not hide his disparaging attitude toward our plan and advised us to do something "more valuable." So, even though the higher government officials approved of our research project, there were still some officials within the system who carried the earlier attitude of dismissal or disparagement toward "religion." Two years later, when we went to a religious fair in Xihaizi (the Western Sea, which I mentioned in Part 1) to observe a yin-yang initiating ceremony, we were followed by plainclothes policemen at an uncomfortably close distance. Aware that this probably signaled their dislike of our attention to these ceremonies and practitioners, we defensively provided our yin-yang friends with photographs that depicted the two of us together with the governor of the province to show the higher level of government support for our project.

We should bear in mind that the negative attitude toward folk religions did not begin in the Communist era; it only worsened, and the persecution of the practitioners was intensified a number of times since 1949. In China when a religious practice is labeled as folk religion because it is seen as "backwards" or "primitive," it has already been placed in opposition of the state, and thereby it is potentially doomed to face suppressions from the state, which feels a strong need to control everything. Whether it was the state that first suppressed folk religious cults or it was the folk religious cults that bothered the state remains a lop-sided chicken-egg question. But tensions and clashes between the two have been millennia-old. From ancient times, folk religions had been utilized by secret societies that caused social instabilities and some even evolved to overthrow the government; the two good examples would be the Huangjin Rebellion (黃巾起義) that, eventually, put an end to the Han dynasty, and the Bailian Cult rebellions

(白蓮教起義) that attempted to overthrow the dynasties of Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911).[64]

We should also bear in mind that not only are the still unrecognized religious practices controlled by the government; the officially recognized ones also are being constantly checked by the central government of China that urges all religious organizations to uphold the leadership of the CCP. For example, in May 1984, the first Catholic meeting of representatives was held in Gansu province; the key content of the charter and resolutions of the meeting was that the priests and church members must support the leadership of the CCP (Zhao, 2009).

There has been a semblance of religious freedom in contemporary China, but no one can guarantee that the policy will go unchanged in the near future, especially since no laws have been made to protect folk religious practices in China. The recently defeated Bo Xilai had, in past years, been promoting a movement of singing the red songs of the Cultural Revolution that many residents tended to believe and to endorse. Had he not been defeated by his rivals, Bo might well have been able to lead the country back into the Cultural Revolution era, which could have meant a disaster for all religious traditions.

The second risk posed to the yin-yang practice is that the older generation of yin-yangs are dying without being able to pass their traditions to a younger generation of yin-yangs. As the direct consequence of the government's persecution, only three decades past, many old yin-yangs have not recovered from their trauma, and many have decided not to take students. Their excuses are simple: man has to follow the time/era and individuals have to follow the government. Having suffered from many persecutions

[64] During the dynasties of Ming and Qing, there emerged numerous secret folk religions or sects (Wang, 2012) that attracted cautious attention from the empires. The Bailian Cult was considered the most troublesome.

already, the old yin-yangs neither want to suffer again nor do they want their children or students to suffer in the future, should the policy suddenly change. In 2002, during my first interview with Master Ma, he told me regretfully that some of the old traditions have already gotten lost, as "some old masters have taken a number of the ritual skills to their tombs and still others refuse to teach." In traditions where oral tradition and apprenticeship are the forms of transmission, there is much at stake – just a single generation break can bring tremendous cultural loss. The behavior of these old yin-yangs has had a discouraging impact on those who are interested in becoming a yin-yang. While in recent years there has been an increasing demand for yin-yangs for ceremonial rites, many of the young yin-yangs are not able to undertake the tasks required by financially better-off villagers, who feel obliged to do thanksgiving type offering feasts to the gods who have helped them.

The third risk posed to the yin-yang practice is the so-called threat from modernity. With the economic advancement in China, as well as the compulsory education policy, more and more children in villages like Fanmagou receive Marxist "scientific education" in schools; this has been producing an increasing number of atheists who denounce the yin-yang practice as mere superstition. The reactions of these young people have significantly reduced the "business" of the yin-yangs, in marriage compatibility consultation as well as in the house and tomb site selection. The biggest loss of the yin-yang practice, however, lies in the medical consultation and the spiritual healing rites. In its entire history, there has never been a village doctor in Fanmagou. Before 1954 there were no medical doctors within 50 kilometers of Fanmagou. Between 1954 and 1958 there was only one medicine vendor 12 kilometers from Fanmagou. In the summer of

1958 a community clinic was built in Zhangyi with two doctors. One had a two-year training in western medicine and the other learned traditional Chinese medicine from his master doctor. As the dependence on medical treatment increases, dependence on spiritual treatment decreases and belief in yin-yang treatment decreases as the result. Since 1958, dependence on yin-yang treatments has been limited to "unreasonable sicknesses," or when a doctor is not available, or when medical doctors cannot find a way to treat a patient. Table 2 shows the declining trend of believers in spiritual healing in Fanmagou, based on a small survey of 60 randomly selected participants (about one quarter of the total population in the village) that I conducted in July 2008:

Table 4 Trends of believers in spiritual healing in Fanmagou

Age	No. of villagers	Believe in yy healing	Not believe in yy healing	Not sure	% of believers
14-16	2			2	0
17-19	4		2	2	0
20-30	11	2	6	3	18.18
31-40	16	3	8	5	18.75
41-50	10	5	2	3	50
51 +	17	14		3	82.35

This table reflects the fact that the age of the villager, which also reflects the level or amount of education, and the availability of medical services, determine the decline of yin-yang spiritual treatment practices.

None of the above-mentioned trends and risks can be neglected and each needs to be taken into careful consideration so as to find appropriate measures to protect and to preserve traditional cultural practices.

3. Conclusion

The meaning and importance of the yin-yang practice is defined by the community rather than by the yin-yangs themselves. The pattern is clear: the villagers (especially the older villagers) believe that (1) there is an afterlife, or yin (陰) world in which ghosts, spirits and gods dwell; (2) the beings from the yin world sometimes will "trespass" into the yang (陽) world of the living, and in many instances will leave someone in the yang world sick; (3) there are many ways to prevent or deal with such trespasses, but the best way is to offer sacrifice, at least for the older villagers, through a rite; (4) many villagers know how to do simple rites in less serious situations but they all believe that, when a situation is life or death, only an official ritual presided over by an initiated yin-yang may successfully resolve it. This gives us a clear picture that his ability to lead important ceremonies in key life situations makes the yin-yang very important in folk religion.

Among the practices of a yin-yang, both the villagers and the yin-yangs I interviewed agree that the descending order of importance of the yin yang ritual role is (1) presiding over funerals; (2) conducting memorial rituals; (3) exorcising the demons to heal the sick; (4) helping choose proper burial sites; (5) helping choose proper dates for certain activities such as marriage and house construction; (6) checking for the compatibility of young people before they are engaged and (7) presiding over and leading community services such as praying for rain. The first four of the practices need further

explanation (Z. C. Wang, W. K. Wang & Z. J. Meng, personal communication, July, 2008; October, 2011).

The order of importance of the practices is determined by the directness of contact, or of confronting the yin world and the urgency of putting the proper interaction in motion. The order of importance is also determined by the seriousness of consequences if a ceremonial is not properly conducted. Both the villagers and the yin-yangs agree that funeral rites are the most important and the most serious; such rituals provide a chance for the mourners to intensively offer their filial piety, and the fear of the end of life for the eternal life-soul can be weakened by the comfort (Jian, 2011) when a ritual is conducted by a ritual specialist (Chau, 2011). It is a very common phenomenon that many mourners feel regretful that they did not do enough to fulfill their filial piety while their parent was still in the yang world. Still others feel that by the time they had a burial ceremony they were too poor to adequately show their willingness to have their parent's soul rescued from hell. Luckily, the memorial ceremonies give good chances for the mourners to recover such losses. That is why the memorial ritual is second in importance among yin-yang practices.

The healing of the sick used to be nearly as important as the burial ritual, but starting in the 1970s, its importance dropped due to development of medical services in the communities and a general understanding and appreciation of modern approaches to sickness and health. This is a typical example that shows the impact of modernity on the yin-yang traditions. Although this new development may not be good for the yin-yang practitioners, particularly for those who wish to keep the tradition, it nevertheless has positive sides for the communities to which the yin-yangs and their relatives belong.

The choosing of a burial site is part of the burial ritual, or it precedes it. It is of crucial importance. Villagers in Fanmagou highlight this importance with a legendary story of a very famous general, Han Xin (韓信, ca. 231 BCE – 196 BCE), who rose from being a farmer boy to the rank of a duke in the Western Han Dynasty (202 BCE – 8 CE) simply because he had buried his mother in an ideal burial place. With hopes that their offspring will ascend on the social ladder, villagers rely on the yin-yang's trained eye to pick a good spot to bury their dead. As a minimum, they believe that a burial spot chosen by a yin-yang will not bring troubles to the family.

Due to the nature of the villagers' beliefs, all elements of the yin-yang practices are taken seriously by both the villagers and the yin-yangs even given the above-mentioned order of ritual importance. My ethnographic research that follows will focus on the most important from the list, which is the burial ritual. In fact a burial ritual as a whole is actually a combination of numbers 1, 2 and 4 among the above-mentioned seven activities and these rites involve most of the yin-yang scriptures. When presiding over a burial ritual, a yin-yang chooses or confirms a burial site, conducts a memorial ceremonial rite and, after the dead is buried, leads a house-cleansing rite. Having now explored the historical, geographical, and cultural context and providing background and description of the yin yangs themselves, in the following chapter I now turn to description and discussion of the funeral ritual itself.

CHAPTER 5: A "THICK DESCRIPTION" AND ANALYSIS OF A FUNERARY RITUAL IN QIJIAZHUANG, PRESIDED OVER BY A LOCAL YIN-YANG

1. Thick Description of the Rituals

Among all the rituals that a yin-yang leads or presides over, funeral rituals are the most important. Funeral rites are central for families as well as for the ritual life of the entire village. The death of a person is always a sad reminder to the living that the yin world is "only a paper's thickness away from the yang world" (Z. B. Meng, personal communication, August 2006). In contrast, a healing ritual can be optional and might even be replaced by seeing a doctor; a memorial[65] ritual also can be optional, or can sometimes be presided over by the head of the household or by a fellow villager. A funeral ritual, however, must always be done by a yin-yang. The bedrock of this funeral tradition, the worldview underpinning its meaning and importance, is the cosmology of the villagers. At its core is the view that there is another world, an after-life world, or, in the terms that identify the ritual leader, a "*yin* world" that co-exists with the *yang* world. A person's journey from the *yang* world to the *yin* world is not as simple as one might think – it is not akin to moving from point A to point B in the *yang* world. It warrants and requires proper procedures in order for the deceased to migrate to the right place in the

[65] In the Xi-Hai-Gu region, memorial rituals are generally divided into two kinds: the informal and the formal. The informal rituals are those that are held every seven days after a relative dies for up to seven weeks, which is called the Jinqi (盡七, or the last seven); then the next memorial ritual is held on the 100th day, which is call Bairi zhi (百日紙 the hundred day's paper money burning). After that, there are anniversary memorials for three years, respectively called Yi-nian zhi, Er-nian zhi and San-nian zhi (一年紙, 二年紙 and 三年紙 first, second or third year paper money burning). The third year is always the biggest celebration and many families will hire a yin-yang or several yin-yangs to hold a memorial ritual specifically aimed at saving the soul of the deceased and escorting the soul into the Western Pure Land, which is a Buddhist concept.

yin world. This passage requires the proper funerary documents, somewhat like a passport, or, as it is commonly described in China, an "introductory letter" that announces the deceased into the *yin* world. There are several primary reasons why the funeral ritual remains a central and serious ritual concern.

First, the underlying belief system prescribes the rituals as central. In this worldview, the moment a person dies, he or she has no ability to keep the multiple souls and the body together. The souls tend to flee the body and may get scattered all about. In the words of a yin-yang himself, "Numerous wandering ghosts are waiting for the moment to kidnap a dead person's souls because they know that the surviving members of the family and other relatives of the dead will offer them sacrifices" (Z. J. Meng, personal communication, March 2011; January 2012). By kidnapping and controlling the souls of the newly dead, these ghosts will receive a good share of the paper money, good food and drinks, from the sacrifices. If these lost souls are not liberated from the wandering ghosts, chances are, the newly dead person's souls will become wandering ghosts as well.

Second, the dead person must be buried on the right date according to the cosmological calendar. Each person has his or her own horoscope, and thereby his or her predetermined burial date and hour, and must be verified accordingly. There are only certain auspicious times for any [dead] person to be buried. And yet this date has to meet the full compatibility of the "Star Officers on Duty" (值日星官); if these dates are compatible, then there is a third restriction that must be examined; this is the *Tuwang* (土

旺) taboo dates[66], during which the moving of earth required for a burial is prohibited. In a personal example, my mother-in-law passed away on February 9, 2007, which unfortunately happened to be the *Tuwang* period, and, consequently, her corpse was kept and mourned for eight days before it could finally be buried. The need to respect this calendric taboo superseded the other primary belief that a dead person's soul and ghosts can only rest in peace after the deceased is buried, which means that the sooner a dead person is buried the better.

Third, the dead must be buried in the correct geographical orientation appropriate for burial in any given lunar year. The propitious directions rotate each year. Whether a person can be buried in a certain direction is always a big concern for the mourning family, particularly because there is frequently an existing family graveyard in which the burial orientations have already been determined, and this cannot be changed in order to bury additional individual family members. In cases when a certain orientation is not suited for a given burial in a family graveyard, a temporary burial site at another location becomes the only option. Again, a typical example comes from my own experience in which my grandmother was first buried in a temporary grave before being moved later to the family graveyard. Detailed descriptions are given below.

Fourth, the proper gods have to be notified and/or invited during the funeral ritual. In a funeral ritual (as well as in a memorial or healing ritual) only the gods that are relevant for the situation should be notified or invited. For example, in all my ethnographic fieldwork, I found that burying a dead person involves at least the following

[66] During the Tuwang days the earth is believed to be the strongest in its force and thereby human beings must avoid offending the earth. According to Master Meng, three days before and four days after the Tuwang day there should not be any burial or reburial ritual (Z. J. Meng, personal communication, February 2007). This is why my mother-in-law was buried eight days after her passing away.

gods (all the explanations are based on my interviews with the yin-yangs and the villagers in Fanmagou, Qijiazhuang and Wang Da-Zhuang, 2002-2014):

- The *Yan-Wang* (閻王 King of the Underworld) must be invited if there is a sacrificial ritual before the burial, or be notified if there is no such sacrificial ritual. The King of the Underworld and his government officials receive/admit the ghosts of the dead and make judgments according to the dead peoples' words and deeds in the yang world – to determine the future of these ghosts.
- The God of the Big Dipper (北斗七元星君) must be invited if there is a sacrificial ritual, because this god has charge over people's life spans. "Entertaining the God of the Big Dipper is not intended to get more years of life for the one that is already dead; rather, it is to beg for longevity and for the ongoing survival of the family. Hence it is very common for the mourning families to hire yin-yangs to chant Beidou Jing (北斗經 Verses and Hymns to the Grand Seven Chief Sages of the North). This activity, in our jargon, is called 'the praying with sacrifices to the God of the Big Dipper (禳星告斗)'" (Z. J. Meng, personal communication, July 2007).
- The Earth God must also be notified, or invited if there is a sacrificial ritual, in order to get permission to open the earth to dig the grave. If a dead person must be removed from one grave to another in a faraway place for a reburial, the Earth God of the old grave site must be thanked and permission from the Earth God in the new grave site must be requested.

- The King of Medicine may also be invited to a sacrificial ritual if the deceased died of a disease. The yin-yang will beg this god to bless the mourning family with good health.

In addition to the afore-mentioned high-ranking gods, numerous low-ranking local gods must also be notified. These include (1) the town god (城隍) if in a town, or the village god (村廟) if in a village, because this god is in charge of the region or area where the dead person belongs; (2) the Ghost-Escorting Messenger (押魂使者) and the Ghost-Discerning Minor Servant (判魂童子) if a person dies in one place and needs to be moved to another place for burial; (3) the Kitchen God (竈君) must be informed, regardless of whether there is a specific sacrificial ritual or not, because the mourning family will keep the Kitchen God very busy for a few days with meal preparations. Therefore at least libations and incense must be offered to the Kitchen God.

Regarding inviting gods, Master Meng has the following remarks: "If a god that is expected to be invited is not actually invited, then he will be offended; if a god that is not expected to be invited is actually invited, then other gods might be offended; so we human beings have to make sure no rules are violated and no deities are offended" (Z. J. Meng, personal communication, July 2007). This double-edged aspect of funeral rituals shows the high degree of precision that is required, necessitating the engagement of the trained yin-yang leaders.

Fifth and finally, the right texts must be recited so that the ghost of the deceased person will not be sent down into hell. In the Chinese folk religion, hell is located somewhere below, underneath the yang world; therefore the direction to hell is always

termed as downward, as it is reflected in the Chinese set phrase as *xia diyu* (下地狱) – an antonym of *shang tiantang* (上天堂, going up to the heaven).

Keeping in mind this central and precise nature of the funeral ritual in this cultural context, I now turn to an ethnographic description of a particular event in which I needed to balance my own dual insider and outsider participant observer role. The following is a full recount of funeral procedures and rites for my maternal grandmother. As quite a number of rituals were held concurrently, it was beyond my ability to observe all of them directly; therefore the recounts here are a combination of direct observations as well as of numerous interviews with the yin-yangs and the villagers not long after the events. The third and the fourth parts in particular are based on my own direct participant observations interpreted through my lifetime of primary cultural and linguistic knowledge.

(1) The passing away of my grandmother and the arrangements for mourning. On July 29, 2003 my maternal grandmother breathed her last breath. She was 91, but she had been in good health throughout her years. She became suddenly sick, after lunch.

My aunt and my uncle were sitting next to my grandmother. My aunt is a retired village doctor[67] so she started checking the pulse while discussing with my uncle as to whether or not they should send my grandmother to the hospital. Soon they found it was too late to even call an ambulance, and the moment they were sure that my grandmother had passed away, they closed her half-open eyes. They then took out the traditional

[67] A village doctor, nicknamed bare-foot doctor during the Cultural Revolution time was one who had received some training during 1960s (some were certified in 1970s, like my aunt); the main task of a village doctor was to provide basic diagnostics to the patients and sell medicine (such as pain killers or those for cold and for small children); all of them were trained to give shots or even intravenous injection to the patients.

graveclothes readied for use in this moment (壽衣, or 老衣)[68] and put them on my grandmother, over the clothes she was already wearing. It is a custom to prepare graveclothes for an old family member when she or he reaches sixty, or when she or he has grandchild(ren), or when she or he has been pronounced by a doctor to be incurable and is counting the last days. Then my aunt and my uncle spread some straw – about three centimeters thick – on the floor of the room, alongside one of the walls, so there would be room for the mourners. They moved her body onto the straw – this is called *luocao* (落草, landing on the straw), laying her on her back and facing her towards the back of the room, so the mourners would not see her head when they walked into the room. Then they opened her mouth, which had not yet become stiff, and placed inside it an old copper coin that had also been previously prepared for this moment. It is ideal for the coin to be silver or even gold, but regardless of its composition, it is called *tankoujin* (弹口金, mouth suppressing gold). Next, they found a sheet of white paper to cover her face, and a piece of thin flax string to tie the tips of her feet together. These have all been local customs for generations. While my aunt made telephone calls to the relatives to inform them of the news, my uncle then went and found a fragment of an old clay tile and soaked it into a bucket of cold water for a few minutes before placing it over my grandmother's chest. This was done to more quickly cool down her body temperature. Cooling down the temperature of a corpse quickly is always a challenge and a matter of concern for family members when the death occurs during the heat of mid-summer. This being the seasonal case for my grandmother's death, as an additional measure to cool

[68] The graveclothes for a female are usually two pieces in the Xi-Hai-Gu region: An outer garment and a skirt. Old-generation women like my grandmother never wore a skirt in their life time; so the only time they wear skirts is when they are buried.

down her body temperature, he poured some sorghum wine onto the tile – according to the local people, alcohol vaporizes fast and thereby it helps reduce body temperature fast.

The first person my aunt called[69] was her cousin Chang Wanliang, who was a designated male mourner of my grandmother.[70] My grandmother gave birth to two daughters, and the local custom has it that in cases where there are no sons, there is a need to find a stepson and identify him as her future male mourner. In the local cultural context this stepson was considered more appropriate than having one of her two daughters take the lead mourner role. There is a patriarchal and patrilineal intention behind this custom, which is to designate a male "child" so that the family's surname will be passed on (傳香火). Therefore about 30 years ago, Chang Wanliang, a son of my grandfather's fifth brother, was appointed as the stepson and the heir of my grandmother. This kind of stepson on the father's side is considered the most reliable because he does not have to change his real surname. Additionally this means that the family he has been adopted into is closely related to his own and therefore requires no significant kinship changes. After this arrangement of a primary male mourner was made years before, and including her two daughters, my grandmother was set up to have three primary mourners at her death. However, my own mother passed away ahead of her in 1996, leaving my aunt and my uncle Wanliang as the two remaining primary mourners.

Before the relatives began arriving, my aunt and uncle next had to set up a mourning room with a family shrine – which in fact has items representing both a shrine and an altar. They cleared a table that was next to my grandmother's body. This table would be used to place a kerosene lamp (in lieu of a candle), and also incense sticks and

[69] Prior to such modern means of communication like telephones, news about a dead family was spread either through baosang (see below) or other people or letter writing.
[70] I am using past tense here because Mr. Chang Wanliang passed away in 2011.

offerings like….While my aunt was preparing to put a brownish ceramic incense burner at the back center of the table, my uncle folded a piece of white paper into a tablet and, with a writing brush, wrote these words:

常门慈母王氏之神位

The spirit tablet of MS Wang, the deceased kind-hearted Mother of the Chang family.

Wang is my grandmother's surname; Chang was her husband's surname. The tablet was vertically set up on one end of a piece of bamboo that was about the size of a chopstick, both in thickness and length. With both hands, my uncle placed the tablet into a bowl of rice, which was also prepared by my aunt and had been placed right behind the incense burner, and then he lit three sticks of incense. He held the incense sticks up about the height of his forehead, paused for about one and half seconds, then slowly lowered his hands and stuck the incense sticks into the sand which was the content of the incense burner. They found a kerosene lamp to place on the table, and lighted it. This lamp would be kept there throughout the entire mourning period so the mourners could use it to ignite the paper money – that was prepared by the mourning family and brought by the visitors. My aunt found a small bowl from the kitchen, poured into it some cooking oil until about 80% full, and then made a wick with new cotton; when the old-fashioned oil lamp was ready, she placed it next to my grandmother's head, at the right side, about 40 centimeters away. This is called the *yin-hun-deng* (引魂燈, ghost-leading lamp). Whenever the oil went down, my aunt or somebody else would add more. Like the kerosene lamp, the ritual practice calls for this cooking-oil lamp to be kept burning all the time so my grandmother's three souls would not be scared of the darkness and run away. When all

these things are ready, they took two china plates and displayed some fruit in front of the incense burner. This was the very first offering to my grandmother. Then they washed two teapots of two different sizes. Sorghum wine was poured into the small pot and tea into the big one. Both of these are for libations. The last thing they prepared was an enamel washbasin whose diameter was about 30 centimeters; it was placed in front of the sacrificial table, with about a quarter of the washbasin extending under the table. This basin was so placed to catch the ashes of the paper money that was burned. This washbasin was placed there to protect the floor tiles because my aunt and uncle live in the city; in the countryside, it would have been an earthen basin (which will be explained later in this chapter).

Less than half an hour passed before relatives living in Guyuan city began arriving at irregular intervals, bringing food, fruits and paper money they bought from drugstores venders. The food and fruits were to be placed on the sacrificial table for a few hours, and then only a very small portion of the sacrifices would be thrown into the burning paper money. At the same time as the paper money was burned, tea and sorghum wine was poured round about the basin as libation. These early rounds of diverse sacrifices would soon be followed by other varieties of sacrificial offerings brought by other relatives and friends who came later as they learned the news of my grandmother's death.

(2) The official mourning shrine and the memorial setting. My aunt's home is in the city of Guyuan, but the family graveyard where my grandmother was to be buried is in Qijiazhuang, a village 40 kilometers southwest of Guyuan and only 1.5 kilometers from my hometown of Fanmagou. Qijiazhuang village is where all my mother's paternal

uncles, aunts and most of her cousins, including my uncle Chang Wanliang, the adopted stepson and male mourner, live or lived.

Immediately after receiving the call from my aunt, Chang Wanliang did four things: (1) He sent a cousin by motorcycle to go find and invite a yin-yang to preside over the funeral; (2) he sent another cousin by motorcycle to buy white cotton cloth for the mourning attire - for this task, this relative would have to work with another relative to calculate the amount of the cloth needed based on the number of all the mourners; (3) as he did not have a wife and children himself, he asked his youngest brothers' family (with whom he lived) to start preparing for a big meal to serve to the fellow villagers who would begin arriving soon after the obituary news was announced – typically there is a one-person-per-family attendance policy; (4) he asked another male cousin of his to go with him to do a *baosang* ritual in the village (報喪, to orally announce the news of the death and to invite the fellow villagers for help).[71] This last task is actually part of the overall funeral ritual. The following description is based on interviews of a group of Fanmagou villagers about the *baosang* ritual.

Baosang is to formally announce the death of a relative to the entire village and to invite the fellow villagers to come to the funeral service. As part of this ritual announcement, it also plays an important role in inviting the fellow villagers to assist with the physical labor associated with the funeral – to dig the grave, to carry the coffin, to bury the dead, and then to participate in the house cleansing ritual; all activities require the help of additional people beyond the immediate family and some of them, such as digging the grave and burying the dead, can only be done by people that are not mourners.

[71] My aunt did not go through the *baosang* ritual. Because all her relatives in Guyuan are one generation younger, she did not have to go to each house of her relatives to inform them of the news; instead, she just made calls, which is now a commonly accepted, urbanized version of *baosang*.

If the dead person had children or relatives, they would be responsible for leading the *baosang* procedure; otherwise the fellow villagers will volunteer to assist with the work. There is no specific sequence as to which part of the village should be informed of the death first; but by custom, the ritual announcement has to be done door-to-door. The ritual informers must proceed to the front gate of each family home and kneel down before calling aloud the name of that family's first child, or the head of the family. When someone comes outside of the house, they will kowtow and announce the news of the death. After the announcement is made they then say: "Now we will have to bother you and invite you to come to help us." Customarily, the head of the family promptly promises to go and help as needed, and then the informers move on to the next family home, continuing until they have made visits to the entire village. During the overall *baosang* procedure, the informers also identify and ask one individual to do a special favor to the family; which is to be the *zongguan* (喪事總管, funeral manager) of the entire funerary activity. The *zongguan* is usually someone who is able to handle multitasks and is good at the calculations needed to manage the overall events. This person is also the coordinator between the mourning family, the yin-yang(s), and the carpenter(s), if a coffin must be made.

According to the yin-yangs' description, the ritual action of *baosang* has another social function; the moment the *baosang* is initiated, the entire village will know that from that day on, the close family mourners, particularly the children of the deceased, are not supposed to enter any villager's house for 100 days – they may only enter homes of their own extended family. The yin-yang masters who I interviewed explained the rationale for this prohibition.

According to their beliefs, during the mourning period, it is not only the ghost of the deceased parent that may be hanging around the family, but other ghosts may be drawn there as well. The wandering hungry ghosts (遊魂餓鬼) may also be lurking in the area attempting to take advantage of the daily sacrifices of food and paper money associated with the death. This is understood and accepted by the mourning family; but it is not a desirable situation for the other village families because these wandering hungry ghosts could bring them misfortunes like diseases. Moreover, there is also the more physical concern that since someone has passed away within the mourning family, it is likely that the germs associated with the death are still lingering and might be transmitted to other villagers by the family mourners. Finally, by tradition the family mourners are not supposed to have a happy mood for at least the first few weeks after the death. Consequently, if they were to visit a fellow villager it is believed they would bring and transmit their sad mood to that family, which is also undesirable. These are the spiritual, physical, and emotional aspects of the mourning-period prohibition (Z. Zhang, interview with Master Ma and Master Meng, July 2004).

Returning to my grandmother's death, even before the *baosang* procedure was fully completed, the yin-yang and his apprentice arrived by motorcycle. (Although the apprentice was not yet initiated, customarily they both are referred to as yin-yangs, which is how I will refer to them hereafter.) They were greeted by the newly chosen mourning manager, who had arrived half an hour earlier, and also by the mourning family which, almost immediately, served a light meal – noodles with fried eggs – to the yin-yangs. Very shortly after the meal, the master yin-yang began gathering information about the deceased and members of the family so as to prepare the ritual "paper work" as well as to

identify the auspicious dates and a time to bury the deceased. The following is a list of the specific information he gathered:

- The surname of my grandmother – the yin-yangs already knew my grandfather's surname so he did not ask.
- The birth date and death date of the deceased.
- The names of all the primary mourners – the children or stepchildren of the deceased, including sons-in-law.
- The names of the secondary mourners – nephews and nieces of the deceased.
- The names of the grandchildren of the deceased.
- The location of the family graveyard and its directional orientations.

Immediately after the master yin-yang learned that the family graveyard was West-East in direction, he sighed and told the funeral manager that my grandmother could not be buried there at this time, because it was the year of the Ram and the West-East direction was ill-suited for that calendar year. The funeral manager and the mourning family was a little disappointed at this news, because they all knew that my grandmother would have to be temporarily buried somewhere else in the vicinity of the family graveyard in a North-South direction and then move later to the family graveyard. As the master yin-yang had already learned that the corpse was in Guyuan city, he asked whether the mourning family was going to buy a coffin there or have one made in Qijiazhuang. Making, rather than buying, a coffin is typical in village funerals, whereas the opposite is often the case in cities. He was told that her coffin had already been made a few years ago and was being kept in Qijiazhuang village.

About 10 minutes later the master yin-yang prepared a tablet for a separate family shrine – like the one at my aunt's house in Guyuan, it was likewise a combination of a shrine and an altar. The differences from the shrine in Guyuan were: since there was no corpse next to the shrine there was no need for a basin under the table. Had the corpse been next to the sacrificial table, an earthen basin would have been under the table to hold the ashes of the paper money. Then, when the corpse is put into the coffin and is lifted to be moved toward the graveyard, the primary mourner would hold the earthen basin upon his head and throw it at the front part, or the smaller end, of the coffin. According the villagers, the functions of doing this are: (1) to show that the primary mourner tries with his last effort to stop his dear mother (or father) from being carried away, and (2) to let the departing relative carry the paper money along as his / her *panchan* (盤纏, traveling expenses).

The tablet that the yin-yang made bears the following words:

公故先妣常君王氏之神位

Spirit tablet of the deceased mother MS Wang of the Chang

Figure 8 A separate family shrine that was set up in Qijiazhuang, at the male main mourner's house.[72]

[72] Video clip from Luckert DVD, 2004.

After Chang Wanliang finished the baosang door-to-door announcement, he returned home. He prostrated himself in front of the master yin-yang and received a spirit tablet made by the yin yang for the shrine (see image and translation). He thanked the yin-yang, stood up, and placed the tablet onto the center of the table. At the front of the tablet, he placed an incense burner and lit three incense sticks over a self-made kerosene lamp, and then he placed the food sacrifice, which consisted of newly-made steamed sacrificial bread (獻饃饃).[73]

One of his brothers, nicknamed Number-Five, brought two pots and placed them in front of the bread. One contained sorghum wine, and the other tea that was not anything special from that which the living people drink, but extra effort was made to make the tea pot cleaner than usual. Chang Wanliang knelt down to burn a few sheets of paper money while Number-Five poured a libation of the wine and the tea onto the ground in front of the shrine. Three other family members who were in the room during the setting up of the shrine and at the initial sacrifice, also knelt down and several female family members wailed outside, in the yard. Wailing at home without the coming of guests / fellow villagers was more emotional than ritual; yet many villagers agree that wailing is another way to announce and / or to confirm the sad news. After this initial opening of the shrine by the immediate family, the incoming relatives and the fellow villagers were then able to pay their respect and to offer their own sacrifices. Customary sacrificial offerings include steamed sacrificial bread, fruits, and canned fruits bought from a small store in the village.

[73] Sacrificial steamed bread is different in shape from regular ones. There are two kinds of sacrificial steamed bread: one is cylindrical, plum tomato-shaped, which is usually small in size (about 1/5 of a pound in weight); the other is dome-shaped, which is usually large in size (around one pound in weight).

(a) Front-door obituary (門告). While the mourners offered their very first sacrifice, the yin-yang wrote the "Front-Door Obituary" on a full-size piece of white paper. This is a formal ritual document that reads:

不孝男常万良罪孽深重不自陨灭祸延公故先妣常门慈君王氏原命子鼠相壬子年九月望日受生享寿九旬有二逝于公元二零零三年古七月朔日因病告终正寝不孝等亲视含殓遵制成服择定本月初二日吉日吉时扶柩发引新茔北山北向安厝倘蒙亲谊送殡吊奠者寸楮片纸概不敢领 仅此

计

闻

哀子孝男泣血稽颡抆泪同拜

侄男常万瑞等泣血抆泪 同拜

The undutiful[74] son Chang Wanliang is gravely sinful [i.e. negligent] but did not I[75] myself perish and [thereby] have caused the harm to be extended to my old mother MS Wang[76] of the Chang family, who was born under the zodiac of rat [e.g. one of the 12 animals] on the 15th day in the ninth month of the lunar calendar in the year of *Renzi* (壬子), and lived up to 92 years; she passed away in the living room on the first day of the seventh month (lunar calendar) of the year of 2003 of the solar

[74] Undutiful: This is a typical way to show modesty. Mourners do not claim that they are dutiful children; it is custom for others to praise them as dutiful children.
[75] The word "I" here refers to the primary mourner, Mr. Chang Wanliang. Letters as such are written in a tone of the first person. In this sense, a yin-yang master is only doing it on behalf of the mourner, or a family.
[76] MS: The Western concept of "Mrs." does not exist in this culture.

calendar[77] due to an illness. I as well as other undutiful relatives will personally witness the coffining and make mourning dresses according to the tradition. A lucky day and auspicious hour[78] have been chosen to escort the coffin to the new graveyard at the Northern Mountain with north-south direction to bury. Should relatives and friends come to offer sacrifices and condolences, we dare not accept even small pieces of paper.[79]

Sincerely we hereby announce

The news

Shedding tears of blood the orphaned child worships by koutowing and wiping tears.

Nephew Chang Wanrui[80] and all the other nephews worship with tears and blood from our eyes.

The "Front Door Obituary" was pasted to a door plank, which was taken down from the front door of the family courtyard, and then leaned against a small stool in the foreyard, close to the passage that connects to the village's main path.

This obituary has ritual functions beyond the practical announcing of the news of the death to the villagers; Master Meng made the following remarks amplifying the spiritual reasons for this component:

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[77] Master Ma said before the Western calendar was introduced to China, all yin-yangs were using the Chinese lunar calendar; but gradually some yin-yangs felt it more convenient to use the solar calendar. (2002)

[78] Lucky day and auspicious hour: The burial time will be determined by a yin-yang.

[79] The local custom is, full-size uncut plain white paper is the must-bring-gift for visitors to the mourning family. A lot of white paper is needed for (1) printing paper money, (2) making paper sacrificial items, and decorating mourning sites. "Dare not accept": This is another way to show modesty; but mourners and fellow villagers will not come without sacrificial gifts.

[80] Chang Wanrui was the oldest nephew of my grandmother. As there were altogether over 20 nephews, only the name of the oldest was put up on the front door obituary.

> …it [the Front Door Obituary] is also for passersby to stop and read. Every time the obituary is read, credits of respect will be added to the deceased. This is good because it will help to offset the sins that the deceased might have committed in his or her life…There is a saying that goes like this: Three feet above the ground there are gods / spirits (離地三尺有神明) watching and listening. They collect information and report to relevant gods about the deceased – this is true to the living as well and you know that every day there is a Star God on duty. That's how one's words and deeds (good conduct and misconduct) are recorded and one's future and length of life (陽壽) are determined (Z. J. Meng, personal communication, September 2013).

(b) The antithetical couplets. Right after the Front Door Obituary was finished and placed, the master yin-yang began writing the traditional poetic lines, or more specifically, the antithetical couplets, that are exclusively composed for such funerary purposes (喪事對聯). He wrote these on strips of white paper that had been prepared by his yin yang apprentice. He learned from the funeral manager that three pairs of the couplets were needed – there are altogether six doors but not all of them need a pair of the couplets. So for the front gate (or the courtyard door, whose plank had been taken down for the obituary) he wrote the following couplet (see explanations of these couplets in the analysis section, below):

海山莫並親恩重

覆載難容子道虧

Seas and mountains cannot match the weight of the deep affection to my relative,

Heaven and earth are unable to contain the deficiency of this son's filial piety.

And on the top of the doorframe, these words were written: The sorrowful heat is like broken (憂心如碎).

For the mourning room, he wrote this couplet:

日落西山不見面

水流東海難回頭

The sun that sinks in the west cannot be seen,

The water that flows to the east will hardly return.

And on the top of the doorframe, these words were written: Mourning wailing with tears (喪哭致泣)

As for the kitchen, he wrote this couplet:

母容莫睹傷心難禁千行淚

親恩未報哀痛不覺九迴腸

Unable to see Mother's face, saddened, cannot hold back thousand drops of tears,

Haven't repaid her kindness, grieved, suddenly realized all worriedness.

On the top of the doorframe, these words were written: The voice and grace will last forever (音澤長存)

These antithetical couplets[81] were written on white paper, instead of red paper; because white color is related to sadness both locally and throughout Chinese culture. In fact, traditionally these ritual couplets, if red are called *xidui* (喜對, happy couplets)

[81] According to Master Ma (personal communication, July 2002), over 90% of these couplets were copied from the old-generation yin-yang books; occasionally a more educated yin-yang will create new couplets specifically designated to the deceased that is mourned.

while white couplets are called *xiaodui* or *sangdui* (孝對 or 喪對, mourning or funeral couplets).

After writing and placing the three white paper couplets, the yin-yang asked the family whether a long narrow flag (長幡) would be needed to further extend the public death announcement and to publicize the good virtue of the death. The family said no. The reason for declining this additional ritual component, as my uncle Wanliang told me later, was that (1) it would cost extra money and (2) since his house is far away from the main road, no additional people would have been able to see the long narrow flag (W. L. Chang, personal communication, August 2010).

(c) Official documents to the yin world. The yin-yangs next moved on to the writing of the "Disaster-Narrating Note" (殃狀單子, or, as Master Ding explained,[82] the "Introduction Letter to the Yin World") and "The Apology Letter to the Earth God" (祭土文). These are key ritual texts that were needed immediately because the burial time was set for 6:00 a.m. the next morning and the grave diggers would need them completed in order to start digging before dark. To save time, the master yin-yang decided that he and his apprentice would write the two documents separately. The apprentice was given the easier one – The Apology Letter to the Earth God. Because there was already a template for this letter in the master yin-yang's bag, his apprentice only needed to copy the text by filling in the blanks with the specific information acquired from the mourning family. In less than twenty minutes, both of ritual letters were completed and the master yin-yang took out his six-sided seal and stamped each of the documents.

[82] (H. J. Ding, personal communication, August 2003).

Next, the master yin-yang assigned his apprentice to write a "Ghost-Leading Road Certificate" (引路亡票) and a "Ghost-Leading Banner" (引魂幡, see explanation and description below).

By this time four villagers, who were to be the grave-diggers, had finished their light meal offered by the mourning family, and they were ready to go up the mountain to the temporary burial location. Standing beside them on this place was Chang Wanliang who, according to the master yin-yang's specific requests, had collected the following ritual items that were needed for the grave digging:

- A peach-twig bow and five willow-branch arrows
- A stack of paper money, a box of incense sticks and a bottle of sorghum wine
- A kitchen knife and a bundle of millet straw that was tied with three single threads

By the time they were ready to leave, it was almost 6:30 p.m. and the master yin-yang, with his bag in hand, accompanied Chang Wanliang and the four villagers up the hill to my grandmother's family graveyard.

The graveyard is a little more than a kilometer from the village and it has eight tombs in it. Owing to the fact that my grandmother could not be buried there yet, a different burial place had to be found. However, because this first burial was only a temporary or sojourn-type burial, the task was to find a suitable place in close vicinity. The place they identified was about 300 meters to the south of the family graveyard, in a fellow villager's field, where crops were growing.[83] The master yin-yang drew a rough

[83] The compensation of the crops destroyed by the burial was negotiated between the mourning family and the owner of the field before the decision was made; if an agreement was not reached, the mourning family would have to look for a different villager.

outline of the graveyard and then the five people stepped down the crops before the master yin-yang used his magnetic compass to draw precise lines of the selected grave area at the center of the yard where the grave-pit was to be dug.

After the outline of the graveyard was drawn, the master yin-yang led the group to the upper right corner – from the perspective of a living person choosing the site – of the square and knelt down. My uncle Chang Wanliang took out the paper money, the incense sticks and the sorghum wine. He ignited the paper money and used the flame to ignite the incense sticks. When he saw the smoke of the incense sticks rising up,[84] the master yin-yang began reading the following letter that his apprentice had copied / composed to the Earth God:

祭土文

维

公元二零零三年岁次癸未夏七月己未朔越祭日癸卯祭主常万良上叩谨以香烛酒礼之仪于新茔后土之尊神前曰，土德广大，生育万物，土府有一千二百尊神。即有一千二百凶煞。兹因弟子葬埋先妣新茔，北山南北向安厝，唯恐山间不利，冒犯土府神煞，因而敬备的酒礼祭献，修文祭土，消除厄难。赦免灾殃。伏愿祭之以后，多蒙保佑。家宅顺利，人口降吉降祥。生者永受福庇，亡者早得超升。神其有知，伏维敢告。尚

飨。

[84] Both the yin-yangs and the villagers believe that the smoke of burning incense will reduce the bad smell from human mouths and thereby human prayers can be clean enough to reach the ears of the gods.

祭土文

消煞文

A Letter to the Earth God with Sacrifice

Re:

On the first day (Guimao, 癸卯) of the seventh moon (Jiwei, 己未) of the year of Guiwei (癸未, [which is] the year 2003 by the Western calendar), the primary mourner Chang Wanliang humbly kowtows here with such sacrificial gifts as incense, candles and wine before the venerated God of Earth of the new graveyard and says, the earth has enormous virtue and gives birth to all things in the world. The government of earth has 1,200 venerated gods and accordingly it also has 1,200 demons. Inasmuch as I, your disciple, will bury my deceased mother in the new grave, which is on the northern hill, in North-South direction, I am afraid that it might be unfavorable in the hills there and offend the gods and demons in the government of the earth. Thus I have humbly prepared wine and [other] sacrifices along with this letter to you to eliminate misfortunes and to have our calamities pardoned. I sincerely hope that after this sacrifice we can be blessed, so our house will be prosperous and lucky and auspiciousness will befall our family. The living will always be blessed and protected, and the dead will be expiated of their sins. In hoping to let you, my god, know this, I am humbly taking the liberty. Please help yourself to the nice food.

Letter to the God of Earth

Letter for eliminating the disasters[85]

The letter was burned after this reading aloud, and then a libation of wine was served to complete the ritual. Everybody then kowtowed and got up. “Now let’s cut the straw,” said the yin-yang.

One of the four grave-digging villagers handed the peach bow and the three willow arrows to Chang Wanliang, and another handed the millet straw bundle and the kitchen knife to the yin-yang.[86] The yin-yang laid the straw in the center of the graveyard he had outlined and started chanting the following verses:

一斩去天殃　The first cut expels the heavenly disaster

妖鬼尽躲藏　All sorts of evil-doers will go hiding

星辰来护卫　The stars will come to guard and protect

日月显三光　The sun and the moon shows the three lights

With the falling of his voice, he bent down and chopped the straw in halves. Two short straw bundles jumped up at the force of his chop and landed diagonally at the yin-yang’s front sides. He straightened up and continued chanting:

二斩去地殃　The second cut expels the earthly disaster

戊己坐中央　The Wu-and-Ji directories sit in the central

伏尸皆化散　The hidden dead bodies shall all scatter

[85] See the analysis section in this chapter for explanation of this second title of the letter.

[86] According to Masters Ma and Meng, there is a more elaborate way of doing the grass/straw cutting. The mourning family is required to go up to three different hills/mountains to pick three grasses (can be the same grass) from each hill/mountain, and then use five pieces of threads of five colors (五色線 green, red, white, black and yellow – representing the five directions: east, south, west, north and central) to bundle them up, so there will be three bundles of grasses from three mountains (三山草). This way, the yin-yang will cut one bundle each time.

魍魉总消亡　　Demons and monsters all disappear

The yin-yang then bent down and cut the left half of the straw again into smaller halves and straightened up to chant again:

三斩去鬼殃　　The third cut expels the ghostly disaster

鬼魅尽消亡　　Ghosts and goblins should completely perish

亡魂超仙界　　The ghost of deceased will be redeemed

穴内永祯祥　　The catacomb shall always be auspicious

Upon finish his chanting, the yin-yang bent down and cut the right half of the straw again into smaller halves. After this third cut, he handed the kitchen knife to a villager and said to Chang Wanliang: You can shoot the arrows now.

Chang Wanliang stood inside the outlined graveyard and shot the arrows in the following order: east, south, west, north, and then down into the center where the straw had been cut into multiple halves.

When this series of gravesite preparation rituals was completed, the yin-yang returned to the village with Chang Wanliang, leaving the four villagers to dig the grave-pit. In this case, they did not need any additional rituals or further instructions since at least one of them had performed this role and work in the past.

When the yin-yangs and Chang Wanliang returned to the village, there were about 20 villagers and relatives at Chang's house; they came to pay their respects to my grandmother. They were now having a meal – an economical dinner that had meat, which was considered luxury in the countryside – that the mourning family provided.[87] As there

[87] For the past decade, standard of life in the villages of Qijiazhuang and Fanmagou has been noticeably improved; nowadays villagers can have meat almost every week, much more frequently than 2-3 decades

were not enough tables and chairs for so many people, they were squatting all over the yard, holding the bowls in their hands, eating and chatting. Usually in a mourning family, there would be no sounds of laughing or loud-speaking, but at this mourning family, people, including some of the mourning nephews and nieces of the deceased, were chatting, laughing and making various kinds of jokes. Yet this is not entirely abnormal. The custom has it that when a villager dies at a good age – seventy years or older, and has great grandchildren, the funeral can be like a celebration. In some places they even use colored paper to decorate the mourning place, including the antithetical couplets.

The mourning family served the yin-yangs and the funeral manager a more decent dinner, which had additional dishes such as chicken and deep-fried dough cakes; a bottle of sorghum wine was also served to these three.[88] Another difference was that they were honored to eat on the *kang*, a heatable clay bed, at a small *kang*-top table. This was also the usual practice in the village so nobody questioned that.

No sooner had the yin-yangs finished with their meal, than one of the villagers, Mr. Luo Youcai, approached the funeral manager and the yin-yangs. Luo Youcai had kindly kept my grandmother's coffin during the past years, and now offered to drive his farm pickup to Guyuan to fetch the corpse. He asked the master yin-yang for the objects that were needed for his trip.

The master yin-yang asked the funeral manager if the funerary objects had been found. When he received the positive answer, he double checked the two documents that

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ago when eating meat was only occasional. (Zhang, interview with Zhang Haicheng and Zhao Zhenyuan, 2012-2013)

[88] Had there been a scripture chanting, the serve of sorghum wine would have been postponed till the end of all rituals.

his apprentice had prepared. The first was “The Road-leading Certificate” (or “The Road Ticket”, 引路亡票).

北魁玄范府，通用路票。恭迓

道旨敕赦生天宝录以皆为戒送亡魂归回故乡事票仰

酆都城隍诸大鬼王九幽冥官主者神虎追缉将吏三部追魂使者即将新亡过常门王氏讳凤莲因病亡故在宁夏固原市城内今者卜定吉日迁移本地搬迁新茔安葬形归窀穸二宅俱利存亡共庆倘遇沿途河头水尾关津渡口有强神恶鬼遏截阻挡者定依女青律令天律治罪施行决不宽恕须至票者

讣物常门王氏讳凤莲灵魂速赴故乡

信受奉行

票差押魂使者判魂童子二大真人准此

照验

公元二零零三年古七月初二日票行限定当日辰时缴到

Common Road Ticket [issued] by the Northern Star (Beikui, 北魁) Xuanfan Office [89] Humbly welcomes

The Daoist decree[90] that pardons and grants the rebirth in the heaven and prepares everything to escort the ghost of the dead to her hometown, [91] we hereby rely on the support of

[89] The residence and office of the Lord of Zhonghe, where the No. 1 Central Star directs all kings in the spiritual world. The Central Star is the most majestic among the five human-life-controlling stars. (Zhang, 2013, Interview with Master Meng)

The Town God of Fengdu, all the great kings of ghosts, the executive of officials in the Underworld, the divine tiger, the chasing officers, the ghost-tracing messengers in the three departments instantly move the newly deceased MS. Wang Fenglian of the Chang family, who died of diease in the city of Guyuan and an auspicious day has been chosen, to her original place so her physical body will be buried in the grave. Both the yin and the yang dwelling places will be propitious and the living and the dead will celebrate. In case there are brutal and unreasonable gods and evil spirits that attempt to intercept or stop at the ferries, crossroads, river banks or road passes, do punish them according to the heavenly code of Nüqing[92] and never forgive them. Upon receiving this Road Certificate the ghost of MS. Wang Fenglian of the Chang family, who is now the object of the obituary, should return to the hometown immediately by obeying this order.

The great two True Men, the Ghost-Escorting Messenger and the Ghost-Discerning Minor Servant, are hereby dispatched to check and make sure that [the ghost of the deceased] will return [to her hometown] between 7:00 – 9:00 AM on
the second day of the seventh moon by the lunar calendar, in the year of 2003, by the Western calendar.

The master yin-yang was satisfied with the letter; he selected from his six-sided power seals the seal of the "Northern Star (Beikui, 北魁) Xuanfan Office" (北魁玄範府

[90] The format of the letters as such makes sure that names of important gods mentioned in the letter appear at top of a new vertical column. As the columns are written vertically, it is also possible to position the gods' names one or two characters higher than the rest of the text, to indicate their lofty position. Specific dates are also written a little higher than the rest of the text to show it emphatically.
[91] As the local custom has it, a female villager has two hometowns; one is her maiden hometown (娘家) and the other her husband's hometown (婆家). In this case it is the latter.
[92] The full name is "the Code of Nüqing for [Controlling] the Demons" (Mollier, 2008, p. 104).

印), damped it in the cinnabar – which is believed to have a function of calming the nerves and tranquilizing the shocks – inkpad, and then stamped it on the letter at the concluding section and handed it to Mr. Luo, telling him that this was to be pasted outside the rear end of the coffin[93] right after the corpse was put in. "In case of rain," he said, "roll it up and hold it in the hands of whoever that holds the ghost-leading banner" (Y. C. Luo, personal communication, July 2003).[94]

Since the Ghost-Leading Banner was mentioned, the master yin-yang checked the one his apprentice had written on a long strip of white paper (about 15 cm by 60 cm) and then stamped "The Seal of the Army and Governing Office of the Thunderbolt" (雷霆都司印) before handing it to Mr. Luo. The banner bears the following:

> 东极慈尊放祥光而接引南丹贵府指云路以超升接引常府王氏凤莲真正乙位灵魂早生净界以超升开通冥路天尊
>
> The kind and venerated at the Extreme East releases auspicious light to escort and the honorable residence in the Utmost South guides the cloudy path to jump promote[95] and to accept and lead the true ghost of MS. Wang Fenglian of the Chang family to be reborn soon in the pure land and get re-enlivened. The Heavenly Venerable Road Opener to the Netherworld.[96]

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[93] After a corpse is placed in a coffin, its rear end should head to the direction that it is moved. This means the deceased is "walking" home, instead of leaving home. That is why the Road Ticket must be pasted on the rear end.

[94] If inclement weather is experienced, the letter should be burned and the ashes should be folded into a piece of soft yellow paper (黃表紙) and stuffed into the sleeve of the deceased. Left sleeve for male and right sleeve for female. (Zhang, 2003, field note in Qijiazhuang)

[95] "Jump promote" means to transcend from the mundane world after death and move to the world of bliss; it is a concept borrowed from Buddhism.

[96] Not like in the letter writing, here on the banner the "Heavenly Venerable" was not written in a separate line because altogether there were only two lines written on it.

The master yin-yang told Luo Youcai that one of the mourners should hold the banner in the front of the vehicle; he should also throw the paper coins along the road. The "paper coins" (or the 貫錢) that the master yin-yang referred to is a different kind of paper money that is not printed, but scissor-cut in round shape with a square hole punched in the middle of it, looking like the old copper coins that had been used in China for centuries (from ca. 200 BCE to 1911). The funeral manager instantly brought a full basket of the "paper coins" and handed it to Mr. Luo.

Now the master yin-yang said there was one more thing for Luo Youcai to take along, which was the "Introduction Letter to the Yin World" (殃狀單子):

> 谨遵茔元内载推选本音门下入棺内外禳物开列于后。
>
> 一課公故先妣常慈君王氏原命子鼠相壬子年七月十五日受生享壽九十二旬有己迺於公元二 00 三年古七月初一日約定午時因病告終正寢擇定七月初二日吉日吉時扶柩發引新塋北山北向安厝大吉
>
> Faithfully abiding by the regulations of the grave masters the following praying and sacrificial items are reckoned to be placed inside and outside the coffin for this category of surnames.[97]
>
> Items List 1: The deceased MS Wang of the Chang family who belonged to the zodiac of rat (the year of Renzi[98]) and was born on the fifteenth day of the ninth moon and she enjoyed ninety-two years of age. She died in bed of a right age around noon of the first day of the seventh moon of the lunar calendar, in the year

[97] According to the feng-shui school, all Chinese surnames are put into five groups by their initial consonants of Chinese syllables: Gong, Shang, Jiao, Zhi and Yu (宮商角徵羽). My grandmother's surname is Wang, it thereby belongs to the Shang consonant group.
[98] Which means 1912 in this case.

of 2003 by the Western calendar. The auspicious date and hour have been chosen to escort the coffin to the new grave on the Northern Hill, to be buried to the north direction.

一課殃煞不出者宜用金銀精石避殃煞，鬼見愁鬼箭草安息香十二精藥井花水桃柳枝神水灑禳，代魂出之大吉。

Item List 2: In case the disastrous and malignant spirit cannot be exorcised [after the ghost of deceased is buried], then gold, silver or precious stones must be used to avoid or to prevent it. Use Sapindus, Euonymus alatus, benzoin, twelve purist traditional Chinese herb medicine,[99] the water that is taken from a well or spring the earliest of a day, peach and willow twigs and the holy water.[100]

一課入棺總用物，宜用丝麻木炭碎錢七枚食罐一個紅花子鐵豌豆白雄雞桑條打門頭兒鳴引魂出之大吉。

Item List 3: All the objects needed for encoffining should be fine hemp fibers, charcoal, seven small coins, one crock, safflower seeds, fried beans and a white rooster – beat the front head of the rooster with mulberry twigs and the cry of it will lead the ghost out. It will be very propitious.

[99] 十二精药 巴戟、人参、芍药、乌头、官桂、鬼箭子、茯神、桔梗、远志、杜仲、狼毒、茯苓
[100] There are two different versions of the “holy water” in the Xi-Hai-Gu region. One version says it is the water from the Chinese medicine (any combination of six herb medicine will do); the other version says it is the water that has a yin-yang’s prayer in it. Master Meng practices with the former.

仙師敕令靈界殃煞化氣消散

公元二 00 三年古七月初一日殃示課行

用物俱全完畢。用物在前永為吉兆。

The immortal master orders the disastrous and malignant spirit in the Spirit World to change into vapor and dissipate.

Publicized and executed on the first day of the seventh moon by the lunar calendar in the year of 2003 by the Western calendar.

All the objects are prepared. It is always a propitious sign to have all the objects prepared beforehand.

After a quick proof-reading, the master yin-yang folded the letter lengthwise in half, pressed it to make a line, and then folded inward each of the half sides so the two edges now met in the center line of the letter, and then he stamped the same "Seal of the Army and Governing Office of the Thunderbolt" (雷霆都司印) straddle-sealing the central line, and handed it over to Luo Youcai and asked him to fold it or roll it before stuffing it into the right sleeve of the deceased. Generally this act can be done before or after the corpse is placed in the coffin.

By this time the apprentice yin-yang had handed a talisman (See sample in Appendix XYZ) that was drawn on a 4 by 12 (cm) long narrow piece of yellow paper to the master yin-yang, who again scanned it quickly for errors and put two seals on it: the one in the upper location was the "North-most (Arctic) Exorcism Seal" (北極驅邪印) and the "Seal of the Army and Governing Office of the Thunderbolt" (雷霆都司印). He

placed a piece of white paper on the top of the two seals, pressed with his palms to take off the extra ink so as to avoid smearing and then gave it to Luo Youcai saying "This is the 'Disaster Dispelling Talisman (Amulet)' (消殃符); as soon as you get to Guyuan, have the mourning family paste this talisman diagonally on the lower part of the wall to which the dead person's head is directed." He asked Luo Youcai to tell my aunt that the talisman should be kept there for a hundred days. It then should be taken down and be burned at the "one hundred days" grand paper burning ceremony.

仙師敕令诸鬼殃煞化氣消散大吉

The key texts of the talisman were the words in the middle which read:

Immortal Master orders that all ghosts and disastrous and malignant beings in the Spirit World vaporize and disappear to ensure great propitiousness.

On both sides of the lower portion of the talisman were two antithetically written sentences to further explain, or to reiterate, the [intended] function of the talisman:

六精斬盡魂魄散，金雞鳴處鬼神驚。

All the six spirits[101] be beheaded and their souls and spirits disappear;

Wherever the golden rooster crows the ghosts and gods be startled.

Luo Youcai and one of the nephews of my grandmother set off for Guyuan around 8:40 p.m., taking the coffin and all the prescribed objects along. "Along the way, there

[101] According to Master Ma, "六精" (or Six [kinds of] Spirits) generally refers to all kinds of evil spirits or wondering ghosts.

are quite a number of villages so it is better not to let as many people see the coffin," Master Meng told me a few years later. He said that this secrecy is to avoid making other people feel bad. There are many people who believe that seeing a coffin, regardless of whether it is empty or has a corpse in it, means bad luck. Usually a Chinese Han family will have to set a small fire in front of their courtyard to prevent the air of disasters from getting into their courtyard (Z. J. Meng, personal communication, September 2012).

Now the yin-yang asked the primary mourner, Chang Wanliang, as to whether the family would be interested in requesting a chanting of a scripture. Mr. Chang Wanliang had already discussed this with his brothers, cousins and the funeral manager; so he simply replied that since the yin-yangs had had several intensive hours of working, the scripture chanting was to be delayed until the next year. The master yin-yang immediately understood because he was clear that this burial was temporary and he was absolutely sure that the family would hire him again the next year to conduct a reburial ritual, and that would be his chance to make a little more money by chanting the scriptures (W. J. Chang, personal communication, June 2011).

So the master yin-yang started chatting with the villagers who stayed late with the mourning family. He also answered a few questions of mine, regarding the grave-digging ritual that Dr. Luckert and I were too late to observe that afternoon. These answers, together with my interview with my uncle Chang Wanliang, enabled me to write parts of the content in the "Official documents to the yin world" section. (See above, on page xyz)

(3) Bring back of the corpse from Guyuan. When Luo Youcai and Chang Wanbin arrived at Guyuan, it was almost 10:00 p.m. My aunt was already waiting for them outside. When she and her cousin, Mr. Chang Wanbin, met, they wept in low

volume, which was a modified wailing procedure. Because they were living in a city, a louder, dramatic or sometimes even hysterical country style of wailing would be inappropriate there. When they entered the room, there were four or five close friends staying with my aunt and uncle; but Luo Youcai and my uncle Chang Wanbin simply exchanged their greeting with a few words and then humbly walked up to the sacrificial table. They lit three sticks of incense before prostrating down to burn some paper money and then offered the libation of sorghum wine and tea. They did look at the corpse next to the table when they entered the room, but their respect and worship was paid to the tablet on the table, not to the corpse (W. P. Chang, personal communication, June 2011).

After that Chang Wanbin took out the talisman and asked my aunt for some paste; then he crawled to the wall toward which my grandmother's head rested, and pasted the talisman there. Soon after that Luo Youcai and Mr. Chang Wanbin were offered a nice meal, but they took only a few bites. By now their conversation was on how my grandmother suddenly got sick and passed away before medical measures were taken. Then Mr. Chang Wanbin raised a question: Why was there no yin-yang hired to do a memorial ritual. My aunt explained that the the corpse was going to be there for only one night and the burial site was in Qijiazhuang, where another yin-yang was needed to arrange for all the mourning and burial activities. It might make things complicated by hiring yet another yin-yang. Plus, my aunt argued, this was in a city, where people do not know each other well, and many people are more indifferent than the fellow villagers in the countryside. Doing a memorial ritual might seem to be intruding on or disturbing unrelated neighbors (W. P. Chang, personal communication, June 2011). Luo Youcai was sent to sleep a few hours in a neighbor's house, and the moving of the corpse was

scheduled to start at 5:30 a.m. the next morning. The relatives spent the night kneeling by my grandmother's body until the next morning as part of the ritual for the mourners, which was called the *shouling* (守靈 keep vigil beside the coffin / corpse).

By day break Luo Youcai had already arrived at my aunt's house, and relatives and neighbors altogether quickly began the encoffining procedure. An elderly neighbor put seven copper coins that had been kept by my grandmother into the bottom of the coffin that had been lowered onto the ground the previous night; the coins were placed in the shape of the Big Dipper, which was in hope of begging blessings from the start god who is believed by the villagers (yin-yangs included) to have the power to extend human life. Then Chang Wanbin placed a cotton-padded mattress on top of the coins and then my aunt loosely spread some fine hemp fibers. The mattress was to ensure the dead lie comfortably; the hemp fiber is part of the mourning dress (披麻戴孝) it therefore symbolizes that my grandmother was fully supported by her filial children. Chang Wanbin then placed a gauze bag that contains a handful of safflower seeds, some fried beans and a small piece of charcoal close to the head part of the coffin. The master yin-yang explained that these things have safeguarding functions; they were placed in the coffin to guard the ghost from being bothered / attached by evil spirits. The moment these things had been placed, four people, including Mr. Luo, carried my grandmother's body into the coffin. As soon as the corpse was carried out of the house, my aunt, who was holding a white rooster on her left arm and an elm tree twig (in lieu of a mulberry twig which was not available in the region) went to the spot where my grandmother's body used to lie and started to gently beat the head of the rooster with the twig. The rooster made a sound with each stroke and after each sound of the rooster my aunt said, "Mom,

let's go home." My aunt slowly walked to the coffin and held the rooster high and circled it over the coffin for three times before the lid was placed on. Had it been for a permanent burial, the lid would have been nailed fast to the coffin; but this was a temporary burial, plus the coffin had to be opened again to double check the position of the body before burying, so the lid was simply placed on and a rope was used to tie around the middle of the coffin to keep the lid from becoming loose.

While the four people were moving the coffin onto the farm pickup, two neighbors sprinkled across the house some liquid from a basin. The liquid, a Chinese medicine prescribed by the yin-yang, had been boiled over a stove last night. This rite is called *xiaoyang* (消殃 dispelling the disaster).

It was 6:00 in the morning now, and a heavy rain could be felt to be coming soon. So Luo Youcai decided to fold the Ghost-Leading Road Certificate and put it into a plastic bag to protect it from being destroyed by the rain. He also asked Zuowen, a brother of mine who was to hold the Ghost-Leading Banner, to be prepared to roll the banner to the stick as soon as the rain drops fell. When all was ready, Chang Wanbin sat in the trunk of the pickup to hold the coffin with his hands, which is called *fujiu* (扶柩 escorting the coffin [by holding it with hands]), although the coffin was fastened to the pickup with ropes. Seating next to Luo Youcai, the driver, was my brother Zuowen. He had two tasks: to hold the Ghost-Leading Banner and to throw the paper-coins along the road – not all the places or all the time, but when going over bridges or passing

intersections. These are the places where the wondering ghosts are most likely gather to request money. [102]

Around 6:10 a.m. Luo Youcai's pickup got on the road; my aunt and uncle stayed in the house for about one hour. They needed to burn the *xuan-men zhi* (paper money for lingering ghosts 旋門紙)[103] and to serve a good breakfast to the people who came to help, and then they would take a bus to get to Qijiazhuang.

(4) The burial ritual. Luo Youcai and the two mourners – Chang Wanbin and my brother Zuowen – experienced heavy rain on the road and they had to make several stops when it was not possible to see that road; therefore they were almost one hour late for the scheduled time. But it was not considered as a problem because the time had been scheduled to avoid exposing the coffin to the sun and the sun was not shining on a rainy day. When they approached the village, two messengers were sent by the yin-yang and the mourning manager to go to the two main entrances to the village to block the road and to remind Luo Youcai not to enter the village, although Luo Youcai knew very well this custom, which says that when a corpse is brought back from an outside place, it is not supposed to enter the village. Usually it is temporarily placed in the outskirts of the village with a roadside shrine for a certain length of time, depending on the availability of a burial date. If there is no waiting time required, the corpse will be directly carried to the grave site, along a path that is usually at the edge of the village. One of the two

[102] According to Master Ma, the yin world is much the same as the yang world where there is always someone who is not lawful and they take chances to rob others. Therefore in addition to the Road Ticket that was prepared to protect the corpse transportation, scattering a little money may double ensure a peaceful journey.

[103] Usually "paper money for lingering ghosts" is burned for a straight three days after a corpse is moved out of a house; but since my aunt and uncle were going to stay in Qijiazhuang for a week, they reduced this ritual to one day. According to the local informants (yin-yang included), "lingering ghosts" include the ghost of the deceased relative. (Zhang, 2010 and 2013, interview with Master Meng and Mr. Zhang Haicheng, Li Dushan and Shen Fagui)

messengers who went to block the southeast entrance to the village also brought along a new Ghost Leading Banner that was written on a small piece of white paper. The old one was destroyed in the heavy rain and Chang Wanbin had called his brother to ask the yin-yang to prepare another one. This new banner was pasted on the front end of the coffin.

Luo Youcai drove his pickup to the southwestern corner of the village and made a right turn; he drove slowly to enable the roadside families to ignite their hay in front of their yards before he moved on, up to the steep road. According to the local informants, the igniting of the hay or straw was to stop wondering [evil] spirits that might be following the coffin from getting into their houses. The rest of the villagers and the mourners climbed along a small ravine to meet him up the hill. Upon seeing the coffin, female mourners began their wailing for a while, and Mr. Chang Wanrui, the oldest nephew of my grandmother, asked Luo Youcaito turn off the engine of his pickup, so the mourners could have a chance to perform the *cheqian* (扯纖 rope pulling) rite to show their devoted love to the deceased. *Cheqian* used to be part of the burial ritual in which the mourners pulled the ropes that were tied to the vehicle that carried the coffin of their deceased relative; it was believed that the longer the distance the mourners pull the rope, a deeper affection is shown to outsiders and the more the deceased was honored. The rite is literally omitted in present day Xi-Hai-Gu due to the fact that most of the coffins were carried on the shoulders, instead of on / in vehicles. In my grandmother's case, as I learned later, it was in fact also due to the muddy surface of the road after the heavy rain; pulling and pushing by people would help keep the vehicle from slipping and tilting and in return it would ensure a less disturbed journey of the deceased.

Figure 9 Mourners (in white mourning hats) pulling and pushing the farm vehicle[104] with help from fellow villagers.

Once the coffin arrived at the graveyard the grave diggers were doing their final scrapings at the inner chamber[105] – they only dug the outer pit the previous evening and they dug the inner chamber that morning. When they were urged to come out, they said they were too tired to come up, so my father and other mourners threw down some money as their payments. According to tradition, this practice is more of a light-hearted humorous custom than actually bargaining for money. This practice is only applicable in burial rituals for someone that had lived a full length of life, which means the person lived to be at least 70, or had grandchildren. When the grave diggers finally came out the pit, some mourners opened the coffin to check to see whether the corpse was still in the

[104] From 1980s gas-powered vehicles have fully replaced the cattle-pulled or horse pulled carts, which reflects how modernity has been reshaping folk life.

[105] In the Xi-Hai-Gu region there are three types of graves: (1) pit-only grave, (2) pit with half-inner chamber grave and (3) pit with full-length inner chamber grave. Anyone that lived a full life and died a natural death (such as from a disease) will be qualified for the third type of grave. (See Illustration xyz (a) below.)

right position after the long journey. The yin-yang went over to make sure all the needed objects were included in the coffin. If it had been a clear day, a piece of cloth about the size of a quilt would have been needed to pull over the heads of the coffin openers to prevent the corpse from being exposed to the sun, which is strictly prohibited.

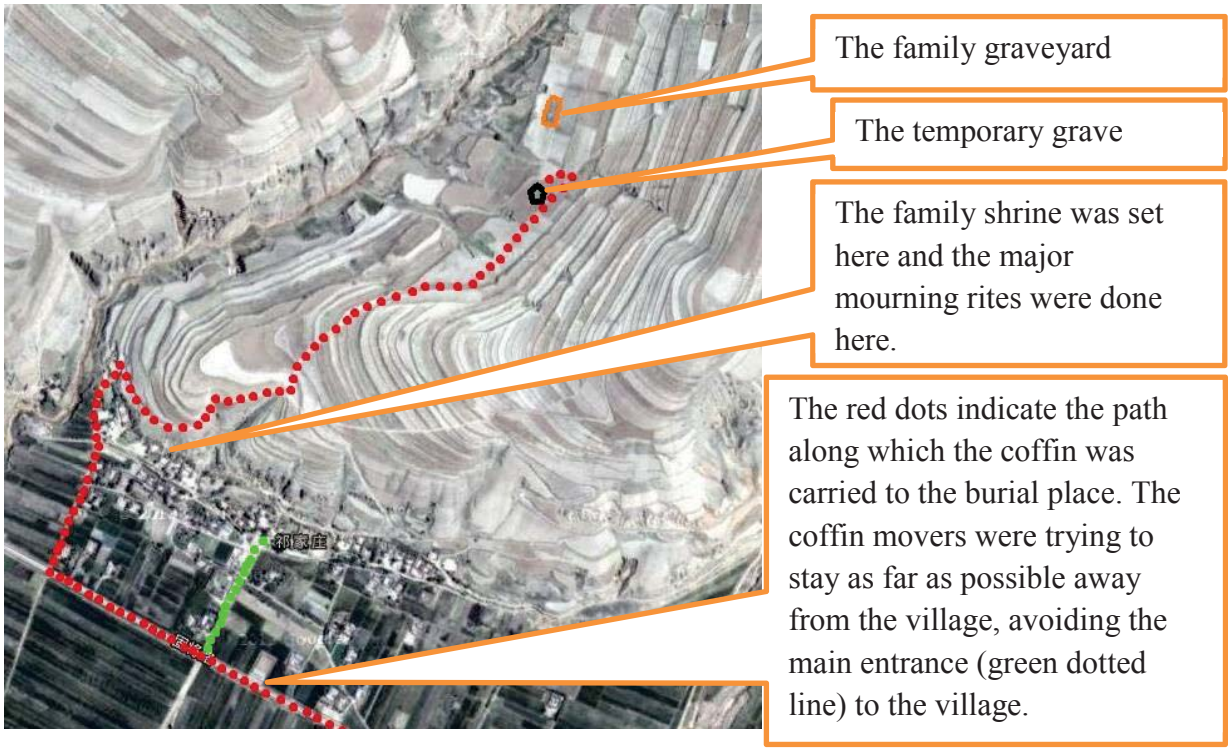

Figure 10 A satellite picture showing the family graveyard and the temporary grave.[106]

At the same time, some male mourners were burning paper money at the foot of the grave pit; all the female mourners and some male mourners knelt about 10 meters away from the paper money burners. Everything was ready now. The primary mourner Chang Wanliang jumped down to the grave pit with a bundle of straw. He held the straw tightly and used it as a broom to sweep the surface dust out of the inner chamber. Then one of

[106] Based on www.googlemaps.com.

the villagers handed him a red ceramic pot which contained yeast. He placed the pot in the back of the inner chamber where the head of the coffin was to be placed. The Chinese character for yeast is 酵, which contains the character 孝 (filial piety); the using of the yeast implies that the dead person has representatives of filial piety by him or her all the time.

A few minutes later the yin-yang gave the order, and the actual burial began. Female mourners began to wail again while the coffin was lowered to the grave pit, under the directions of the head yin-yang, who was standing at the heading direction of the grave pit. When the coffin was pushed into the catacomb, the inner chamber, the yin-yang went down the pit and used his compass and a piece of white string to make sure the coffin was in line with the auspicious directions. As always, the head yin-yang was giving orders while the primary mourner, Mr. Chang Wanliang, was making adjustments to the coffin. This part of the burial procedure is called *da-zhen-wen-xiang* (搭針穩向) by the yin-yangs; it is considered to be one of the most delicate tasks in a burial ritual (Z. J. Meng, personal communication, March 2011).

About three minutes later, the master yin-yang was helped out of the grave pit and all the mourners went over to the pile of dirt; each of them threw three scoops of dirt into the grave pit while the fellow villagers began to use their spades and shovels to take care of the major burying job. As the entrance of the inner chamber needed to be blocked, a long straw braid was coiled up as a gate, to hold the dirt so it would not slide into the inner chamber. For this task, my father, another primary male mourner, went down the pit to offer his help as part of his responsibilities.

In the meantime, the master yin-yang and his apprentice knelt at the upper right corner and read a letter to the Houtu (后土, Earth God). When they reached the last paragraph, which was rhymed, they switched from reading to singing. They used two musical instruments – the master yin-yang used a drum and the apprentice used a pair of cymbals – to accompany their singing. While the yin-yangs sang the hymn to the Earth God, one of the mourners, a nephew of the deceased, knelt next to the master yin-yang, burning paper money and pouring libations of sorghum wine to the Earth God. The following was the letter the master yin-yang read to the Earth God:

酹土文

維

公元二零零三年歲次癸未夏七月初二日祭主常萬良上叩謹以香燭酒禮之儀酹土於

寄塋后土之尊神前曰：坤輿尊神，位鎮中央。生育萬物，宰制四方。城隍社令，各施職司之威；土地方隅，共守丘陵之正。弟子慈母常門王氏新亡待葬，憾逢舊塋方向不利，此皆因弟子等不孝而招致老母蒙受牽連。敢請

后土尊神赦免不孝弟子，開恩無辜老母。准允我母亡靈，寄葬一周之年。明年同日，遷移老塋，與家門先亡團聚一處。

一年之久，土德深厚。弟子感恩，獻禮祭酒。眷顧陰陽，免除災殃。存亡共慶，平安健康。家宅順利，子孫興旺；神其有知，伏惟尚

饗

酹土文

謝恩文

A Letter to the Earth God with Libation

Re:

The second day of the seventh moon of the year of *Guiwei* – year 2003 of the Western calendar – the primary mourner Chang Wanliang has humbly prepared the incense, candles and wine to pour out a libation in front of [107]

The venerated Earth God of the sojourning grave and says: The venerated Earth God sits at the center. The Earth gives birth and nourishes all beings and controls the four directions / corners. The town gods and regional [yin world] officials all use their powers according to their rights; the local gods of all the directions, working together to guard the hills. Your disciple's kind-hearted mother, the newly passed away MS. Wang of the Chang family, is about to be buried; but unfortunately the directions at the existing family graveyard are ill-suited. All this is the consequence that I, your disciple, and other children had been lacking in filial piety and thus caused my late mother to suffer the implications.[108] May I take the liberty to ask the venerated Earth God to pardon this unfilial disciple and show mercy to my

[107] This is an intentional break of a line in the yin-yang writing to highlight the veneration of a god. As the letter was written vertically, a breaking of line will enable the yin-yang to write the name or title of a god in a protruding position to indicate its highness and veneration.

[108] One of the ways for the local people to express their filial piety to their elderly is to take all the blame to themselves; so by saying this they mean that their lack of filial piety, which is equivalent of wrongdoing, brings retribution to their parent, who was not granted by the life-controlling gods to die at a good time to be buried immediately, or to be buried in the family graveyard that has an ideal directional orientation . (Zhang, interview with Master Meng, 2013)

innocent mother to permit her ghost to be guest-buried here for one year? This very day next year [she] will be moved to the family graveyard to be reunited with the family members that died prior to her.

A year's length shows the profoundness of the virtue of the Earth. Your disciple is grateful and I offer sacrifice and pour libations. [Please] bless the dead and the living and remit the disasters, so the dead and the living can celebrate together and there will be peace and health. Our homestead will be smooth and our offspring will thrive. Hopefully this can be heard by the Earh God and I humbly invite you to Enjoy the sacrifices!

A Letter to the Earth God with Libation

A Letter of Thank You

Toward the end of the burial ritual, one of the fellow villagers approached the paper money and took a handful from it, ignited it, and took it to a nearby place to burn for a relative of his who passed away not long ago. This has been an interesting custom in the region as the residents believe that the ghost of newly deceased people are not settled and that they always look for opportunities to join in the fun of funeral or memorial rituals, hoping to share some sacrifices that his or her living family members can get from the mourning family. But despite their past relationships in the yang world, the ghosts in the yin-world seem to be stingy and therefore the wandering ghosts have to rely on their relatives in the yang world to help them by sharing some money and other offerings.

Figure 11 The master yin-yang used his compass and a string to calibrate the direction

Figure 12 Straw braids are prepared at the main mourner's house

Figure 13 The entrance to the inner chamber.

When the hill of the tomb was piled up, the mourning sticks were thrust at its foot-end. While two mourners were still burning the last handfuls of the paper money, the rest of the mourners along with their fellow villagers and the yin-yangs went home. They chatted during most of the journey but a few minutes before reaching the mourning home, the mourners accelerated their steps. There was a low pile of fire over which the mourners jumped and then they all knelt down, facing the arriving yin-yangs and the villagers, who also jumped over the fire. The mourners kowtowed to all to express their sincere thanks. Then a nice meal was served to all, after which the primary mourner prostrated and offered the payment to the master yin-yang, who might share some with his apprentice.

(5) The omitted house cleansing rite. After the deceased has been buried, a "house cleansing" is usually the concluding rite. This is a ritual of exorcism, not a literal cleansing, and there are circumstances when it is not required. The house cleansing rite

was deemed unnecessary in the case of my grandmother's burial because her corpse was never actually brought to the house – it was in fact not even brought into the village. Aware of the importance of including here an ethnographic description of this rite, I interviewed, in the winter of 2007, villagers and local yin-yangs about the house cleansing ritual.

According to the villagers in Fanmagou (W. K. Wang & H. C. Zhang, personal communication, August 2010), if a person died at a good age (70 years or older) and of natural causes, after the corpse is buried, a house cleansing ritual may be led by any experienced villagers and it does not necessarily have to be led by a yin-yang. However, if a death does not meet these criteria, it is implied that the disastrous and malignant spirits are strong and therefore the family has to hire a yin-yang to perform the house cleansing ritual. This ritual may be performed at various levels of seriousness; the largest and most involved can include several yin-yangs and up to twelve helping villagers. Most commonly, the ritual requires six people working together, a yin-yang and five helpers. The yin-yang opens his sack and pulls out all his tablets of gods (see Illustrations 5 in Appendix); after sorting out what divine help he needs for this particular rite, he begins to set up a shrine in either the northern part [109] or in the middle of the mourner family's courtyard, where he then invites all the gods whose names are mentioned in the scripture of "Excellent Dragon and Tiger Scripture for Eliminating Disasters and Guarding Houses, Revealed by the Most High Zhengyi Heavenly Master (*Taishang Zhengyi Tianshi shuo xiaozai zhengzhai long-hu miao jing* 太上正乙天師說消災鎮宅龍虎妙經)." Having

[109] In all yin-yang rituals, when a shrine has to be set up, the northern direction is always the first choice by the yin-yang; this is because "the gates of heaven at the north is kept open all the time while those at other directions open in rotation" (Z. H. Ma, personal communication, July 2003).

invited all the relevant gods, he then chants this very important scripture that he copied from his scripture book, accompanied by musical instruments. The yin-yang himself will use a bell, while the helping villagers will use drums, gongs and cymbals. The following is the full text of the scripture in both Chinese and English.

太上正乙天师说消灾镇宅龙虎妙经

尔时

圣祖元始天尊。与玉清圣境太上道君。太清仙境太上老君。玉皇上帝。天皇大帝。北极紫微大帝。紫微天皇大帝。先天圣母。后土地祇。五方五帝星君。东方木德星君。南方火德星君。西方金德星君。北方水德星君。中央土德星君。三十六洞神仙。八十一万真人。年值月值日值时值使者。太阳星君。太阴星君。罗睺星君。计都星君。森罗万象星君。二十八宿。天地水府三官大帝。北极四圣元帅真君。奉行六甲六丁。左手执印。右手掌剑。寒光逼人。天师有二十四万神将。人人咬牙。个个勇猛。声如虎喊。气如风云。摇旗云摩。鼓震雷霆。筛锣相催。力发神兵。

忽见人家宅上。或有邪魔魍魉之鬼。血精痨病之鬼。投河落井自缢之鬼。一切铁枷棒打。火轮烧身。缚手锁脚。捣沫为尘。一切妖精。赶离宅门。东堂西舍。卧房楼阁。宅院之内。细绪搜寻。

咸有人间。修盖宅舍。打墙动土。移门改户。眠梦颠倒。睡卧不安。树木掘坑。不依禁忌。不选良辰吉日。触犯土公土母。惊动六神。恼羞作祸。旦暮相侵。

志心焚香。生日看此经。寿命得长生，本命看此经，灾病得离身；病人看此经，早得离床枕。甲子看此经。行往遇福神。逐日看此经，百事称其心。夜梦看此经，睡卧得安宁。狱中看此经。枷锁早离身。难月看此经。男女早降生。每遇甲子，本命生辰之日看此经，种种香花，时新五果，志心供养，或注生死，上至帝王，下及庶人，信守奉行，魁鬽魋魀魒魓魖，斩尽邪魔杀尽妖。水火盗贼登时灭，官灾病患一齐消。

急急如律令。

The Excellent Dragon and Tiger Scripture for Eliminating Disasters and Guarding Houses Revealed by the Most High Zhengyi Heavenly Master

At the time, the Holy Grandfather the First Heavenly Venerated was with the Most High Daoist Chief of the Jade Pure Sacred Land and the Most High Lord of the Supremely Pure Wonderland. Also with them were Jade Emperor the Highest, the Heavenly Emperor the Greatest, The Ziwei Star Great Emperor of the Northernmost, the Ziwei Heavenly Emperor the Greatest, the Female Deity of the Sky and the Revered God of the Earth. Also with them were the five empire star gods of the five directions: The Wood Virtue Star God in the East, the Fire Virtue Star God in the South, the Gold Virtue Star God in the West, the Water Virtue Star God in the North and the Earth Virtue Star God in the Center. With them were also the Immortals of the Thirty-Six Daoist Cave-Temples, the Eight Hundred and Ten Thousand Divine (Supernatural) Beings, the Messengers on Yearly Duties, Monthly Duties, Daily Duties and Hourly Duties, the Sun God, the Moon God, the

Luo-hou Star God, the Ji-du Star God, the Ten-Thousand Universal Phenomena Star God, the Twenty-Eight Constellations, the Three Empire Officials that govern the Heaven, the Earth and the Water as well as the Four Saint Marshals of the Northernmost.

Following the Six Jia Gods and the Six Yi Gods, [110] the Daoist Master[111] holds in his left hand a seal and in his right hand a sword, whose cold light compels people. Each of his two hundred and forty thousand divine generals is gnashing his teeth and every one of them is valiant. Their voices are like the roar of tigers and their movement is compared to a storm. Their flags are like clouds and their drums vibrate like thundering. Gongs are beaten restlessly and soldiers are sent off.

All of a sudden they saw that at people's houses there were evil spirits – those who were victims of bloody spirits or tuberculosis, those who committed suicide by jumping into rivers, wells or hanging themselves, those who were killed at the cangue scaffold[112] or with clubs, or with fire rings, or who were pounded into foam and dust with their hands and feet being tied with chains and fetters. All evil spirits must be evicted from the houses. Rooms in the east and west, bedrooms and pavilions, every corner inside the courtyard will be carefully searched.

There are some families, when they build the houses, they move the earth and build the walls, they move the door or change the window, they reverse the night for the day and they do not sleep peacefully; when they dig the holes to plant trees, they do

[110] The Six Jia Gods are male gods and the Six Yi Gods are female gods, all at the commander of the Heavenly Emperor (Z. J. Meng, personal communication, August 2010).
[111] The "Daoist Master" to whom this yin-yang text refers is Zhang Daoling (34-156 CE), commonly addressed as "the Heavenly Master Zhang" (張天師), the founder of the Zhengyi Denomination of Daoism.
[112] One of the instruments of torture in old China prior to 1911; see Illustration 9 in Appendix.

not take care to respect the taboos and choose the good days, and they offend the Earth Mother and the Earth Father and also disturb the six gods. Therefore the gods get angry and they send disasters to the families and trouble them day and night.

[You must] burn the incense stick devoutly. If you read the scripture on your birthdays, your life will be lengthened; if you read the scripture in the year of your own zodiac animal, disasters and illnesses will leave your body; if you read the scripture when you are sick, you will get well shortly; if you read the scripture on the day of Jia-zi (甲子), you will meet a mascot when you travel; if you read the scripture every day, all things will be satisfactory; if you have disturbed sleep, reading the scripture will make you sleep soundly; if you are in prison, reading the scripture will set you free; if you suffer from blocked labor at childbirth, reading the scripture will bring the body out soon. On every Jia-zi day, or during your own zodiac year, or on your birthday, read the scripture, sacrifice with all kinds of fragrant flowers and five kinds of fresh fruits, devoutly offerings these may have [favorable] impacts on lives and deaths. All people, as high as emperors and kings and down to commoners, should abide by this. [The Seven Star Generals] Kui, Zhuo, Huan, Xing, Bi, Fu and Piao, behead the evil demons and kill all the devils. Calamities of water and fire, robbers and thieves, should all be eliminated; lawsuits, disasters, diseases and sufferings must all wither away.

Do immediately in accordance as this law commands!

Immediately after chanting the scripture, with proper libations,[113] the yin-yang burns his copy of the scripture. Then he gets up, grabs a few sheets of the paper money, ignites them and holds them with the burning tip upward so the burning will last a little longer. Then he walks to one of the corners of the courtyard where a pot has been put on a small stove, decocting the twelve herbs that the yin-yang prescribed on the first day of the funeral procedures. The main mourner follows the yin-yang with three incense sticks that he has just lighted and a stack of about twenty sheets of paper money in the other hand. When both men come close to the medicine pot, the yin-yang kneels down and the main mourner hands the incense sticks to the yin-yang, who then holds the incense sticks and makes several circular sweeps over the medicine – three clockwise and three counterclockwise – while singing the following:

谨请奉请香奉请 Sincerely, respectfully and with incense I am inviting

The yin-yang stretches the sentence long enough for the main mourner to pour the liquid medicine into a clean basin that has been prepared by other family members. Then the yin-yang holds the incense sticks in his left hand and continues to sing the remainder of the lines (see below) while the main mourner kneels down again next to the yin-yang to fold the paper money, one sheet each time, to get ready for the yin-yang to grab. The yin-yang ignites the paper money from the flame in the stove, and repeats what he did a moment earlier with the incense sticks. The singing continues:

奉请三皇圣帝君 I invite your majesties the holy Three Emperors

[113] Libation of whisky-like sorghum wine is poured by the helping villagers every time the yin-yang bows to the gods during the scripture reading; but at the end of the ritual, the yin-yang himself takes over the wine pot to pour the last libation. If there are several yin-yangs, the master or head yin-yang will do this.

轩辕伏羲老神龙 Xuanyuan, Fuxi and the senior Shennong

十大冥王诸仙众 The Ten Kings of Hell and all the immortals

丘刘谭马郝王孙 Qiu, Liu, Tan, Ma, Hao, Wang and Sun

灵丹妙药崔元帅 Marshal Cui[114] who gives miraculous cure

神手仙方吕洞宾 Lü Dongbin the divine physician that has fairy prescriptions

和瘟教主匡阜使 Kuang Fu the leader of plagues pacification

徐州降魔大神功 Demostrated great strength by vanquishing demons in Xuzhou

At the end of each line sung, the yin-yang bows toward the medicine water and after singing the last line he stands up, ignites several sheets of paper money, holds them up, and slowly walks to the shrine, while the main mourner follows him, holding the basin with the medicine water. When they get to where the shrine is, the main mourner places the medicine basin in front of the shrine before he kneels down with the yin-yang. But the singing is never interrupted:

焚香祈祷赴坛庭 Burning the incense, saying prayers I am going to the shrine

十二精药紧随跟 You twelve pure medicines shall follow closely

一十二位都请至 All the twelve of you should be invited

奉请入于净水中 To come into the pure water

往上洒，开天门 Sprinkle upward, the gate to heaven opens

往下洒，闲地户 Sprinkle downward, the windows of earth close

开天门，闭地户 Open the gate to the heaven and close the windows to the earth

[114] One of the Thunder Gods in Daoism.

留人门，塞鬼路 Leave the door to humans, block the path for the devils

穿鬼心，破鬼胆 Pierce the hearts of the devils, break their gallbladders[115]

人行有路，鬼走无路 The humans have roads to walk; the devils have none

吾奉太上老君 With the decree from the Supremely High Daoist

急急如律令 Do immediately in accordance with the commands of the law!

The yin-yang stretches the last sentence by slowing down and raising his voice. Then he stands up while the main mourner remains kneeling. A helper hands a clean willow twig to the yin-yang who dips the medicine water and sprinkles around him. The singing continues:

一洒天堂四时净 The first sprinkle makes all the hallways clean in heaven

二洒地府鬼神惊 The second sprinkle frightens the ghosts and gods on earth

三洒邪魔皈正道 The third sprinkle makes evil demons turn to the right path

四洒亡魂化厌尘 The fourth sprinkle turns the ghosts of the dead into dust

五洒人民值开泰 The fifth sprinkle ensures people prosperity, safety, and wellbeing

六洒六畜保安平 The sixth sprinkle keeps the six domestic animals from mishap

七洒七星增福寿 The seventh sprinkle invites the Seven Stars to add blessing and longevity

八洒八方遍安宁 The eighth sprinkle protects the eight directions free from worries

[115] This comes from a Chinese idiom which means to scare somebody almost to death.

九洒九泉来开泰 The ninth sprinkle gives peace to all the graves in the Nine Springs

十洒疾病早离身 The tenth sprinkle expels diseases away from [human] bodies

洒着人来人长寿 If the sprinkle falls on a human being they will enjoy a long life

洒着鬼来鬼消音 If the sprinkle falls on the spirit beings they shall disappear

吾奉太上老君 With the decree from the Supremely High Daoist

急急如律令 Do immediately in accordance with the commands of the law!

With the last two lines of singing, the yin-yang bows to the shrine, the main mourner bows while still kneeling, some helpers who have quietly joined the mourners by kneeling next to him also bow along with the main mourner.

Now the yin-yang motions the kneeling people to stand up and he takes from his pocket his peach-wood power seal to hold in his left hand, and he pulls out the sword that is carried on his back. When the yin-yang is sure that all his helpers have got their own "weapons," the yin-yang announces the house cleansing rite with a loud shout "Hai," to which all of his helpers respond by holding their "weapons" high. The yin-yang bows one more time to the shrine – which is being followed by his helpers – befoer he calls loudly on his primary divine helper: "*Xiangmo hudao Tianzun* (降魔护道天尊 The Heavenly Venerated who vanquishes demons and guards the Dao)!" Then he starts singing the following rhymed lines while searching all the rooms and corners of the mourner family, continuing to hold on to the seal [thus portraying the official style of this procedure] he is

sweeping his sword through the air –up and down, to the left and to the right, as if he is fighting a fierce battle.

讚天师。护道尊。Praise to the Heavenly Master, the guardian of the Dao

降生在龙虎山中。Who was born in the Mountain of Dragons and Tigers

执掌万法天地惊。Controls ten thousand talismen that surprise the heaven and earth

统神霄。辖天兵。Governs the highest heaven and the soldiers of Heaven

手执宝剑斩妖精。Holds a sword to behead the evil spirits

请得天将下凡尘。I am inviting the heavenly soldiers to descend onto earth

邪魔恶鬼心胆惊。Demons and evil spirits will tremble with fear

移星换斗能显应。Stars of all sizes will be mobilized to appear

保护社稷享太平。Protect the country to enjoy peace

降魔护道大天尊。The Heavenly Venerated who vanquishes demons and guards the Dao

天师法力严如雷。The power of the Heavenly Master is as rigorous as the thunder

摧破魔山化为灰。It will destroy the mountain of the demons to make it into ashes

百怪皆徒罡下惊。All the goblins will flee with fear under the Gang Star

群妖悉赴剑中哀。Every demon will suffer grief by the power of the sword

先凭正乙急驱邪。I first use the Zhengyi [sword] to quickly expel the demons

后按玄雀步斗魁。I then use the Xuanque [ruler] to lead the Dou and Kui stars

此日若行三洞法。Should I use the methods of the three Daoist weapons

神水河沙洒方位。The divine water and the sand grains will be thrown into all directions

Wherever the yin-yang goes, his five helpers follow him performing aspects of the ritual in this order: The first helper forcefully throws out pea-size sand grains; the second brandishes a long bamboo broom in the air, as if he is sweeping out the disastrous spirits; the third spits alcohol or kerosene, lighting it into a flaming torch as he spits; the fourth sprinkles the medicine water; the fifth sprinkles warmed vinegar. When all the places inside the courtyard are searched and "cleansed" the team walks out of the courtyard and continues their cleansing practice for approximately 20 steps in each direction – unless a direction is blocked by a cliff or a building. Whenever the yin-yang finishes the last line and, after the cleansing team has done its procedures, the yin-yang repeats the rhymed lines and they start over to "cleanse" the house two more times.

When all these procedures are concluded, the yin-yang, his helpers, and many members of the mourner family kneel down in front of the shrine where the yin-yangs recites the following text to then send off the gods that had been invited to be present and to assist with the cleansing:

弟子 XX 真诚谢过圣祖元始天尊，玉清圣境太上道君，太清仙境太上老君；谢过各位天地神明与众位星君不辞劳苦，降临法场，以无边威力协助扫除殃煞，清扫宅院，安定一家大小之人心。弟子感激万分，无以为谢，谨借东家之水酒香烛，恭送列位神明圣驾返回天界。日后弟子若有事相求，将再燃香秉烛叩请仙驾降临坐镇。弟子 XX 等叩首恭送！

I, your disciple XYZ, sincerely thank the Holy Grandfather the First Heavenly Venerated, the Most High Daoist Chief of the Jade Pure Sacred Land and the Most High Lord of the Supremely Clear Wonderland. I thank all the heavenly and earthly gods and star lords for sparing no pains to descend to this execution ground and to assist me with your bondless power to vanquish the disastrous and malignant spirits and to cleanse the homestead so that the minds of the resident family will be put at peace. With much gratitude I have nothing adequate to thank you, but I borrow the sorghum wine, incense and candles to humbly escort your return to your heavenly dwelling places. Should I have anything that I need your help with, I will command and I will ignite the incense and the candles again to humbly invite you to descend and to take charge.

Your disciple XYZ and others are now seeing you off with kowtows!

With these concluding words all the team members kowtow three times, get up, put their two palms and fingers together, up at their chests, and then raise them so that the thumbs almost touch their noses before letting the hands drop apart.

Now the members of the family will begin to clean the mess in all the rooms while the yin-yang and the helping villagers take down the shrine. The family will always clean the main guest room first so as to let the yin-yang and the helping villagers sit to smoke a cigarette before they are served a nice meal, which has been prepared before the ritual.

After the meal, some villagers will take the opportunity to consult with the yin-yang their fortune for the year, or the compatibility of their children with potential husbands or wives, or just do a casual chat.

If the yin-yang's home is not far away from the mourner and hiring family, he will not spend the night as a guest; for a longer journey he will leave for home the next day. Whatever the case, a few minutes after the farewell dinner the hiring family will pay the yin-yang. To do this, the head of the family places cash and two packs of cigarettes – or a pack of tea – on a rectangular wooden platter and then kneels down on the ground, facing the yin-yang who is sitting on the *kang* (a heatable clay bed) behind the small portable *kang*-top dinner table and says something like: "We thank you for taking your busy time helping us; we do not have anything decent to offer to you but please accept this small gift from us." The yin-yang will always take the cigarettes or tea before taking the money; but it is a custom for the yin-yang to say that he has been overpaid; he will pick up money but take some from his payment to place it back on the platter. If the helping villagers are still staying with the mourner family – for example when the yin-yang decides to go home after the concluding house cleansing dinner – they will say thanks on behalf of the mourner family and praise the yin-yang for being very professional. When the yin-yang gives some money back to the mourner family, the helping villagers will say, along with the head of the mourner family, "Take it. Take it. It has been hard work" (F. G. Shen & Z. Y. Zhao, personal communication, February 2007).

A funerary ritual provides a large stage on which the yin-yang practitioners put out their most crucial performances. The performances aim at pleasing the divine beings, controlling the evil spirits and comforting the mourner family and therefore best represent the interactions between the *yin* and the *yang* worlds. In the funerary performance, the yin-yangs are both the directors and the star actors, while the helping villagers, including members of the mourner family, are the supporting roles. The villagers need professional

leaders in this ritual and the yin-yangs need the fellow villagers as trusting helpers. The yin-yangs have divine helpers as well, but the divine helpers cannot be seen; they can only be felt presenting.

2. Analysis of the Rituals and the Rationale of Using a Yin-Yang

From the first moments after a relative passes away through the concluding house cleansing rites, a funerary ritual entails various kinds of smaller ritual procedures at each stage of the preparation and burial. It is probably more accurate to say that a funerary ritual is actually a collection of related rituals. Some of the preparatory or peripheral rituals are able to be done by the family members or fellow villagers; but all the key rituals are prepared and led exclusively by a yin-yang or a number of yin-yangs. As it was summarized by Master Z. H. Ma (personal communication, July 2002; August 2002) a yin-yang's primary tasks in a funeral ritual include the following steps:

- Inquiring information about the dates of the dead and the location and direction of the mourners' family grave so as to consult the books to see what dates are available and what directional orientations are auspicious for the burial

- Finding the spot for the grave – even if the mourner family has already found a spot it must be confirmed and fine-tuned by the yin-yang with his knowledge and his needle compass

- Writing all the documents – the front door obituary, the funerary couplets, the "Disaster-Narrating Note", the "Apology Letter to the Earth God", the

"Letter to the Earth God with Libation", the "Ghost-Leading Road Certificate" (引路亡票) and the "Ghost-Leading Banner" (引魂幡) – most of these will be copied from his templates by filling information specific to the dead person

- Reading the letters and chanting the scriptures, or singing the hymns while playing at least one of the Daoist percussion instruments
- Leading the house cleansing ritual that will require some or all of the four basic crucial acts: *fu* (符 amulet), *zhou* (咒 incantation), *jue* (訣 mudra) and *bu* (步 magical steps)

A funerary ritual involves (a) physical labor such as the *baosang*, or door-to-door death announcement that requires prostrating and kowtowing, all the way through, or grave-digging or coffin carrying and burying and (b) intellectual labor, such as what a yin-yang does to make informed decisions about all the details of the funeral and burial. While the villagers maintain that all a yin-yang does is light intellectual work; the yin-yangs argue that scripture chanting is long and tedious and it is often repeated several times upon the request of the mourner family and the yin-yang(s) will have to either stand or kneel through the entire procedure that can be several hours long (Z. J. Meng, personal communication, August 2010; September 2012). Without question, leading the complex and vitally important rituals involves significant physical and mental work.

In villages like Fanmagou and Qijiazhuang, physical labor is considered dirty, dull and tedious and therefore indicative of low level social status, while intellectual or mental work is considered clean, interesting and therefore of high level social status. Whoever

belongs to a social status that is higher than that of the ordinary villagers, and works for the villagers, is respected. The level of education, the unique talents – singing and playing musical instruments – and the special training of a yin-yang convince people that a yin-yang master knows the proper ways in dealing with the *yin* world (i.e., he has the high status of this intellectual labor). All my villager informants agree that the official way to deal with the *yin* world is through written language. The reasons they give are (1) "Everyone that is not deaf or dumb can speak, but it is much easier for men to make mistakes in speaking than in writing. And the yin-yangs usually copy texts from the books that have been passed down through many generations and thereby there should be no errors or mistakes [in their writing]" and (2) "the letters and other documents that a yin-yang writes will be burned so that those who govern the *yin* world can read them – the same way as paper money and [paper] offerings have to be burned before our ancestors can use them" (W. K. Wang, Z.C. Wang & J. L. Zhang, personal communication, August 2010). The villagers hold that the *yin* world itself is a scary place to the people of the *yang* world, dealing with it requires great delicacy and carefulness. Only educated and trained people like the yin-yangs are qualified for the job; "rough fellows like us illiterate farmers may say prayers in some circumstances and do minor rituals, but for burial rituals we dare not do so, as we will make mistakes that'll cause severe consequences" (Ibid). It is the fear of offending the beings in the *yin* world that urges the villagers to seek help from a yin-yang. It is their illiteracy that makes the villagers give special respect to the written language – in fact the mystical awe of the written texts used to be even more pervasive in villages like Fanmagou and Qijiazhuang in the past. Even in the late 1950s old villagers strictly forbade young children to sit on or

to step on pages from books or on fragments from newspapers (W. K. Wang, Z. C. Wang & J. L. Zhang, personal communication, August 2010). Even greater awe is associated with the written texts that the yin-yang have in their scriptures, and the texts of the practical writings that the yin-yangs adapt from their templates, or the ones the yin-yangs compose. This respect for literacy and texts, and particularly sacred texts is even more widespread in places like Fanmagou and Qijiazhuang than in other places where general literacy has advanced more quickly. The texts the yin-yangs write and read on behalf of their clients are addressed to relevant gods – ancestral gods included – and are thereby sacred or holy. Although nowadays most of the villagers are literate to some degree, the convention to have the yin-yang write the letter and read it is solidly established and faithfully kept. This is partly because the clients feel it is more official to have the yin-yang take care of the funerary ritual; partly because people feel uneasy to change the centuries-old traditions, but mostly because the special awe of the yin-yang texts the villagers have inherited from earlier generations.

A funerary ritual contains three major parts: (1) Taking care of the souls of the dead; (2) burying the body and (3) eliminating the disasters and guarding the house. All the three have joint functions of comforting the heart of the living by way of eliminating their worries. Among the three concerns, while burying the dead includes only a very small portion that is primarily taken care of by the villagers, taking care of the souls of the dead and eliminating disasters and guarding the house, which constitute the much larger portion, is almost exclusively taken care of by the yin-yangs.

(1) Taking care of the souls of the dead. Over the duration of a funerary ritual one will notice that the living give much more care to the souls of the dead than to their

physical bodies. It is believed by both the yin-yangs and common villagers that once a person dies her or his souls will become so loosely attached to the body that they might be lost at any moment; these same souls are also vulnerable to the extent that they can be attacked by any mean or evil spirits that are wandering about. The mourner family and the yin-yang are expected to keep the souls of the dead from getting lost or attacked. The family can use a ghost-leading lamp (引魂燈) close to the corpse to keep the souls from leaving and scattering; when the corpse is being moved out of the house, the primary mourner uses a rooster to wake up the souls of the dead and then call the souls to come along to the coffin; when the corpse is moved from one place to another, whenever there is a bridge or and intersection along the road, the mourners will call the dead by his or her name (if the mourner is older than the deceased) or by the title, such as "Mom" or "Old Brother" (if the mourner is a child or a younger sibling), so that the souls may not get lost. To secure the soul-protection measure at a higher level, the yin-yang issues the "Ghost-Leading Road Certificate" (引路亡票) and the "Ghost-Leading Banner" (引魂幡) to escort the souls to the graveyard where they can be settled. This settlement is made easier if the deceased is buried in an existing family graveyard. Behind the soul protection measures is the notion of an afterlife, which holds that the system or the structure of the afterlife world is not much different from the world of the living. But before a dead person is properly buried together with his or her souls, there are always dangers. After the dead person is officially admitted to the yin world, there should be no worries – at least less worries. This notion is constructed out of the binary yin-and-yang world cosmology. Somewhat overlapping with, but widely different from this cosmology is that of the three-tier world, which holds that the afterlife has two drastically different

styles. One is the Hell where souls and ghosts suffer from unimaginable tortures and the other is the Heaven that can be loosely compared to the Christian concept. Wherever the soul or ghost of the newly dead should go, it is determined by a combined judgment administered at the *difu* (地府 the nether world): His or her words and deeds in the *yang* world, as well as the salvific actions taken by the dead person's family members.

With regards to multiple souls and spirits, while a Chinese villager is still alive and healthy, he or she is quite capable of holding his or her little flock of three souls and seven spirits contained within. However, a corpse in the transitional funerary proceedings is no longer able to do so. Those who carry and convey must do the herding chores for the deceased. Thus, before bridges and intersections that loosened little herd must be brought together more tightly, and at the graveyard they must be bedded down together with the corpse.

Of course there is no way to undo or redo what one has done in the *yang* world after the last breath is spent; but the salvific theory provides such a wonderful possibility that no children of the deceased with good conscience and filial piety dare to ignore it. It is this very possibility that generates professional need for the yin-yang practitioners who are trained to take care of the souls of the dead with their salvific scriptures. As long as the notion of salvation in an afterlife exists, the yin-yang profession will also continue to be needed. The name of the profession, yin-yang, by which people call the practitioners, encapsulates the meaning and function of the professional role in itself.

(2) Eliminating disasters and guarding the house. It is common belief that any death, even a natural death of a well-aged person (i.e. 70 years or older), is the result of encountering a *yang* (殃 disaster) or *yang-sha* (殃煞 disastrous and malignant spirit); this

is why during the funeral period the word “disaster” is most frequently mentioned by the yin-yangs. In one of my interviews with the yin-yangs, Master Meng (personal communication, August 2010) stated that a disaster that has brought death to a family would not willingly walk out the house of a mourner family; it must be removed or driven out by force. A house cleansing is always needed unless the dead person was never brought into the house; and even in that case a house cleansing may be necessary as a safety measure for the rest of the family who came into close contact with the deceased. The yin-yang master showed me “Item List 2” from a “Disaster-Narrating Note” (殃狀單子, see above for contents) template and explained: The note says that in case the disastrous and malignant spirit does not get out [of a house], gold and silver or precious stones should be used. This is because these things are not only sharp and stern, but also shining in the dark. “There must be a reason why people like to wear gold and silver or diamond jewelries,” the Fanmagou villagers told me, “because those things help ward off evil spirits and protect humans” (Z. C. Wang, W. K. Wang & H. C. Zhang, personal communication, August 2010). In case one does not have precious things like those, he can hire a yin-yang, who can use his power, or use his knowledge to summon powerful gods, to expel a disastrous spirit that has gotten into the house, or to use his drawn-on-the-paper talismen to guard the house so the disastrous spirits have no chance to get in. A yin-yang can also prescribe the twelve pure medicinal herbs and empower them to be used in expelling the disastrous spirits.

It is the *yang-sha* disaster that brings death to a family and overwhelms the surviving members of the family with emotion. Some villagers comment that during a funeral the disaster has been so strong and its emotional effect is so great that it can bring

a mourning family to their knees. Taking care of the souls of a dead person provides a last chance for family mourners to exercise their filial piety, an ancient cultural core value. It also ensures the family mourners that the future generation will continue to be protected by the ancestors who are just being joined by the newly deceased. The underlying belief is that souls that have been pacified will not return to the house and cause trouble for the family. It is even common that some dead may need to be reburied in different locations in order to settle their souls so that their family members will no longer be constantly bothered by those dissatisfied souls. But pacifying the souls of a dead relative is not quite enough to guarantee the safety of a family. The causes of *yang-sha* disasters need to be chased out of the house and additional guarding measures need to be established. All these activities must be performed by initiated yin-yang practitioners. All of this is done, after all, for the wellbeing of the living.

The rituals associated with yin yang practice in Fanmagou are a syncretistic blend of influences over millenia of cultural and social evolution in China and include outside contact. They blend language and traditions of the big three religions, no doubt, but also continue much older shamanistic traditions and roles whose origin may run many thousands of years deeper. The people clearly value the need for literacy and professional training, even though the yin-yangs themselves are not a separate priestly class, but instead remain simple farmers during their off hours. The worldview these practices derive from blends belief in an afterlife with concerns for this life and the living. It has changed over time, no doubt, and adjusted to encounters with modernity and other technological changes in recent decades, but these changes are probably small when compared with the change to be faced in the near future as the surrounding society moves

quickly towards urbanization and modernization. It hangs in the balance and it is hard to see where it will be even a decade from now. One proactive response may be to preserve this culture and tradition at least through documentation, as in this ethnography and its accompanying digital video pieces. Another response, presently on the rise in China, may include a kind of cultural tourism that values a window into the past to the more remote heritage traditions. But in either case, the yin-yang tradition is transforming rapidly and even an ethnography, such as this, may be nearly impossible to conduct in the near future.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

After analyzing the data from my decade-long field research on the yin-yang practice in Fanmagou and Qijiazhuang and several other villages in the neighboring regions, it is now time to step back from these specific locations and practices to reflect on their meaning both locally and in a broader context. The field research has produced several primary findings that align with my own insider knowledge acquired from growing up and living in Fanmagou. These findings include, but are not limited to (1) the yin yang practice in Fanmagou is underpinned by a belief system structured by a binary *yin* and *yang* world cosmology and the three-layer world cosmology – the heaven, the living human *yang* realm and the netherworld – *yin* hell – this is a worldview that the villagers and the yin-yangs share across the Xi-Hai-Gu region; (2) the yin-yangs represent synthetically the three traditional main religions in China as well as shamanism: The yin and yang binary worldview and the three souls and seven spirits are Daoist notions; the three realms (heaven, living world and hell) is a Buddhist notion; a yin-yang master can translate the Confucian filial piety of a mourner family into ideal destination of the dead; and a yin-yang uses shamanic means of exorcism in healing and house-cleansing rituals. Therefore a yin-yang master not only mediates between the yin and the yang world; he also integrates the three main religions teachings and shamanic practices all in one; (3) the scholarship on traditional folk religious practices across China has been intermittent historically and often politically (negatively) motivated; however the current generation has seen a resurgence of interest and scholarship that values the cultural heritage of these traditions and seeks to document their practices and to understand their meaning; (4) the role of a yin-yang practitioner in folk religion, in underdeveloped rural

villages like Fanmagou, incorporates a unique blend of influences and plays a key professional mediation role in many life situations, and remains particularly indispensable in funerary rituals, and (5) the practical challenges of conducting ethnographic field research on traditional cultures, particularly those facing threats of cultural loss amidst a backdrop of rapid social change, are perhaps best taken on from an insider-outsider dual position exemplified by the indigenous scholar. In my own case, this approach allowed for the access and trust needed to even begin the project and the dual perspectives from which to understand and interpret the complex layers of field experience obtained in the course of an ethnographic process. The first two findings on the local worldview system and the history of folk religious scholarship in China have been discussed relatively fully in earlier chapters. Here in this chapter I would like to focus my attention on discussion of the indispensability of a yin-yang in funerary rituals and the practicality of certain methods in doing field research on traditional culture. At the end of the chapter, I will also briefly discuss the implications of my work for future research, as well as for advocating for a public policy that could support cultural preservation and assurances for people's freedom to practice and to evolve freely their own cultural and religious practices.[116]

1. The Indispensability of a Yin-Yang Practitioner in a Funeral Ritual[117]

Like many other spiritual mediums across China, such as the *La-mo* (腊摩) of the Yi nationality in southern China's Guangxi Zhuangzu Autonomous Region (Lu, 2007),

[116] All I would ask for is dignified "protection of the living people." Those leaders and researchers who dictate changes do not really understand what they are doing anyhow--they are primarily interested in the success of their power applications. Humanities teachers can only work for gentle reform, and indirectly. Anything else may mess up the lives of ordinary people.

[117] See a flowchart in Appendix 4 for a yin-yang master's involvement in a funerary ritual.

the dujian (都监 executer) of the Korean nationality in northeastern China (Lian, 2011), the Tu-laoshi (土老師) of the Tujia nationality in central China's Hubei province (Wang, 2010) and the badai (巴代) or badaixiong (巴代熊) of the Miao nationality in Hunan province in central-south China (Wu, 2012; Wu, 2011), as well as the Daoist master of the Chinese Han nationality in Hunan province (Peng, 2008), the yin-yang masters in Xi-Hai-Gu region in northwestern China are indispensable in funerary rituals. This indispensability is neither solely determined by contemporary yin-yangs that lead the rituals nor by the fellow villagers that hire the yin-yang(s) to do the rituals; it is primarily determined by the centuries-long tradition that compels all of them to keep the practice alive. The backbone of this tradition is the belief in the immortality of souls and spirits, the ancestor worship, as well as the mutual impact of the *yin* and the *yang* worlds through their constant interactions.

Similar to the everyday human *yang* world in which among the diversity of people, there are present certain strong, domineering, aggressive and even mean or evil individuals (i.e., the bad guys) who make life unpleasant or dangerous for weaker individuals; the invisible spiritual *yin* world also has this same diversity of beings including the "bad guys" who make afterlife unpleasant and dangerous for the others. It is not the case that the yin world is utterly composed of evil or dangerous spirits, but that it mirrors the diversity of the yang world. Consequently, the children and siblings of a deceased person understand the challenges of the relative who transitions into the other world. They feel obliged to extend their assistance to them for safe and successful passage. However, this is not a simple matter since they themselves do not have reliable and safe access through training and expertise to actualize their wishes implied in their

filial piety. In this cultural tradition, the most suitable and, in fact, the only people that they can get adequate assistance from are the local ritual specialists (Peng, 2008, p. 15) who, acting as intermediaries on their behalf, can conduct this important and delicate business of navigating the *yin* world through proper rituals. In a first stage, the yin-yang's written and officially sealed documents allow the dead person's souls to be properly escorted to the grave, and ensure that the sacrifices offered by the mourning family members will not be robbed by unwanted ghosts. In a second ritual stage, the yin-yang's official letters and professional rituals give proper notification to the Earth god, the Town god, and the Kitchen god in order that these important deities will be satisfied, and not offended, ensuring that they will not make trouble for the family. A third ritual stage involves the yin-yang's chanting of scripture and singing of hymns expressing the desire that the souls of the dead should be saved from being sent to Hell or being reincarnated into a domestic animal.

During various stages in a funerary ritual paper money[118] is burned. This money is not only burned in offering to the newly deceased. It is also burned (1) as an offering to the gods who have been invited by the yin-yang, (2) as an offering to the ancestors of the family who have also been invited through the help of the yin-yang, (3) as an offering to the ghosts of other recently dead fellow villagers (within the last three years) who because of the newness of their transition to the *yin* world are still wandering about in the surface world. The money burned directly for the ghost of the deceased member of the mourner family is primarily for him or her to use to get settled in the *yin* world; but it is also for him or her to use it to repay to other ghosts any outstanding debt that he or she

[118] In this writing, "paper money" refers to currency for the nether world (*mingbi*, 冥幣) that is printed on white or yellow paper with a plate and ink. Paper money used to be exclusively printed by the mourner families but now many people choose to buy from stores.

might have owed while still in the *yang* world. This repayment of any debts by the deceased in turn will help the yin-yang's ritual prayer chanting become more widely efficacious. In order for a large sum of paper money to be directly burned to a designated ghost, the mourner family will pack the paper money in a parcel and have the yin-yang write the name of their deceased relative on the parcel. The impact of burning the easily and cheaply available paper money on a mourner family's wellbeing is believed to be fairly great: The more money the deceased relative carries in the yin world, the less worried are the surviving members of the family because this money may also help pacify the yin-world creditors that have the tendency of bothering the living relatives of the debtor.

The help of a yin-yang is also crucial in the concluding stage of a funeral ritual – the house cleansing ritual. This ritual requires that twelve pure Chinese herb medicines are used; but not just anybody can simply go to a drug store to buy these herbs and boil them into medicine to use in a house cleansing ritual. The medicine must be empowered, or initiated, by a yin-yang before it can be used. The medicine is efficacious only after the yin-yang master has channeled the divine power and good-will into it.

Important as a yin-yang's job is, it can also be stressful and tedious. The most stressful and tedious work for a yin-yang practitioner is to prepare all the ritual documents for a same-day burial funerary ritual. The same-day burial ritual means that a dead person is buried the same day she or he dies without reducing the number of basic ritual steps. The only procedure that can be postponed in this case is the chanting of the salvific scriptures. What makes a same-day burial necessary is that when a death occurs four days before a *Tuwang* (土旺) taboo day, in which circumstance most families would

like to have a same-day burial for their relative. The reason for choosing the same-day burial is that, according to the yin-yang books, within three days before a *Tuwang* taboo day and within four days after a *Tuwang*, plus the *Tuwang* day itself, for eight days the earth cannot be disturbed for burial. If for any reason such a deceased cannot be buried the same day she or he dies, the mourning will be stretched to over a week, and the mourners will not only suffer from kneeling for eight days and nights next to the corpse, as the vigil-keeping requires, but also suffer from the psychological pressure of believing that a dead person cannot rest in peace unless she or he is buried (入土為安) and, most importantly, that the longer a dead stays unburied the more sins will be added to her or him, and thereby the dead person's souls will suffer a longer time in the nether world before they are released (W. K. Wang, J. K. Zhang & Z. J. Meng, personal communication, February 2007; August 2010). A same-day burial is deemed more urgent if the death occurs in summer when every adult is expected to be working in the fields, plus there is no air conditioning in the countryside to keep the corpse from decaying. The problem is, when a same-day burial is determined necessary, everybody will have to act quickly and usually a more experienced yin-yang will be hired to make everything proceed smoothly and quickly. More often than not, two or more yin-yangs will have to be hired. In cases when a *Tuwang*-taboo-day dead person cannot be buried on the same day, at least one yin-yang is needed to chant the scriptures during the waiting period of days to reduce the sins that the dead might have intentionally or unintentionally committed. This again shows the indispensability of the yin-yang practitioners because whatever the case happens to be, they are needed.

Prior to the 1950s the yin-yangs used to be more indispensable than they are now because of their more frequent employment for illness rituals. Since the 1950s more doctors have been trained for the community and modern medical facilities have been added. This modernization trend has almost brought one significant component of yin-yang practice – the healing rituals – to an end. While the modernization of health care has been a significant positive development for the village and its people, the rituals associated with traditional healing practice are in danger of disappearing altogether in the near future as they fall out of use.

2. The Practicality of Certain Methods in Doing Field Research on Traditional culture – A Reflective Note

This is an ethnographic study of the yin-yang practices in the Xi-Hai-Gu area in northwestern China, and the main components of the practices are various rituals for various situations or circumstances. Research on rituals and folk practices may be best done through observations, especially participant observations, so as to see where, when and how the rituals are performed and also through interviews of key informants so as to find out the rationales or beliefs of those involved in doing the rituals or benefiting from the rituals. Aspects of the rites that cannot be observed in field work might be understood with the help of interviews. Interviews can also help to learn about changes of the practices over time as the result of political, economic and social changes.

Inasmuch as the lives of villagers in Fanmagou and Qijiazhuang are inseparable from the yin-yangs, interviewing only the yin-yangs does not yield a complete picture of the practice; therefore I have also systematically interviewed villagers in Fanmagou and Qijiazhuang who were sponsoring these rituals or who were particularly well situated to

talk about the meanings and importance of the rites. In many cases this included interviewing my own family members with whom I have evolved a lifetime of trust and respect. I am bringing the valuable quality of lifelong knowledge and relationships to these interviews and to the interpretations of their content.

While I have found ordinary ethnographic research methods very useful in my work, what follows here is a reflective note about my own approaches to research regarding yin-yang practice.

(1) Putting the research subject in a specific time and space situation. The significance of an ethnographic study is to reveal the normalcy of a given cultural mode. In China, it requires a certain amount of maturity and subtlety to present folk religion favorably to the government officials. I have discovered over time that while many officials adopt an overtly state-oriented stance of indifference or skepticism toward this subject, many are actually interested in the ritual practices and are in fact themselves wondering about what happened to their relationships with their ancestors and families back home. That is, while they represent a current state perspective that is indifferent or skeptical, their own sense of filial piety for example runs deep and their curiosity or appreciation for these practices lies below the surface. At this point of research diplomacy, the researcher must almost exceed the skills of the priest in comforting souls caught between their soul-givers and the modern power structures that attempt to control them. This navigation has been a careful and complex part of my ongoing research. It has been very helpful that Karl Luckert, an outsider to China but a respected international scholar, has always maintained good relations with the highest authorities in the Province of Ningxia. In Chapter 19 of his latest book, *Stone Age Religion at Göbekli Tepe,* he has

summed up his approach with a new perspective on Ancient China, including a rather critical review of the evolution of the Chinese empire. It is revealing of the overall respect he enjoys that the censors in Beijing have approved his evenhanded essay even for the education of Communist cadres. As Luckert has exemplified, and I also have found in my work, negotiating a working level of cooperation with the government regarding the study of Chinese folk religion is quite possible, even if complex in today's climate.

Thus, when we study the traditional cultural practices and ritual systems, we cannot just give the so-called "typical custom" as a general description. Instead, we must describe when, where, and how those customs took on life. That is to say, our main research content is to reflect on the specific time and space situation. For example, in Bush (1970) and Luo (1991), we find that researchers specifically address issues of religious practices in communist China under a socialist system. According to Bush, C.K. Yang learned from his field work in the village of Nanching that "there was an indiscriminate smashing of temples and much antireligious violence by ardent supporters of the new regime at first, but as social-political order was re-established, emphasis fell on organized religious [such as Christian] activities" (p. 385). For instance, it is interesting to see how various religious practices in Pi County, Jiangsu province, were looked at by the researcher(s) who did the field work. The word "superstition" is frequently used in their writings, which truthfully reflect the political influence and ideological constraints the researchers had to bear in mind still in early 1980s.

While in the late 1980s researchers in general, and even outsiders like Karl Luckert, particularly still needed to relate to and interact with the ideology of Marx and Engels as

they described Chinese cultural life, this ideological referencing was no longer necessary later during the 1990s. Ethnographers were liberated to pay attention to the contexts of how people were living in particular places, and the endemic folk details, including local events—while also watching how government officials and party cadres themselves died and got themselves buried. These details of life and death are not only vivid and fresh, but are also personalized and valuable contextual information. Of course, what one learns in regard to these things cannot and should not always be published – it would complicate the work unnecessarily and add additional layers of risk for all involved. In this dissertation study, for example, I limited my actual research to the yin-yang folk religion and avoided giving much comment or interpretation to the surrounding socio-political events and context. To include the later would have made this less an ethnographic document of an important and disappearing cultural tradition, and more a political act of resistance or activism.

Ethnographic research must be oriented to the local people who are researched, who are using the local words, expressions and logic, to narrate local matters and events. If we really want to make clear that local culture, we must employ a "deep description" of the local culture, and local words must be used to explain local circumstances. This will require us to look for the local customary statements of communication in the field. The ethnographic descriptions must be expressed by specific people's interpretations of their own experiences. The customary statement includes the folk vocabulary, folk language and folk logic. It can be said that the amount of customary ways of saying things, mastered by a researcher, and the accuracy of this mastery, is directly related to the credibility and persuasiveness of his or her ethnography. Ethnography is "deep

description" and ethnographers are those who are engaged in producing such descriptions. (See Part 1 in Chapter 5 for my own examples of thick description) One has to be clear that the difficulties in doing such research are inevitable, because "doing ethnography is like trying to read …. a manuscript – foreign, faced, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries" (Geertz, 1973).

(2) Focusing on specific people and describing folk changes. The ethnographic research paradigm emphasizes fieldwork, showing the overall research orientation of the ethnographic style. It is difficult, and arguably impossible, to do anthropology from afar; the researcher has to be present and on location with eyes and ears open. Without this starting place, it is impossible to know what is being missed or misrepresented. Representative ethnographic research projects in China include: Liu Xiaochun's "A Kejia village's family and culture – a case study of Fu Dong village in Jiangxi Province" (Ph. D. dissertation, Beijing Normal University, 1998), Wu Xiaoqun's "Miaofeng Shan: Historical changes of Beijing folk society" (People's Publishing Press, 2006), and Wang Xiaoli's "The worship of Bixia Gods and village activity of pilgrims from Miaofeng Mountain" (Ph. D. dissertation, Beijing Normal University, 2002). The main objects of my own study have been the yin-yang practitioners, and I have been on location and able to pay close attention to their upbringing and education, to their manner of learning and mastering skills, to observe and discuss their religious orientation and practices, and simply to see and know them in their daily life.

(3) Digital ethnography. With the advancement of modern science and technology, the tools for conducting ethnographic research have increased immensely. What once used to be sufficient with a pen and a notebook now appears to be quite obsolete, or at

least far from sufficient. While an audio recorder is more handy and comprehensive than a pen and notebook, a video recorder has added even richer and more advanced features that allows a researcher to not only hear what an informant said, but also how the informant said what he said, his tone and facial expressions, as well as any gestures or actions accompanying the words. These devices become more helpful when combined with computer software. But these digital tools are not only for data collecting, mining and processing, but also for data publishing, as well as multi-layer evaluation.[119]

My research has utilized digital devices throughout. When I first started collecting field data for my Master's Thesis in 1998, I called one of my brothers in China and asked him to interview some yin-yangs on my behalf and collect some yin-yang books for me. What we collected in this process included (1) an audio tape that recorded the yin-yangs' voice in a memorial ritual; (2) photographs of the ritual objects (hand-drum and bells) that yin-yangs use in these rites, and (3) a set of talisman (amulets) from the yin-yangs' drawing that were scanned into images. As some of the physical objects were not collected, I also made use of the Internet to download images of similar objects (for example, the little bell that children wear during certain rites). Also, drawing upon my personal experience, I also made some images with the "Paint" software. My interest in integrating and fully utilizing digital tools has been with me from the beginning of my ethnographic fieldwork.

In summer of 2002 Karl Luckert and I began using various kinds of digital devices, especially video cameras, to collect research data in our field work, and using some of this footage to produce a DVD that can be used as courseware. The end product of this

[119] See, for example, the *Journal of Digital Humanities*, which in 2012 devoted a whole volume to uses in evaluation.

current research project will, over time, most likely take on two parallel forms: a traditional hard-copy dissertation text and academic articles, and also subsequently a website that will display and explain photographs, audio and video clips and hyperlinks to additional resources (my own and others) that provide richer context and opportunities to expand upon the research itself. My motivation for pursuing this parallel digital humanities style product is that I find video documentary to offer a richer and more compelling format for presenting and preserving a disappearing culture and its key ritual practices. I also find that digital products are increasingly ideal for disseminating knowledge to larger audiences, more so than traditional products such as papers or books. The best way to preserve and teach about disappearing cultures is to use both traditional printed formats and digitized materials and sites. I currently host a website (i.e., "zzslanguageculturweekly") devoted to portraying, describing, and interpreting Chinese folk culture. It includes many videos and images related to this ethnographic study that can be more systematically organized and presented as a digital humanities content from this dissertation.

It is worth mentioning that my informants – both the yin-yangs and the villagers – did not find it easy to talk or act in front of a camera or a recorder in the first few minutes, but they forgot about the digital devices when they got into the subject. Over half of the villagers cleared their throats before they began to give answers in my interviews, which indicates they took the interviews seriously and, in fact, they said that they felt important to be interviewed on something they are familiar with (W. K. Wang, H. C. Zhang, Z. C. Wang, J. K. Zhang & J. L. Zhang, personal communication, August 2010).

3. Insider / Outsider Roles of Doing Field Research on Traditional Culture

There is no doubt that insider ethnographers or anthropologists who do research on their own culture have remarkable advantages that cannot be matched by that of the outsider ethnographers, as the insiders inhabit a home web of intricate knowledge and they can draw "directly from the reservoir of their own experience" that is intimate to their social world of everyday life and labor (Pickering, 2008, p. 23). The advantage lies in that the insiders can identify the important elements and components of their own culture and thereby know what to preserve by way of documentation. However, perspectives of outsider researchers can provide cross checks and rectify possible shortsighted biases, or help improve the methods and the quality, or even the validity, of the research. In the case of doing research on folk religious practice in places like Fanmagou, the academic outsider is also important to help cushion the interaction with the government – to help avoid unnecessary misunderstandings. At the same time, the milieu of literary discourse, for establishing lines of academic questions, for doing, writing, as well as publishing the research, is almost entirely the contribution of outsiders. The deeper a researcher goes inside, the clearer he may learn to distinguish his line of reasoning from the general outside world.

My dual role as an insider and an outsider was constantly changing during my field work and during the yin-yang text translations and interpretations. In most of the rituals I participated, whenever prostrating and kowtowing (拜) were required, it felt natural to do so as a 100 percent insider; but at the same time I kept on observing as a fully conscious outsider. When doing the yin-yang text translations and interpretations, my insider role placed me in an advantageous position. Some of the texts were written in the local dialect

which, from the Chinese characters that were used, even an "outsider" in China who does not know the dialect would have found it difficult to understand, let alone scholars whose native languages are not Chinese.

Ethnographic fieldwork always requires familiarity with the subject and a rapport with the researched; an insider naturally has an advantage in this regard. Yet, being too familiar and saying "I know this" may well be a pitfall. Humility is crucial in ethnographic work! Sometimes presumption of knowledge is wrong and shows that I am also an outsider. Having left the village at 19 and in the same year the Cultural Revolution ended, I was too immature to understand the culture and things that were hidden from the young people. So even as an apparent insider I missed a lot; for example, the gradual reviving of some of the folk religious activities (rituals included) took place during my physical absence.

As an insider I did not know how to analyze what I observed. I needed a theoretical framework to step away and see the bigger picture. That gave me more power to understand my own culture. As matter of fact, I did not know I was an insider until I read about it and then I thought I was an insider, but when I walked to the villagers I felt like an outsider because of how they treated me as a researcher. And they looked at me and Dr. Luckert as outsiders. I was like a yin-yang on the border, in between. Nevertheless, I have cultivated both insider and outsider relationships in this process, relying upon my insider knowledge to find answers to questions and to build relationships of trust, and drawing upon my outsider academic training to give a broader interpretive framework and establish a formal credibility for such work. If William Whyte's Street Corner Society, written from the perspective of an outsider, can help preserve a lively piece of

history of a once marginalized group, my personal involvement as a more-insider-than-outsider author may also help preserve freedom and confidence in a declining and endangered culture.

4. Limitations and Questions for another Generation of Researchers

This study has been ongoing for over a decade; and yet, there are still limitations and unresolved questions. One ongoing and unresolved ethnographic question of my own involves the theory of souls held by the villagers and the yin-yangs that seems to include an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, the souls of the dead are supposed to be kept altogether with the body by all possible means; yet on the other hand, a separate shrine may be set up in a remote place (i.e., away from the body), so the souls of the dead can be entertained with sacrifices. How can both be possible in the minds and beliefs of the locals? I did ask some of my informants, but their answers were not definite or consistent enough for me to draw any conclusions. Perhaps this conflict of orientation is dependent on the proportion of how many souls manage to rise to an ancestors' Heaven, and how many, after being neglected by their own kin or after escaping from Hell, are still doomed to continue wandering on Earth. I suspect that these differences result, to no small degree, from the uneven practices of the yin-yang rituals themselves. Even in such a specific and culturally unique area, there are differences of practice and interpretation that naturally exist. Perhaps this paradox and other seeming incongruities of religious belief and practice will never be resolved.

A limitation of this research is that it has focused only on the Xi-Hai-Gu region in terms of field ethnography, and even more specifically on three small villages. My attempt has been to look deeply at a particular local culture in which I am also a natural

insider. While I believe this choice has merit and value, it is also true that I have not yet expanded the circle of my ethnographic description to include additional villages so that I could explore existing diversities to better understand Fanmagou's yin-yangs within a larger regional context of cultural evolution. However, I understand that dissertation research is perhaps only a beginning of more full-scale research, and I reserve my interest in continuing the research whenever time and funds permit.

Additionally, while I have been engaged in this research for a number of years and in many ways began the ethnography in time to capture many important voices (of elders and older yin-yangs), I am aware that even so, I was only able to interview villagers that were born after 1918. This means yin-yang practice earlier than their remembered time has already been lost for direct study, especially since there is no extant literature about earlier practices. Ethnology can, after all, only hope to collect what samples actually exist here and there and within the limitations of what is available. Therefore, even the most detailed and confident ethnography remains limited to the time and place in which it takes place.

Another limitation requiring mention is that for political and practical reasons I did not include communist cadres (officials) among my informants. While their perspective would certainly be interesting to explore and include, the time certainly has not yet arrived for free and open discourse on their personal beliefs and administrative obligations. It may take a few more years before folk religious practices can be understood as harmless folk practice that has no potential threat to the government; only by that time will it not be imposing to interview the communist cadres. Thus, there always will remain a deficit of information regarding Chinese people of the area in

general. We must simply continue to attempt to learn from ethnology, about general humanity, from as many samples and variables as are available to us.

As for questions for another generation of researchers, I maintain that the meaning of folk religious practice needs to be fully explored based on field research. Traditional academic communities may think of traditional cultures as static and living back in previous times, yet in my study we can see all of the porous adaptations to changing societies, especially in the healing rituals. Of equal importance are the ethics of heritage preservation and questions as to how values like self-determination and cultural extinction vs. natural cultural evolution need to be considered. Despite the importance and value of heritage to a given community, it may not be inherited and preserved. The Chinese folk culture in the Xi-Hai-Gu region has been kept for many generations and there has to be value, be it societal or personal. It at least keeps filial piety going on: respect and responsibility for elders and, recognition of the efforts of the elders. The key point is that memorial and funeral rituals are underpinned by filial piety, which is a moral and cultural pillar. Filial piety is one of the traditions I personally would like to keep and the folk practice revealed in this study helps sustain it. But of course not all traditional practices are worth keeping; healing ritual, for instance, should diminish in importance because now there are more and better scientific medical options available to villagers. This ritual should be reserved only for the spiritual aspects that may have psychological and emotional benefits.

5. Implications of My Research for Future Research on Yin-Yang Practice and Folk Religions

My research itself cannot protect or preserve the yin-yang folk religious practice of Fanmagou from getting diminished or lost; it nevertheless, I hope, will fill a gap in the Chinese scholarship in the folk religions research on the yin-yang practice. Additionally, I hope it may spark the interest of more ethnographers to go (back) to the countryside, especially where old practices suffered less severe damage during the Cultural Revolution and are still relatively less influenced by modernity. Even regions that are still traditionally intact and active face drastic changes ahead, particularly with the current policy of urbanization (城市化) that takes the residents out of their villages and resettles them in other localities. While urbanization is arguably well-intentioned, the consequences of transitional pain on the part of the villagers, and the endangerment to their cultural heritage may not have been thoroughly considered. Most villagers will carry their faith or beliefs wherever they go, but continuing the ritual practices will be much more challenging in new urban areas, and without the practices, the ritual meanings and their worldview will be difficult to continue to a next generation. Even in my grandmother's case, one can see that the funeral ritual procedures in small cities are being modified, reduced or modernized (such as making telephone calls instead of doing the *baosang* rituals or using a gas-powered vehicle to carry a corpse-in-coffin instead of a cattle or horse drawn cart). In some cases this may result from simple practical concerns such as fearing that they will disturb their new neighbors who may not share the same culture or customs. Relocation and resettlement of villagers is like transplanting them in very different environments and even if moved together, they are likely to be separated

from their fellow villagers and mixed with villagers from other regions where folk religious practices are different. The result is that the overall social life of the villagers will be disturbed or perhaps destroyed. The villagers may gradually adopt the cultural practices of the new environment and slowly be naturalized into their new home. In any case, dramatic change is inevitable. Their traditional religious practices, for example, may have to be combined with those of others in the new community.

My hope is that if more scholars can be attracted to the study of the folk culture and even specific yin-yang practices, our picture of the importance of this heritage both inside and outside the academic community will be enhanced. If ethnographers and scholars can preserve and educate about these unique cultural systems then perhaps even future government leaders may adopt remedies, resolutions, or constructive suggestions for preserving local folk culture. Perhaps new policies will even support new academic projects and priorities for scholars.

Another hope of mine is sharing this unique culture with scholars and a broader audience in the outside world. Despite all the research in the southeast part of China, northwestern China has not been well studied. For the past few decades, the central government has given primary attention to economic development and stability maintenance in northwestern China, and therefore matters like folk heritage research have not been fully addressed. Southeastern China has many advantages in economic wellbeing, cultural heritage reviving and tourism cultivation, while northwestern China where Xi-Hai-Gu locates is remote and may be considered as somewhat “barbaric” or “primitive” and far away from the modern world. Ethnographic research in northwestern

China will inform people in China and beyond about the traditions that are facing the challenges of relocation and urbanization.

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APPENDICES

1. Maps to show location of Fanmagou in China

Above: The brown part is Ningxia; and the little star is where Fanmagou is located.

Below: Satellite maps showing Fanmagou and Qijiazhuang.

2. Excerpt from "Yin-yang interview Tape III" (2002)

Note: ZZ = Zuotang Zhang; YY1 = Master Ma, the head yin-yang; YY 2 = Master Meng

張佐堂： 我想知道陰陽總共有哪些儀式？有哪些類別？比如說埋人都是幾種儀式，比如說周年紀念等或者幾週年紀念這些都有什麼儀式？名稱上怎麼叫？

陰陽 1： 哀悼、紀念嘛，為了紀念嘛！為了紀念村上的，好比亡故的人，就是舉行哀悼儀式，把陰陽請去，陰陽也叫高功，請去給人家行文，誦幾段真經，哀悼一下。

陰陽 2: 用土話來說就是超度一下，凡間受了多少磨難，到了陰曹地府的話，走了一番過程的話。是這麼個少受一些罪，就說是咱們超度，早早地超生。

陰陽 1： 現在也不行了，陰陽這個儀式上也減退了，像原先的話，作為一個陰陽，真正要作一個陰陽也不容易，確實是要有很多的知識，作為一個陰陽既要會安葬埋人，又要懂風水，這是相結合的，作為陰陽，是相結合的，你必須要懂風水，第二方面要會誦經。

張佐堂： 對。

陰陽 1： 第三你要會做亡醮。

Zz: I'd like to know how many rites the yy's do. What categories do you have? For instance, how many funeral rites, or anniversary rites and etc. what rituals do you have for each of them? Do you have any names for them?

Yy 1: To lament or to commemorate somebody's death in the village. On occasions as such, rituals are held and yin-yangs are invited. Yin-yangs are also called "*gaogong*" (高功 the ones with high merits and virtues). The yin-yangs are invited there to write a letter, or to chant some true scriptures, to lament the dead.

Yy 2: The purpose of lamenting the dead is to release his/her souls from purgatory, to expiate the sins. By so doing the sins that the dead person may have committed during his/her life time may be expiated, so that he/she will suffer less in the hell, and get out of there sooner.

Yy 1: Nowadays things are no longer what they used to be. Yin-yang rituals are reduced. In the past, if one really wants to be a yin-yang, it was not that easy. He must learn a lot of knowledge. To be a yin-yang, he not only should know how to do the funeral rites, but also know about the Feng-Shui [120], knowledge of these two aspects should always go together. Yes, that's right. You must know Feng-Shui. The second requirement is that you should be able to chant the scriptures.

Zz: Oh, okay.

Yy 1: The third requirement is that you should know how to do the death rites.

張佐堂： 亡醮？

陰陽 1： 亡醮。這個就叫亡醮，人先開始逝世了以後，就叫亡醮。

張佐堂： 哦，對。

陰陽 1： 噢，當亡醮呢，哎一周、二週年的紀念上，咱們這裡的風俗習慣上就很隆重，一周年的紀念三週年的紀念，有時間按家庭的情況也請陰陽，這個里頭，按咱們的風俗習慣上就分層次了，就是按家庭的情況看怎麼樣，情況如果好，就是幾天幾夜的經，情況如果不好，也就是幾天幾夜的經。也就是說按家庭的情況，按我外爺相傳這個下來是，有時間好比三天三夜。按三天三夜來說就是民間的一個出門道場。

佐堂：三天三夜是一個出門道場。

陰陽 1：哎，對。出門道場。

張佐堂： 嗯！

陰陽 1： 按三天三夜來說這就是咱們民間的一個道場。

陰陽 1： 七天七夜就是十二分的醮.

陰陽 2：七天七夜就稱起賢，掛起賢了。

陰陽 1：這就是二十四分的請賢，做的十二分的醮。

Zz: Death ceremonial rites?

[120] Literally, wind and water. The location of a house or tomb, supposed to have an influence on the fortune of a family. Geomantic omen. While some literature put yin-yang and geomancer together, villagers in Zhangyi and Hongzhuang do not mix them.

Yy 1: Yes. Death rites. That is the funeral rite. When people die, the rite you do is called death ceremonial rite.

Zz: I see.

Yy 1: Regarding death ceremonial rites, it is like this. Our custom here is, the first year and the third year anniversaries are grand (ceremonious). However, the degree of the grandness is determined by the economic conditions of the family that hosts such anniversaries. Generally a family would invite a yin-yang for the rite, but the length of the rite depends on the family's economic conditions. Basically the better the condition, the greater the scale of the rites. For example, if a family is better off in economy, they may ask a yin-yang to do a rite for several days and nights. According to my grandfather, if a rite is three days and three nights, it is called a "Going-out-the-gate" rite.

Zz: "Going-out-the-gate" rite?

Yy 1: Yes. In the villages a three-day-three-night rite is considered a formal one. If it is a seven-day-seven-night rite, it is called a twelve-degree rite.

Yy 2: A seven-day-seven-night rite will be featured with an invitation of the virtuous.

Yy 1: That will be a twenty-four degree invitation of the virtuous with a twelve-degree rite.

佐堂：對。

陰陽 1： 請賢嘛這個就是人家莊家有身勢的，有名望的，高貴之人。意思是請來給這個亡故的人按他生前所經歷的事情，做了些啥事題幾個詞，適當的題幾個詞，幾句啥話題出對他恰恰到合適。題個詞，這就是請賢，十二天，就是二十四分的教事，四十八分的請賢，都是相對應的，這就是最大的教事。比咱們現在所說的高一半，現在在這一輩這個階段裡頭，在這個教事方面都做不下來。

張佐堂：主要原因是啥？

陰陽 1： 主要原因是老藝人年事高了，在社會這個過程中

陰陽 2 ：道場消失了。

陰陽 1： 就是有些文明之師已經逝世了，就沒傳下來。

張佐堂：是不是因為文化大革命把這個給弄脫節了。

陰 陽：就是的。

陰陽 2：燒的燒了，埋的埋了。

陰陽：有意去學沒有人麼。繼續想請高明之師領教但沒有人了。

陰陽 2：也就是說把這些東西全部毀了麼。

陰陽：有些東西是書面知識，有些東西就是口口相傳，這個過程中，就像唱戲的一樣，還有些動作呢

陰陽 1： 哎，對。所以這些都失傳了，好像破獄放舍、放藥呀這些事也基本失傳了？

Zz: What is it?

Yy 1: Well, that is an invitation to those who have power, influence or who have high positions in the village. They are invited to write, according to the deeds of the dead, a few words of appreciation or commemoration of the dead. For example, what good things he or she did or what he or she once experienced. Usually such comments are very fair. A twelve-day rite will be a twenty-four-degree rite with a forty-eight-degree invitation to the virtuous. The degrees correspond to the number of days a rite is performed. A twelve-day rite is the grandest. It is twice as high as what we do now. Yin-yangs of our generation are not able to do the rite any more.

Zz: What is the main reason for this?

Yy 1: The primary reason is that the old masters are in their senior years, and as the society changes….

Yy 2: The rites got lost.

Yy 1: That is, some skilled masters died and their (knowledge of the rites) has not been passed down on to the young generation.

Zz: Was it the Cultural Revolution that disturbed the apprenticeship?

Yy 1: Yes. It was.

Yy 1: Some knowledge is from the books, some is from the oral-passing tradition. (Rite) is just like in an opera, it is accompanied by some actions and body movements.

Zz: Actions and body movements?

Yy 1: Yes. That's right. So these are lost. Such as breaking the jails, dispensing charity foods, as well as flying the cranes. All these are almost completely lost.

張佐堂：嗯，這些事我從來都沒聽過。

陰陽 1： 這都失傳了。

陰陽 2：十二分教你必須得考慮一場跑獄。

張佐堂：跑獄指的是咋麼跑的？

陰陽 1： 因為他就是栽的竿子嘛，他這個主要是說明了一個在古代的歷史上傳說昔日有木蓮，這個人是一個大孝子，他母親是一個忌口的人，從童兒時就修行，她是一個忌口的人，一直忌口，忌口到老的時間，常言說，人老非辱不亡，很多人到老了就饞了，就要吃肉呢，在途中時沒遇到別的吃了狗肉了，口開了以後，她繼續？木蓮她母親就轉成狗了，那麼在這種情況下他母親就被打入十八層地獄了。木蓮呢為了尋找他的母親，到處尋找不著，木蓮他就要修道，修道以後說是有天堂地獄，死了的人在地獄，到地獄裡頭尋他母親去了。他首先是一頭擔的是他的母親，據人說一頭擔的是他的母親，一頭擔的佛家經，這是成功以後才擔的，把他母親尋著的時間是一條狗麼。按破獄的情況來說是第一個關口是木蓮把他娘從滑油山尋著呢，這就是仙人的點化。仙人點化木蓮是不是對他母親真心實意，看他思母之心嘛，所以然仙人給他擺的陣勢，看他能不能過去。

張佐堂：噢，相當於你要接你母親的話……

陰陽 1： 對，關口上你要過去，你若是誠心誠意的話，多大的關可以過，首先咱們做這個醮就是要上滑油山，木蓮非過這個滑油山不成，也就是咱們說的地油子。一座禿溜溜的山，上山的時間還比較攀登起來還有些腳窩子還能踩，而下去時一陣是懸崖，一陣是陡坡，就是這樣，看你是否願意捨得你的身體，一掉下去就是粉身碎骨，然而木蓮為了尋找他的母親，是不怕懸崖深谷，他繼續要從滑油山上爬過去呢，他要一直攀登過去，下到滑油山，他一直行走，要經過一個惡狗村。

Zz: I have never heard about these rites.

Yy 1: They are lost. For a twelve-degree rite you must think about a breaking jail rite.

Zz: How do you do it?

Yy 1: You set up poles to represent jails in the nether land. This comes from a story—Long, long ago there lived a man named Mulian. He was an obedient son. His mother was a person who avoided certain foods， and since childhood she disciplined herself according to a religious doctrine. She avoided such foods until she was very old. However, it has been said that formerly people did not die unless they committed sacrilege in their old age. More and more old people became gluttonous and wanted to eat meat. So she, too, craved very much to eat some meat. On a journey she did not obtain any meat other than the meat of a dog. Ever since then she continued to eat meat, and she became a dog。The mother of Mulian was thrown into one of the eighteen layers of hell. Mulian could not find his mother anywhere, but because he wanted to look for her he decided to cultivate himself in accordance with a religious doctrine。It has been said that after a person trains himself or herself in accordance with a religious doctrine， the person would be able to (reach) heaven and hell. It has also been said that dead people were in hell. So, Mulian went to look for his mother in hell. If he wanted to break out of hell， the first strategic pass for him led over Oil-Slick-Hill, a fact that was pointed out to him by an immortal (a god) as being the correct path. The immortal wanted to test Mulian, as to whether he really missed his mother and whether or not he was sincere. Therefore the god arranged for him a test situation. He wanted to see whether he could pass.

Zz: So that was like to say, if you want to get your mother, you….

Yy 1: He could pass this key point if he was sincere. First of all, he had to pass over the Oil-Slick-Hill. It was a bald hill, and it was more difficult to go down that hill than to climb it. When he climbed it, he found some pits where he could put his feet in. That really helped him. However, when he went downhill he found that every now and then there were either cliffs or steep slopes all the way along. If he were to be careless, he would slip and fall and suffer a most cruel death. In this manner was to be revealed whether this Mulian indeed would give his life for finding his mother. Mulian wanted to do anything he could to find his mother, even if it meant dying.

After he had climbed the Oil-Slick-Hill, he also succeeded in going down. Then, he continued walking to a village of ferocious dogs.

張佐堂：滑油山，惡狗村。

陰陽 1： 對，這個惡狗村據人人相傳，為水作成的，這些人是不能過去的。心地裡十分好善的人，經過惡狗村時狗不咬；若是歹人的話，會被惡狗亂咬，無法過去。因此，木蓮自己發問，我能不能過得去惡狗村，就證明我是惡人還是善人。我自己也沒法確定自己是行善之人，只有上天知道，我今天的主要目的是要尋找我母親。必須得經過這個村兒。也就是得往過衝了。結果衝的時候一下子圍上來數不清的狗，狂咬起木蓮來。不一會兒功夫，木蓮被咬倒，幾近死亡。木蓮雙目緊閉。心想，好吧，你們要吃掉我就吃掉算了，我也就豁出去了。不過，木蓮很快發現，他就像在做夢一樣：剛才還覺得快要被咬死了，但等他睜眼一看，發現渾身上下沒有任何傷痛，完好無損。這時木蓮發現其中有一個狗很是高大，看上去慈眉善目，還有兩股眼淚流出。她把一隻前爪搭在木蓮肩膀上，眼淚叭噠地往下滴。就這樣，木蓮在惡狗村找到了他的母親，他是通過那條狗對他的神情悟出那就是他的母親。這樣，他就把母親放在一個筐子裡，另一個是佛家經，要救她出去。就在此時，木蓮想到：我母親在世受罪，和她同在十八層地獄的人都在受萬般之罪，我為啥不把他們一齊解救出去呢？讓他們跟著走呢？木蓮為了行善，解救墮落地府的受苦受難的人，這些是要破獄的。

Zz: Oil-Slick-Hill and Ferocious-Dog-Village.

Yy 1: Yes. It has been said that this village was made of water and that lots of ferocious dogs roamed there. It also was said that not all people could pass through this village—that the dogs would not bite people who had been doing good deeds, and that these people could pass through the village unharmed. By contrast, the dogs bit to death anyone who did violent deeds, and such people could not pass through the village at all. Mulian said to himself: “It is only God, not I, who can know whether I am a good man or a bad man. The most important thing is that today I want to find my mother and that I must pass through. Whether I can pass through this village or

not, it will show whether I am a good man or not." So, Mulian decided to rush into the village. However, as soon as he had rushed in, countless dogs gathered and immediately surrounded him. They bit him with great frenzy. Within a short moment, Mulian was dragged down and was lying on the ground. He almost died. Mulian closed his eyes tightly and thought: "Well then, if you all want to eat me, then please eat me. I have no other choice but death." However, suddenly he found that everything seemed to be just like a dream. Just a moment ago he felt that he was going to die, but when he now opened his eyes he found that his body was whole and that there were no wounds. At that moment, he noticed a she-dog that was very large and looking at him with kindness. Two tears rolled from her eyes as she placed one of her front paws upon his shoulder. Then her tears flowed continually. Mulian concluded that this dog was his mother, and he had found her in the Ferocious-Dog village, at last. Then Mulian placed his mother in one of two small baskets, and in the other basket there was a Sutra. So he rescued his mother from hell. At that moment another thought entered his mind: "All people who ended up in the eighteen deep hells are suffering as much as my mother. Why not saving all of them from hell together with my mother?" So, Mulian wanted to save all the people who had sunk into hell and who were suffering there. He needed to break out these hells.

張佐堂：先從孝敬老人一開始，然後就從憐憫眾人出發，三是破獄，有點兒普渡眾生一樣。

陰陽 1：就是的，就是這樣的。

陰陽 2：他是以孝為主，不怕一切，連生死都不怕麼。

張佐堂：有意思。不管是哪一個方面，總是有個來歷的，有個名堂的。這個故事的名堂叫啥來著？

陰陽 1：叫"破獄"

Zz: First it began with showing filial piety and respect to a parent, then it went on to show compassion to everyone, and the third is break out the hells. It is somewhat like saving all living beings.

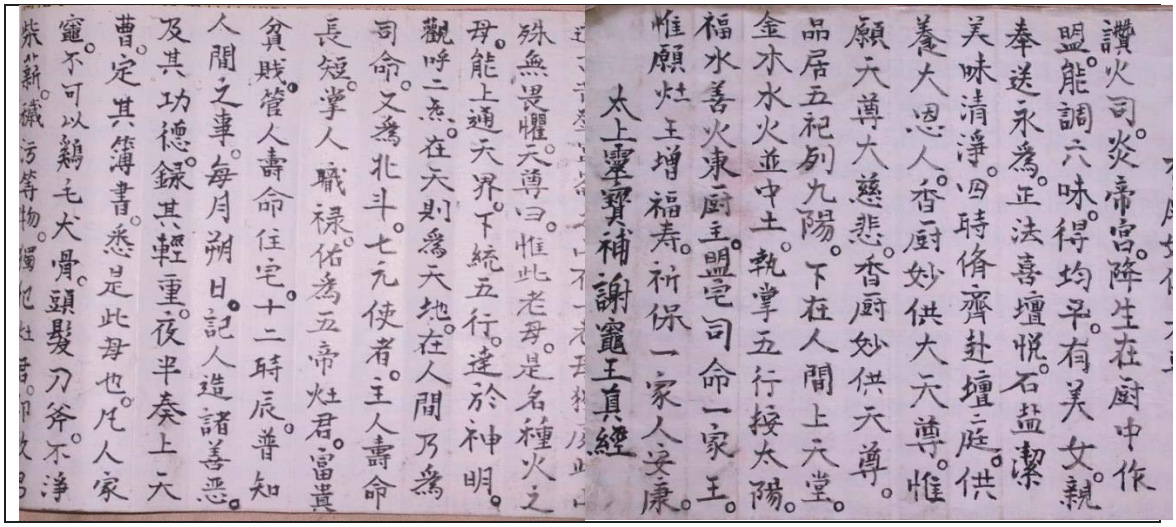
Yy 1: Yes, exactly.

Yy 2: He was primarily focusing on filial piety and feared nothing; no even death.

Zz: Fascinating. Regardless the perspectives, there is an origin of it and there is a name for it. What is the name for this story?

Yy 1: It is called “Prison Break.”

3. Book of Kitchen God: Original text, my transcription, and selective translations


讚火司。炎帝宮。降生在廚中作盟。能調六味。得均平。有美女。親奉送。永為正法喜壇悅。石鹽潔美味清淨。四時修齊赴壇庭。供養大恩人。香廚妙供大天尊。惟願天尊大慈悲。香廚妙供天尊。品居五祀列九陽。下在人間上天堂。金木水火並中土。執掌五行按太陽。福水善火東廚主。盟宅司命一家王。惟願灶王增福壽。祈保一家人安康。

太上靈寶補謝竈王真經

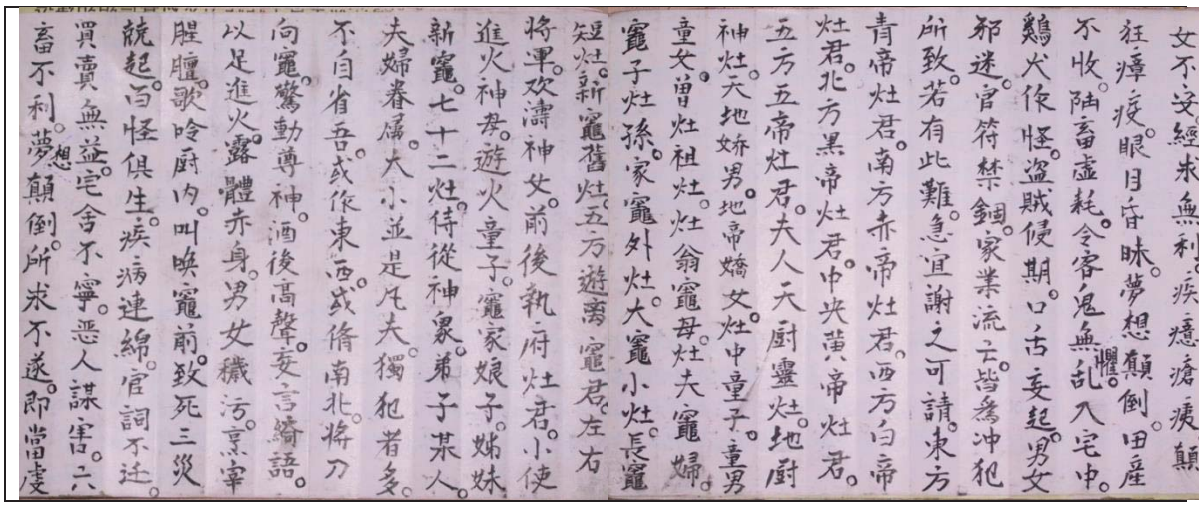
香廚妙供天尊

讚火司。炎帝宮。降生在廚中作盟。能調六味。得均平。有美女。親奉送。永為正法喜壇悅。石鹽潔美味清淨。四時修齊赴壇庭。供養大恩人。香廚妙供大天尊。惟願天尊大慈悲。香廚妙供天尊。品居五祀列九陽。下在人間上天堂。金木水火併中土。執掌五行按太陽。福水善火東廚主。盟宅司命一家王。惟願灶王增福壽。祈保一家人安康。

太上靈寶補謝灶王真經

道言昔登崑崙之山。有一老母。獨處此山。殊無畏懼。天尊曰。惟此老母。是名種火之母。能上通天界。下統五行。達於神明。觀呼二炁。在天則為天地。在人間乃為司命。又為北斗七元使者。主人壽命長短掌人職祿。佑為五帝灶君。富貴貧賤。管人壽命住宅。十二時辰。普知人間之事。每月朔日。記人造諸善惡及其功德。錄

其輕重。夜半奏上天曹。定其簿書。悉是此母也。凡人家灶。不可以雞毛犬骨頭髮刀斧。不淨柴薪。穢污等物。獨（觸）犯灶君。即致男女不安。經求無利。疾癒瘡痍。顛狂瘴疫。眼目昏昧。夢想顛倒。田產不收。六畜虛耗。令客鬼無懼。亂入宅中。雞犬作怪。盜賊侵期。口舌妄起。男女邪迷。官符禁錮。家業流亡。皆為衝犯所致。若有此難。急宜謝之。可請東方青帝灶君。南方赤帝灶君。西方白帝灶君。北方黑帝灶君。中央黃帝灶君。五方五帝灶君。夫人天廚靈灶。地廚神灶。天帝嬌男。地帝嬌女。灶中童子。童男童女。曾灶祖灶。灶翁灶母。灶夫灶婦。灶子灶孫。家灶外灶。大灶小灶。長灶短灶。新灶舊灶。五方游離灶君。左右將軍。歡濤神女。前後執府灶君。小使進火神母。遊火童子。灶家娘子。姊妹新灶。七十二灶。侍從神眾。弟子某人。夫婦眷屬。大小並是凡夫。觸犯者多。不自省悟。或作東西。或修南北。將刀向灶。驚動尊神。酒後高聲。妄言綺語。以足進火。露體赤身。男女穢污。烹宰腥羶。歌吟廚內。叫喚灶前。



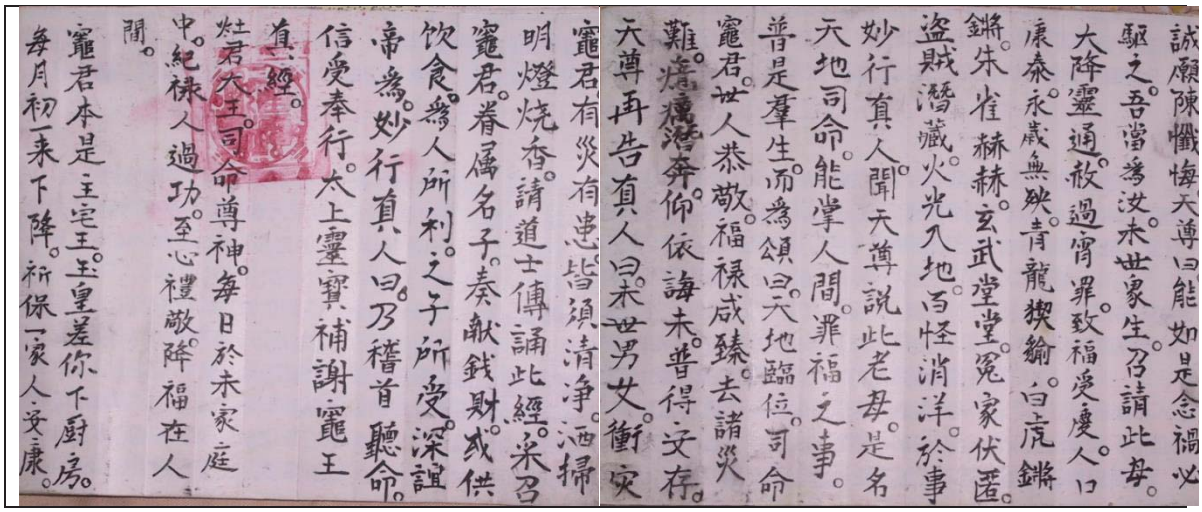
致使（死）三災兢起。百怪俱生。疾病連綿。官司不遷。買賣無益。宅捨不寧。惡人謀害。六畜不利。夢想顛倒。所求不遂。即當虔誠，願陳懺悔。天尊曰。能如是念。禍必驅之。吾當為汝末世眾生。召請此母。大降靈通。赦過宵罪。致福受慶。人口康泰。永歲無殃。青龍猰貐。白虎鏘鏘。朱雀赫赫。玄武堂堂。冤家伏匿。盜賊潛藏。火光入地。百怪消洋。於是妙行真人。聞天尊說此老母。是名天地司命。能掌人間罪福之事。普是群生。而為頌曰。天地臨位。司命灶君。世人恭敬。福祿咸臻。去諸災難。癒癘潛奔。仰依誨未。普得安存。天尊再告真人曰。末世男女。

衝災（犯？）灶君。有災有患。皆須清淨。灑掃明燈燒香。請道士傳誦此經。採召灶君。眷屬名子。奏獻錢財。或供飲食。為人所利。之子所受。深誼帝為。妙行真人曰。乃稽首聽命。信守奉行。

太上靈寶補（補）謝灶王真經。

灶君大王。司命尊神。每日於眾家庭中。紀祿人功過。志心禮敬。降福在人間。

灶君本是主宅王。玉皇差你下廚房。每月初一來下降。祈保一家人安康。



Selective translation of *The Book of Kitchen God*

Dao says that while climbing the Mountain of Kunlun, an old Lady was seen. She lived all by herself in the mountain and she was not afraid of anything. The Heavenly God said that this old Lady alone is the mother of all kinds of fire. She has connections with Heaven above and with the Five Elements down upon Earth. Up in Heaven she can be the Emperor of Heaven, and down in the human world she can be the Judge of Life. She is also the messenger of the Grand Seven Chief Sages of the North. She takes charge of the length of people's lives as well as their richness or poverty. She takes charge of people's life spans, their residences, and the twelve hours. She knows everything in the man's world. On the first day of every month she records the good or bad deeds of humans, or their merits and virtues, at various degrees, and at midnight she reports them up to the Heavenly Court—to make a final decision. This is what the old Lady does.

No households should put into their kitchens such things as chicken feathers or dog bones, or hair, a sword or ax, unclean firewood or other dirty stuff. For that will offend the Kitchen God and bring about unrest of the kids and bad luck in business. It will bring about disease, skin ulcer, madness and infection of miasma. It will result in dizziness in the eyes and confusion in the mind. There will be no harvest of the crops and the domestic animals will be in poor health. The wandering ghosts will be fearless and step into the house straightforwardly. Chicken and dogs will make trouble and thieves will rob constantly. There will be unreasonable quarrels, and men and women will be perplexed. Official seals will confiscate the house and the family property will be abandoned as a result of force. All these are the consequences of the offence. Whenever this happens, an immediate apology must be made [to the Kitchen God]. You can make your apology to the Green Kitchen God of the East, the Red Kitchen god of the South, the White Kitchen God of the West, the Black Kitchen god of the North, and the Yellow Kitchen God of the Center. Yes, the apology must be made to all these five kitchen gods of the five locations and the Madam's Heavenly Kitchen God, the Earthly divine Kitchen God, the charming sons of the Heavenly Emperor, the attractive daughters of the Earthly Emperor….

The Great-grand-parent Kitchen and the Grand-parent Kitchen
The Father Kitchen and the Mother Kitchen
The Husband Kitchen and the Wife Kitchen
The Son Kitchen and the Grandson Kitchen
The Home Kitchen and the Neighboring Kitchen
The Big Kitchen and the Small Kitchen
The Long Kitchen and the Short Kitchen
The New Kitchen and the Old Kitchen
The Kitchen Gods Who Travel in Five Directions
… …
The Sister New Kitchen

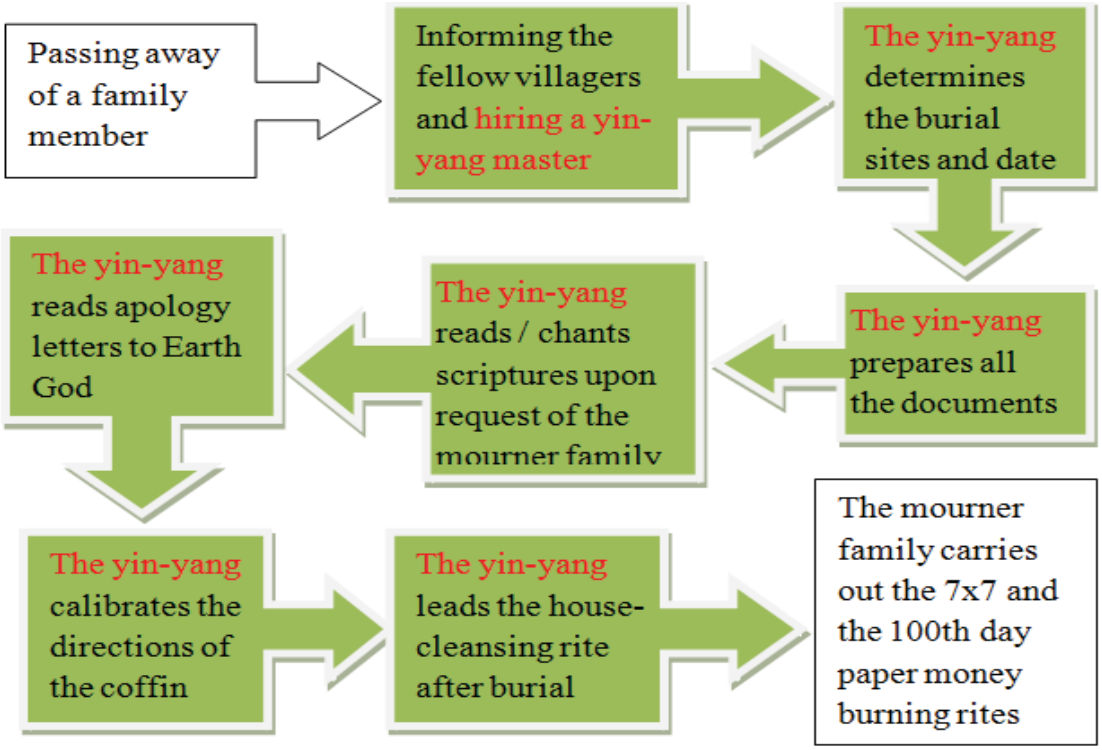
The Seventy-two Kitchens: [121]

Your disciple so and so, husband and wife and family dependents, young or old, we are all ordinary mortals. We offended you really unknowingly. Some of us must have done some construction work in the east, west, south or north; or must have pointed the kitchen knife at the Kitchen God and therefore disturbed Your Respectful God; or somebody must have talked loudly after getting drunk and talked nonsense; or someone must have put the firewood into the oven with the foot; or somebody must have walked around the kitchen without clothes on; or the dirty stuff of men and women has been left in the kitchen; or the stinking smell of fish or mutton got into the kitchen; or someone must have sung songs in the kitchen; or screamed in front of the oven. So there resulted the frequent occurrence of the three adversities and the appearance of hundreds of strange things. So there have been continuous diseases and endless law suits. So there has been no interest in the business and there has been no peace in the house….right now we feel very regretful and we would like to repent. The Heavenly God said, "If people can do this their disaster will be stopped. I would like to invite this old mother to bestow her blessings to you. She will remit your sins and give you fortune. Then the number of your people will grow and there will be no trouble…." [122]

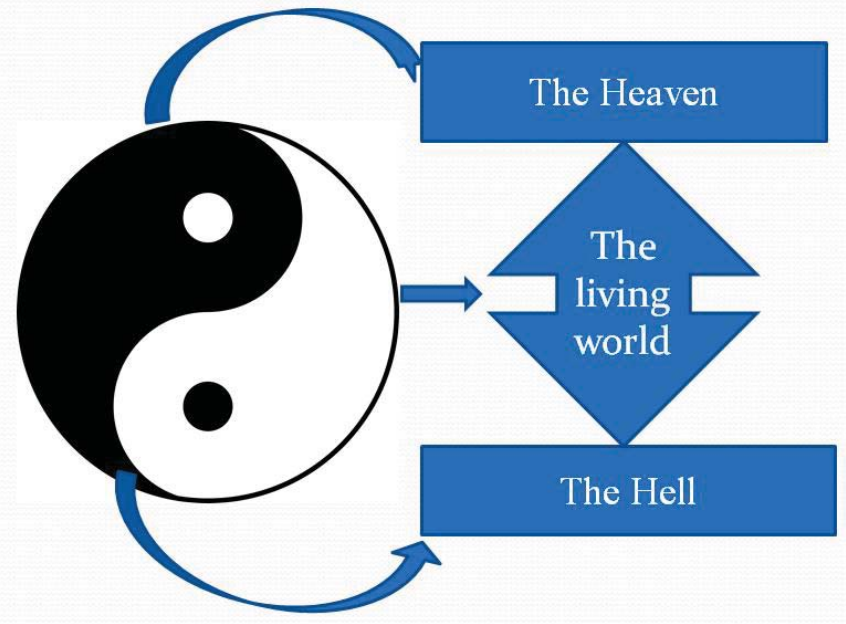
Note: *The Kitchen God is one of the most easily offended personages for the reason that he/she lives together so close with the family. And most often they are offended by the women in the house. The duty of a woman is to cook and therefore she has more of a chance to offend the kitchen deity. Kitchen gods at the same time seem to be more easily placated than most other gods. The following letter that the yin-yang may write to the kitchen gods, on behalf of the head person of the house, is both an apology and an appeal. The letter's opening title is "A Letter to the Kitchen Gods." It concludes with the summary title "Thank-you Letter with Libation." This closing sentence suggests that the help of kitchen gods is already assured and that the house is thankful for that. It seems best to cite the letter in full length*.

[121] These are the kitchen gods of all ranks to whom a yin-yang is supposed to address when making an apology on behalf of the family.
[122] The text is copied from a yin-yang's book by Zuowen Zhang. Translated by Zuotang Zhang.

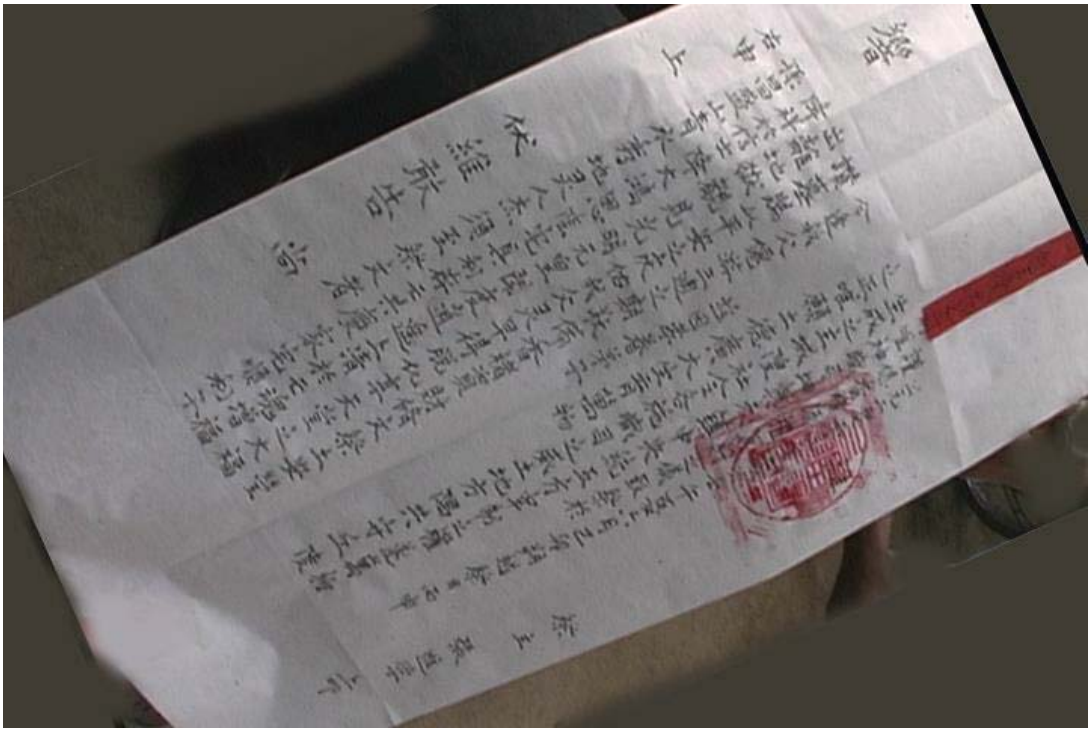
4. A flowchart of major steps in a funerary ritual



5. The three-layer cosmology coexists with a yin and yang binary one



6. Elegiac address to the Tomb



祭墓文

維

祭主

張進學上叩

公元二零零二年歲次壬午夏六月巳卯朔月祭日丙申謹俱香燭清茶雲馬之儀致祭於鎮中央統五方宰制之權遂萬物生成之主城隍社令各施職司之威土地方隅共守丘陵之正唯願土德廣大生育萬物茲因孝眷弟子今逢我父仙遊三週之期敬備香燭資財修文祭土安塋贊墓賜以平安之慶佑我父靈早得脫化享天堂之大福出離地獄睹見光明元皇開度逍遙上清與亡魂增福降祥於信士降大鴻恩陰宅具利存亡共慶家宅順利子孫昌盛山清水秀地靈人傑須至祭文者

右申

上 伏維敢告 尚饗

To ----,

From Zhang Jinxue, the mourner[123]

On the first day of the summer of the Year of the Horse, in the year 2002, I have hereby prepared incense, candles, tea as well as other things to offer sacrifice to[124]_____

who guards the Middle and governs the five directions, and who is in charge of the generation of all lives. Under whose leadership the town god and the gods of the land, and grain, all do their powerful duties to keep everything in order. I sincerely wish for the virtue of Earth to extend wide, so that life of all kinds can be given birth to and nourished. As this is the third anniversary for my late father who has been wandering about, I, your disciple, have humbly prepared incense, candles and money and a letter to offer sacrifices to the Earth God and to placate the grave (to keep my deceased father satisfied), hoping to offer peace to my father and to help obtain a speedy purification for his souls, so he can get out of the hell to see lights in the Heaven. _____ This will add blessings to the souls of the dead and give luck to those who believe in the Dao. It will do great favor to both the Yin and the Yang and it will be beneficial to both the living and the dead. There will be no trouble to the family and the offspring will be prosperous. The hills will be green and the waters will be clear. The Land will have sagacity (for peace), and the people will become prominent. Such is what I would like to say.
Respectfully yours,

Please enjoy the nice food we have offered.

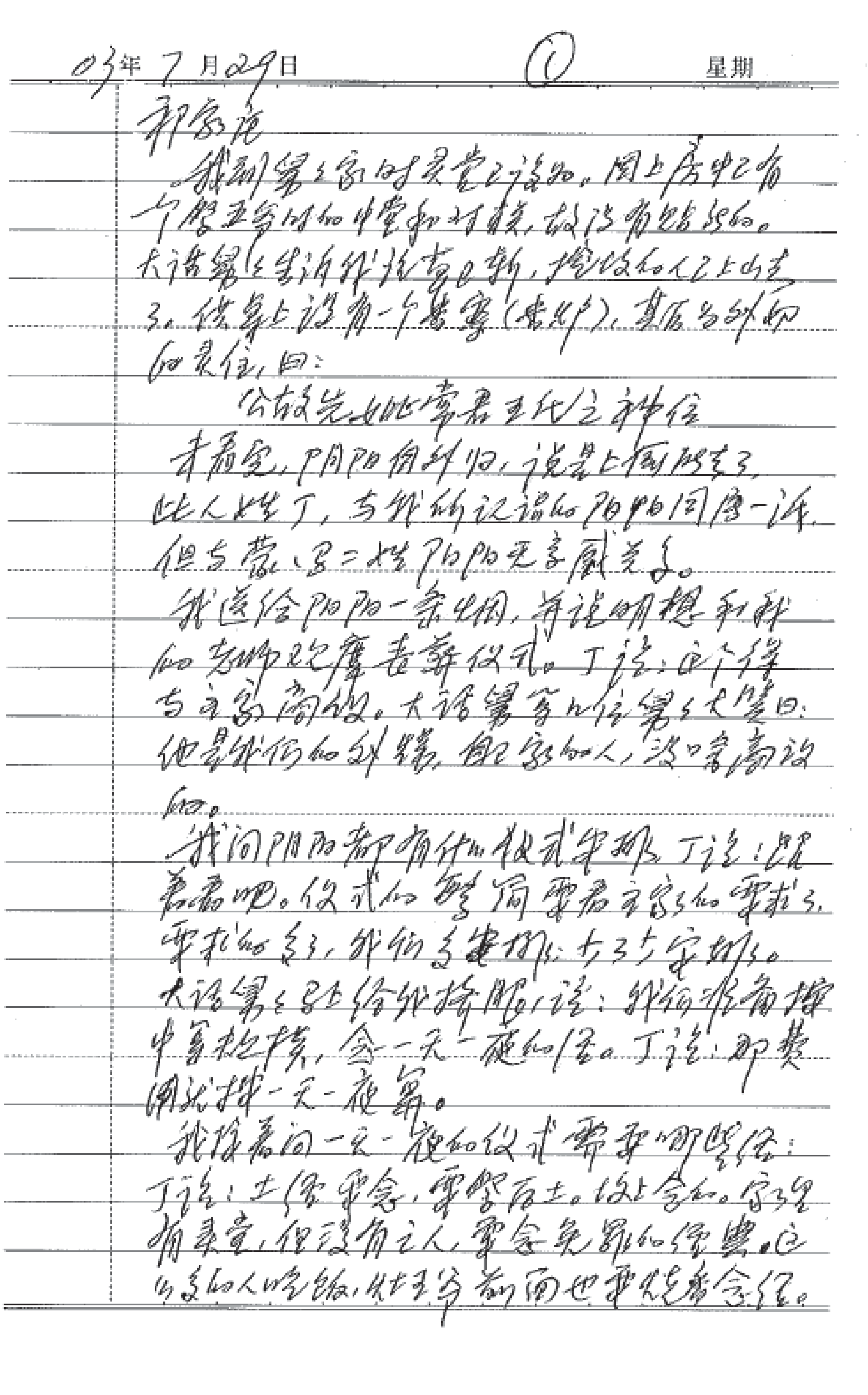
[123] This is a real letter written by Master Ma for my uncle's (my father's brother's) third year anniversary memorial ritual. The primary mourner is my cousin (Photo by Luckert, summer 2002). At funerary rituals some mourning families like to ask the yin-yangs to do memorial rituals before the dead is buried.
[124] As it is mentioned in the chapters, an intentional break of an unfinished line is to place the name of title of a god in a new line, in a protruding position, to show its venerated status.

7. Gods of various levels that are invited to rituals by yin-yang practitioners

(A) Tablets of some of the gods that a yin-yang invites or summons during a funeral ritual. According to Master Meng (personal communication, July 2008), the premade tablets are "merely paper strips with written words" if they are not put up in shrine.

(B) Gods invited to a shrine during a ritual presided over by a yin-yang in Qijiazhuang Village. July, 2004. Screen shot from Luckert and Zhang's *Yin-yang Shamanism (unfinished)*.

8. Excerpts of field notes (first two pages of original field notes in July 2003)



03年 7 月29日 ① 星期

此俗是很早的，丧葬之事重大，应该通告此讣信。要在灵前念。

我问去搬尸的人都需要带啥东西，丁曰：带的是通用路票。

"搬尸抬棺的时候，为了防止鬼怪骚扰，没有路票不行。"

我问：通用路票的内容可以问你吗？

丁曰：档案来了你就可以看到。不过，如果天气不好，雨大，路票就烧了，用黄纸包好装在死人袖筒里了。

我问阴阳：因为我姨妈是我妈妈之故的地方，是不是也该要查？

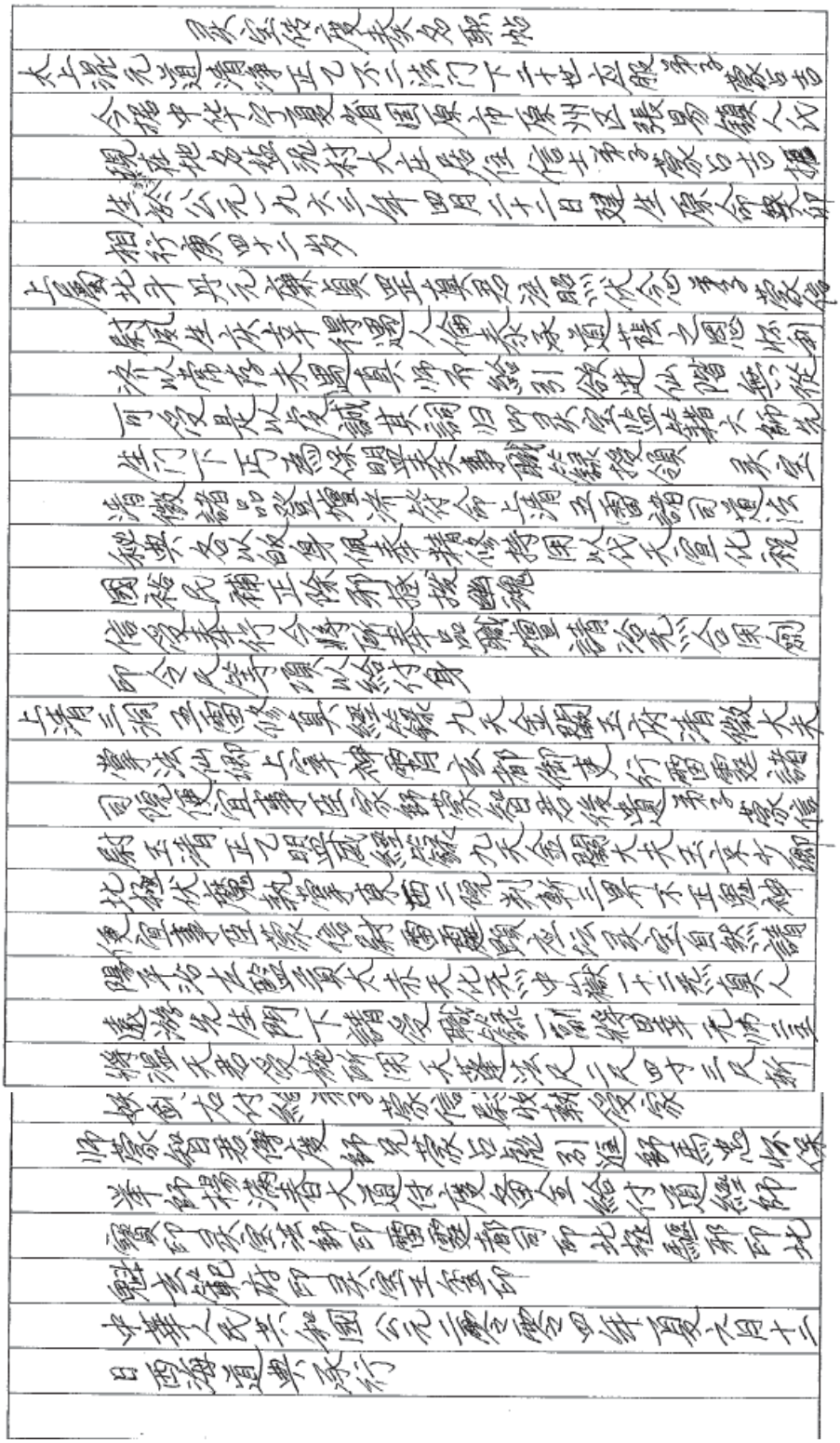
丁曰：但能要往里看的。

我说：丧事的灵堂应该是什么样的？是本家的还是阴阳先生的？

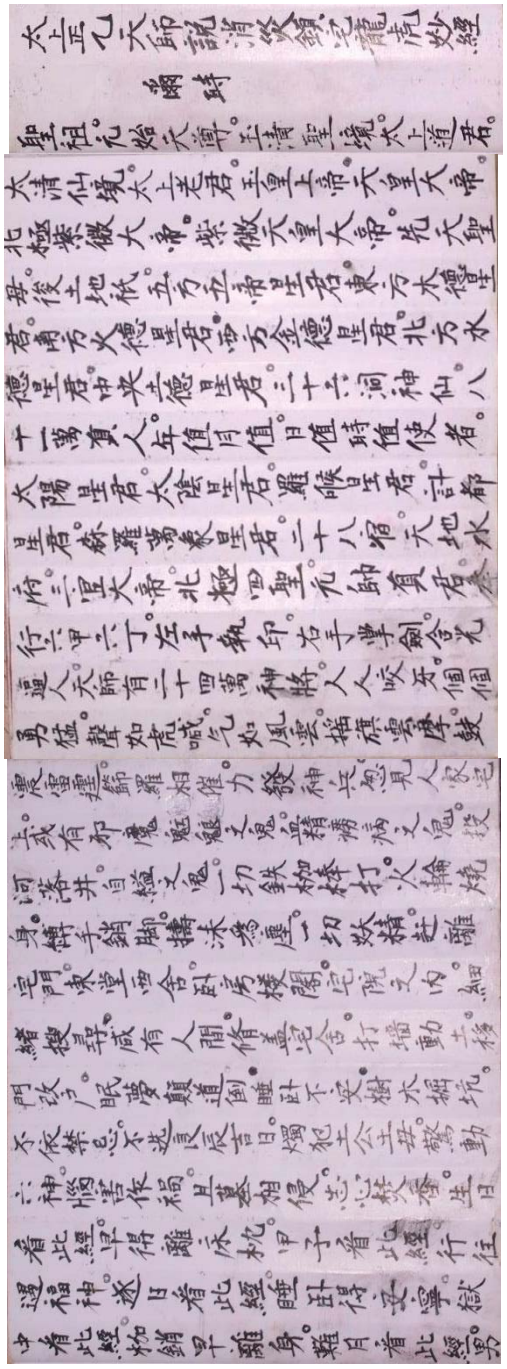
丁曰：本应该是阴阳先生的，但死人只在家中停放一夜，第二天要搬到葬地里去，一般就没有必要再请一位阴阳了，除非棺在家里停放。

我问：那么说，我姨父第一夜他也就舒了？时，只要你姨父知道以后，就可以了。多数老一辈的家乡人都知道啥是的。

9. Hand-copied Certificate of Master Meng's Initiation (August 2004)



10. “The Excellent Dragon and Tiger Scripture for Eliminating Disasters and Guarding Houses Revealed by the Most High Zhengyi Heavenly Master” (First two pages)

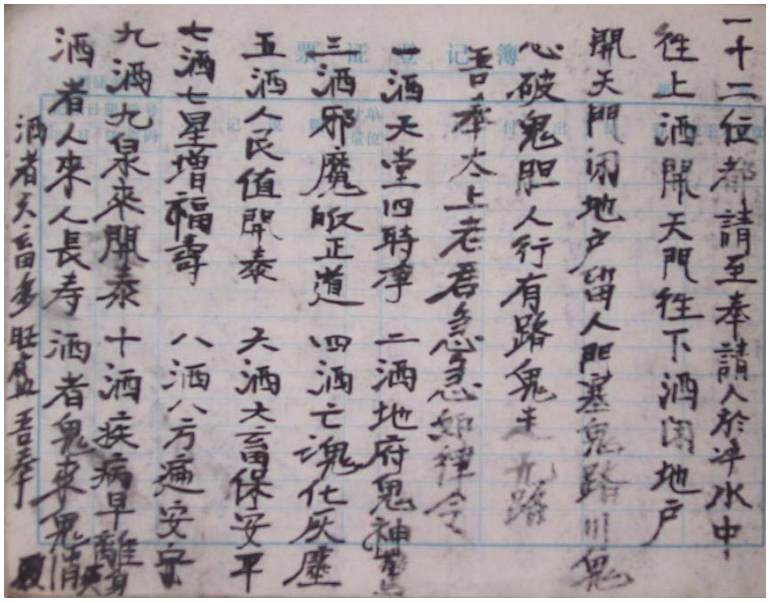


11. An example of cangue scaffold

A criminal locked in **cangue scaffold** in Qing dynasty China. Original picture taken from *Illustrations of China and Its People* by John Thomson (1837 – 1921). Retrieved from http://www.bjnews.com.cn/book/2013/01/26/246071.html

"Cangue scaffold" is a fairly frequently used word in yin-yang scriptures to either refer to those died while wearing such an instrument of torture, or the ghosts that are tortured in Hell as a consequence of their sin in the *yang* world.

12. An excerpt of "Medicine Empowerment Incantation" from a hand-copied yin-yang textbook.



(Photo by Luckert, courtesy of Master Meng)

13. Link to Zuotang Zhang's Chinese Folk Culture Blog that has more pictures and sub-links to video clips of funeral rituals.