

Holding Temple Festivals at Home of Doing-gooders: Temple Festivals and Rural Religion in Contemporary China*

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Abstract

Holding temple festivals at home is a local temple festival system and practicing religious in Pear Area of North China, referring to the regular “temple festivals” people hold at home centering on *shénshen* (Gods). Through the ethnographic study on the family space shared by people and *shénshen*, the controlled possession, unbalances in the daily life of local people, shrine of spirits and the practice of efficacious reading-incense, etc., this article responds to both classic modes of Chinese rural religious study and contemporary western discourse of Chinese temple festivals’ study. The article tries to illuminate the following ideas: firstly, as a life style and a part of daily life, both Chinese rural religion and temple festivals represent a cultural system that not only embodies sacredness and carnival but is more of an extension to daily life as well; secondly, the flexibility of temple festivals. Family temple festivals are the bearing soil of temple festivals, and the relationship of encompassing the contrary is the essence among family temple festivals, village temple festivals and multi-village temple festivals; Thirdly, it is the necessity and the significance of its methodology to come back to the domestic space in the course of daily life as investigating rural religion and temple festival.

Key Words: Efficaciousness, Rural Religion, Holding Temple Festivals at Home, Doing-good, Daily Life

* The names of people and place in this article are incognito. Please don’t try to locate them. I am grateful to Prof. Liu Tieliang, Prof. Zhuang Kongshao, Prof. Wu Ming and Prof. Adam Yuet Chau for their valuable criticisms. And I am indebted to Dr. Hua Zhiya, Dr. Wang Xuwen, and Dr. Cao Rong with whom I had many stimulating discussions about the materials collected in the fieldwork.

INTRODUCTION

Whether in the era of colonialism or post-colonialism, whether at the end of a feudalistic and imperialistic era or during the heyday of a country, the progress and development of China have always been accompanied by the infiltration of western hegemonic discourse, which has aligned western disciplines with the academic discourse of China. The result is that not only the interpretation of native experience is misled by western theories to a certain degree, but also some theoretical constructions built by local older scholars have been neglected and abandoned (Wang Mingming, 2003: 1-34; Yang Nianqun, 2003; Zhuang Kongshao, 2006: 17). Such phenomenon is particularly palpable in the research field of Chinese rural religion and temple festivals.

Although there are many works on Chinese rural religion which are illustrated with Chinese material, these so-called objective works is actually bird's-eye view under the commanding attitude of Christianity when they massively spread to the East. Until recently, "the tendency in Western studies has been to force Western assumptions and categories on non-Western traditions and artificially create religions that do not exist in actually" (Paper, 1995: 2). Before describing it, Chinese rural religion was already regarded as either heresy or idolatry (such as Doré, 1926). Later on, when the Chinese elites actively identified with the standards of science and civilization from the West, Chinese rural religion was dismissed as the superstition to be eradicated immediately (Li Ganhen, 1924; Tai Shuangqiu, 1929), in spite of the relatively neutral but weak voice of the primitiveness and backwardness of rural religion, or the ignorant religion of an uneducated. Thus Gu Jiegang (1928:1-10), one of the famous historians and folklorists who studied the Miaofeng Mountain temple festival, had to repeatedly assert that his research was not advocating superstition in the 1920s. At the same time, those subjective attitudes, such as "going to the people", convey indirectly the indifference and romantic imagination of the elites towards the masses and their living world including their religion. Over a long period of time, no matter whether it was the subject of academic research or of laws and regulations, Chinese rural religion has always been lingering among the concepts of superstition, religion and culture (Nedostup, 2009).

Therefore, "popular religion/belief" and "folk religion/belief" will be replaced by "rural religion" when we forsake the prejudice of the Western ideology and the great tradition or high culture and confront directly the action of the believers. The concept of "rural religion", directly facing to practicing religion¹, refers to the religious practices of ordinary believers, not the ideologies of their speech about religious identity, actively or passively (Yue Yongyi, 2012:70-72). And it has neither the difference between urban and rural area nor the disparity

¹ It should be noted that "doing religion" put forward by Chau still puts more emphasis on the instrumental rationality of religion although it begins to pay attention to religious practice. See Chau, 2006a:73-76, 2011a, 2011b.

between male and female because the “believers experience religious reality directly through purposeful behavior, especially ritual” (Harrell, 1979: 520). Here the “rural” (乡土, *xiangtu*), created by Fei Xiangtong who also used the English word “earthbound” in the 1940s (1992, 1949), refers the basic features of Chinese society and culture nurtured by long agricultural civilization, i.e., from the soil, at the same time, it also refers to the lingering and survivals of this feature just mentioned in the transforming contemporary China and the China in future.

Under the influence of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), currently, there are basically three kinds of understanding on Chinese rural religion: diffused religion, interactive mode of gods, ghosts and ancestors as well as the pilgrimage mode. The research conducted by Yang C.K. (1961) on the social functions of Chinese religion is a typical example of the diffused mode, which has a great influence until now. However, Yang just applied Western concepts to the Chinese gestalt, “creating artificial constructs that fit the Western understanding of religion” (Paper, 1995: 23).

The interactive mode of gods, ghosts and ancestors (Jordan, 1972; Wolf, 1974) is firstly developed by Feuchtwang (1974a, 1992) based on the research on the Chinese clan and ancestral worship. Indeed, this commonly-recognized mode of rural religion overemphasizes “a passive metaphor for China’s political order” and “a simple reification of its social hierarchy” (Shahar and Weller, 1996:3). Furthermore, it obviously neglects the importance of the Four Sacred Animals(四大门, *sidamen*) of the Fox, Weasel, Hedgehog, Snake (Li Wei-tsu, 1941, 1948; Li Jianguo, 2002) and the Five-Fury Spirits (五猖/通, *wuchang/tong*) (von Glahn, 1991; Guo, 2003). Over seventy years ago, Li Wei-tsu pointed out that these sacred animals(仙家, *xianjia*) could not only dominate men and bring them fortune, disaster or happiness, but they were also believed to have their own position in the spiritual system which does not belong to gods, ghosts or ancestors. In addition to affecting the life of individuals, families and communities, they often determined the prosperous degree of a temple festival, as this is happening these days (Kang Xiaofei, 2002).

Including sacrifice circles and belief circles based on Japanese and Taiwanese scholars’ studies, the pilgrimage mode is akin to the diffused religion and the interactive mode of gods, ghosts, and ancestors in following the Christian culture (Turner and Turner, 1978). Sangren summarized a uni-directional promotion system made up of neighborhood, village, multi-village and pilgrimage (1987:50-92). This pilgrimage theory not only profoundly influences the analysis of the time and place of Taiwan people’s pilgrimage (Chang, 2003:25-105), but also affects the study on territorial society in Dali, Yunnan province (Liang Yongjia, 2005). However, the usage of the word pilgrimage, “a typical Christian word”, to interpret Chinese rural religion, shows that the researchers’ efforts to selectively choose some aspects from a broader system to correspond with world’s dominating cultures (Wang Mingming, 2003: 177). Maybe due to a similar introspection, Berling made it clear that the pilgrim in Chinese culture is only to negotiate religious diversity (1997).

Different from western's saints accompanying with the God, in China, sages are always associated with emperors and refer to those elites with power, knowledge and decency in the secular world. In Chinese rural religion, as an object worshiped, the gods are not so much associated with the holy or sacredness as "efficaciousness". Therefore, in the localized description, what believers usually do and say is "doing-good" (行好, *xinghao*), "visiting to the holy mountains" (朝山进香, *chaoshan jinxiang*), "participating in a prayer service at a temple festival" (行香走会, *xingxiang zouhui*), "efficacious" (灵验, *lingyan*), and "making a vow and redeeming a vow" (许愿还愿, *xuanyuan huanyuan*).² In contrast, in monotheism e.g. Christianity and Islam, to make a pilgrimage, votaries have to go through the three stages of separation, transition and incorporation. In order to get close to the gods, votaries engage in introspection to achieve a transcendent state, and are subordinate to gods and thus form a holy life totally different from a secular life.

Indeed, *chaoshan jinxiang* and *xingxiang zouhui* do have some touch of gods, but they do not totally deviate from daily life. The actors spend time and money simply to make themselves feel better. They make a vow to gods and give votive offerings in the hope of gaining gods' favor. In establishing the reciprocal relation of people relying on gods and gods depending on people, gods are subordinate to the people. This makes *chaoshan jinxiang* and *xingxiang zouhui* an extension of daily life, not a deviation, with a distinct "game" nature of practice and habits (Bourdieu, 1990:66-68, 80-82). There are multiple arbitrary combinations and transplantations among the formation, content and meaning of rural religion whose nature is liquidity, uncertainty and polytropy. Piety and prank, kneeling down and fighting, ascetic and debauchery usually appear at the same time and place. In the event of a temple festival, there are devout ascetic practices such as carrying saddle (背鞍, *beian*), rolling brick (滚砖, *gunzhuang*), hanging lantern and furnace (提灯挂炉, *tiding tualu*), and wearing shackles (披枷戴锁, *pijia daisuo*) (Jin Chanyu, 1936: 15-16), as well as entertainment, jokes and mockery such as Lever Boxes Officer (杠箱官, *gangxiangguan*) (Jin Xun, 32, 38). Plump, dressed-up young men and women, seduce and appeal to each other under the name of the gods. Men may touch the bulging breasts of beautiful women, and even tear their clothes (Gu Xijia, 1991: 180-182; Broadwin, 1999: 95-96).

Therefore, the temple festival, where rural religion is showcased, means a kind of group association and the cyclical activity centering on worshiping gods. The ritual structure of the festival can be divided into two parts, the figurative part and the abstract part. The former is a part of a sensory perception that can observe and perceive, such as space, time, objects, speech,

² Efficaciousness, as the basic feature of rural religion, emphasizes the interactive relationship between people and gods. So Chau regards "efficacious" as a core concept to interpret rural religion in China today (2006a: 99-123). Through carding and analysis of a large number of official archives, Zhuang Deren indicates that epiphany, different but closely related to efficacious, more emphasizes gods' initiative, unpredictability and dross of the mainstream ideology in rural religion (2004). Thus this article uses efficacious. Daily practice of speeches, narration and action between "efficacious" and "vow" as in "make a vow" and "redeem a vow" will be explained in another article.

participants and actions. The latter means both the interactive relationship and configuration of these visible and perceivable parts by the followers, and the convention and rule for assembly of many elements in the figurative part (Yue Yongyi, 2004a: 23). Obviously, the concept of “temple festival” used in this article is different from the concept of “temple fair” (庙会, *Miaoshi*). *Miaoshi* in Chinese is mainly goods exchange and the consumption of traditional folk art and modern recreation, either having a relationship with temple worship or no relationship with temple worship because of changing times, per se an economic concept. Because of the intervention of the political strength from 1949 to 1979, most of temple festivals actually became the temple fairs without temple. In recent years, many temple festivals have attained some official titles such as “folk culture” and “intangible cultural heritage”. So the semantics of temple festival in contemporary China is very complicated (Yue Yongyi, 2010b: 13-16). As a cultural system, the temple festivals in Pear Area may be divided into family temple festival (FTF), village temple festival and multi-village temple festival, the three of which are interactive and mixed.

FTF is annually held worship activities of non-kinship group, centering on possession of psychic mediums (香道的, *xiangdaode*), at home of *xiangdaode* or ordinary doing-gooders (行好的, *xinghaode*) in Pear Area. Through the ethnography of FTF, I am attempting to give response to the above-mentioned classic models of Chinese rural religion and temple festivals and try to expand on my previous research questions (Yue Yongyi, 2004a:16-17, 2010a:178): 1. Chinese rural religion, as a life style and part of daily life, possesses a particularity that is true to life; 2. Temple festivals, which clearly display the collective aspects of rural religion, are not only carnivals but more of an extension of daily life; 3. FTF are the bearing soil (息壤, *xirang*) of temple festivals in Pear Area, and the relationship of encompassing the contrary, i.e. the flexibility of temple festivals³, is the essence of FTF, village temple festivals and multi-village temple festivals.

At the same time I emphasize that it is necessary and important to come back to the domestic space in the course of investigating Chinese rural religion and temple festivals. Basing on the religious reality in contemporary China, Fenggang Yang puts forward a triple-religious-market model. According to the model, the gray market of religion is between the red market of religion approved by government and the black market of religion suppressed or forbidden by government (2012: 85-122, 159-180). Nowadays, family churches (家庭教会, *jiating jiaohui*) that belong to the gray religious market are so prosperous in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai that some researchers call the state to pay close attention to them (Yu Jianrong, 2009). The family space is a relatively private space. Holding group-unrelated religious activities at home has a very long tradition in China which is from the soil (Fei, 1992) or under the ancestors' shadow (Hsu, 1949).⁴ There are still similar practices in rural China until now, such

³ It is noteworthy that Hua Zhiyi has also recently found the foundation characteristic of temple festivals in Pear Area, although his intention is to explain the revitalization of rural religion (2011: 175-182).

⁴ Obviously, family church in contemporary China has inherited not only the Christian tradition but also the

as incense table (香桌子, *xiangzhuozi*) (Wang Xiumei, 2003:6-7, 18) in Juye, Shandong province, virgin body (童身, *tongshen*) who can visit heaven (走天家, *zou tianjia*) in Meizhou, Guangdong province, and holding good things at home (Xu Xiaoying, 2006: 99-108). There are many researches which have noticed the shifting social status, behavior, and the relationship with local community of the religious specialists in China today (e.g. Katz, 2006; Chau, 2006b). And several scholars also focus on paper gods (纸马, *zhima*) at home worship (e.g. Day, 1949; Goodrich, 1991; Po and Johnson, 1992; Knapp, 1999). However, except for the study by Yue Yongyi (2004a, 2010a:169-240), the existing studies on Chinese rural religion and temple festivals have paid little attention to FTF. Since 1999, I have been doing fieldwork about rural religion and temple festivals in Pear Area, which is in the eastern part of Shijiazhuang, Hebei province. Through this long-term investigation, I gradually realized the important role that *xiangdaode* and FTF play in the daily life, temple festival system and rural religion in Pear Area (Yue Yongyi, 2007: 119-127).

In Pear Area, people call such supernatural powers as gods, sacred animals and masters (sometimes “masters” refer to spirits, sometimes the leaders of folk religious sects such as the creator of Hongyang religion, Han Piaogao), “gods” (神神, *shénshen*), i.e. “unruly gods” (Shahar and Weller, 1996), and call those people who can directly communicate with *shénshen* “*xiangdaode*” because their ritual action is always linked with incense. The major ritual practice of *xiangdaode* is to provide followers or pilgrims, i.e. doing-gooders who are looking forward to helping, with “reading-incense” (看香, *kanxiang*), which is also named “watching-incense” (瞧香, *qiaoxiang*) or “igniting-incense” (打香, *daxiang*). That is to say, *xiangdaode* possessed by *shénshen* in front of the shrine for *shénshen* prophesies disasters and fortune according to the shape of one bunch of burning incense or three incense sticks.

FTF is also called “festivals” (会, *hui*), in much the same way that the term is used to describe temple festivals in Pear Area. It is often said that “someone is holding a temple festival at home” or “at someone’s home there’s a festival” or “go to someone’s house to attend the festival.” Generally, *xiangdaode* themselves and outsiders of the village are both all used to calling these FTF “Safe-and-Sound Festival” (平安会, *ping’an hui*) or “Spirit Festival” (仙家会, *xianjia hui*). According to the fact that whether there will be such ceremonial patters as “loud shed” (响棚, *xiangpeng*), they can be further divided into “Quiet Festival” (清静会, *qingjing hui*) and “Loud Shed Festival” (响棚会, *xiangpeng hui*). And people generally call those FTF “Sibyl Festival” (神婆会, *shenpo hui*) because most of the *xiangdaode* are females.⁵

tradition of Chinese rural religion. It has been very good to use the privacy, closure and crypticity of the family space.

⁵ In Pear Area, female *xiangdaode* and *xinghaode* are more than male *xiangdaode* and *xinghaode*. This is a common thing in Rural China. This is partly because the fate of women ruled by father-son identity is often “a permanent shelter”, that is to say, the female is much more limited by fate than the male due to different status personality configuration (Hsu, 1949:270).

1. HETEROGENEOUS LOCAL SOCIETY: *XINGHAODE* AND *FENGJIAODE*

At the border of the three counties of Zhao, Ningjin and Jin around 50 kilometers east to Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, there are more than fifty natural villages (natural form of settlements) with a population of about 80,000 densely spreading along the Hutuo river. Nowadays, this plain which was filled up by silt has developed into a fruit tree area fertile with pears—Pear Area, one of the biggest production bases of pears in China. Pears have become the core of local people's production and life, as well as the tool and symbol of perceiving and pondering nature and interpersonal relationships (Zhao Xudong, 2003: 47-48; Yue Yongyi, 2004a: 34). Due to natural and man-made calamities, the collective memory of locals is ruptured and most villagers say that their ancestors moved here from the Great Locust-trees (大槐树, *Da Huaishu*) in the Hongdong, Shanxi province at the beginning of Ming Dynasty(1368-1644 A.D.), so a popular saying, "*Wen wo laoia zai hechu, Shanxi Hongdong Da Huaishu*" (which means that asking where my old home is—the Great Locust-trees in the Hongdong of Shanxi),⁶ can frequently be heard in this area. Currently, these villages in Pear Area have multiple surnames with a few thousand populations in general. The people over fifty years of age count for around thirty percent of the total population in these villages. The roads in the villages basically show east-west and north-south orientations. Usually, the east and west bound street is the most important, along which there are the office of villagers committee, primary school or middle school, bank office, post office, bus station and many shops, etc.

From the beginning of the Reform and Opening-up to the mid-1990s, the income of people in Pear Area has been much higher than those in the neighboring villages which mainly depend on agricultural production. With several years of drought in the late 1990s and a large number of foreign fruit entering the Chinese market after China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, the income of people in Pear Area has become lower than those in the neighboring villages. However, compared to the marginal mountain areas, the economic situation in Pear Area is still much better. People's life there remains stable. Due to the influence of some deep-rooted traditional notions such as "when their parents are still alive, children should not travel far away," "raising children to ensure a comfortable elderly life," and "nothing is better than one's own home" and the existence of some labor intensive township enterprises like pear box and pear bag factories, few young people in Pear Area leave villages and work in cities. The involution production of pears and the skill of growing pears, which need quite a long time to master, make the locals' marriages often limited to the villagers within (Zhao Xudong, 2003:48-54) and the custom of children marriage (娃娃亲, *wawa qin*) still prevails (Yue Yongyi, 2010a:13-49). Because of the large population of Pear Area, the grass-root units of the

⁶ Because there was no big war in Shanxi at the end of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368 A.D.), the population of Shanxi was relatively prosperous. The government of Ming really organized migration from Shanxi to Hebei, Shandong, Henan and other places at the beginning of Ming Dynasty. For the complex relationship between the Hongdong immigration legends, folk memory and historical facts, see Zhao Shiyu, 2006: 73-124.

government's functional departments are extended to each corner of the villages, with each village having its stores and markets of different sizes. In some sense, the living in these villages in Pear Area is still in autarky (Yue Yongyi, 2004a: 78).

Located in North China, Pear Area has always been the seesaw battleground of the nomad and Han people. Shamanism which is related to worshipping sacred animals has blended into the locals' life and spirit/master belief. Similar to the existing literature materials about the village temples in North China (Fu Zhenlun, 1930; 中國農村慣行調查刊行會編, 1985: 42-44,152), according to the old men's memory, there were all kinds of temples and their remnants such as Old Mother Temple, Emperor Guan Temple, Three Officials of the Heaven, Earth, and Water Temple, Zhenwu Temple, Jade Emperor Temple, Five Paths Temple (五道廟, *Wudao miao*) in Pear Area before the 1990s (Yue Yongyi, 2004a:78-84, 152-153; 2004b: 222-223). Not only does each village have several temples, but also each temple has its festival over a long period of time. At special times, people in and outside the village go to the temple to ask the gods worshiped in it for help in solving the unbalance in their lives.

For a long time, as one of the holy mountains in North China, the Cangyan Mountain in Jingxing county at the west of Shijiazhuang, which has Third Princess(三皇姑,*San Huanggu*), has attracted a great number of pilgrims from Pear Area in the middle of every third lunar month. The basic models of the mountain pilgrimage are Walking-shed (行棚, *xingpeng*) and Sitting-shed (坐棚, *zuopeng*). Before the Cultural Revolution, Walking-shed takes place when the weather or the social environment permits. People would build a shanty on their way to the Cangyan Mountain. In case of bad weather or accident, people would switch to Sitting-shed and, according to the decision of the leader, build a divine shed somewhere in the village or in one's family to burn joss sticks and kowtow.

However, the rural religion in Pear Area, where the natural environment and mode of production are identical, is not unitary, but polybasic, showing a competing landscape (Yue Yongyi, 2012a). Buddhism and Taoism have long been endeavoring to expand their sway in Pear Area. And the folk religious sects such as Sages Tao, I-Kuan Tao, Ruyi Tao, Puji Buddhist Association, etc. all successively had their own branches and followers before 1949 (Yue Yongyi, 2004a: 45-47). Religious activities centering on psychic mediums, the heads of temple festivals and the leaders of the sects, especially Sitting-shed, have influenced the FTF in Pear Area till today.

With the modernization of the Chinese society, Catholicism has been spreading for almost two hundred years in Pear Area. Religious beliefs are more heterogeneous and intense in the region. The locals who maintain native beliefs usually call themselves "xinghaode" and call Catholics "fengjiaode" (奉教的). Churches were constructed before 1949 in some villages where Catholics are concentrated. Given that Catholicism is the Institutional Religion recognized by the government, Catholic churches have been renovated to various degrees since the Reform and Opening-up, although the inheritance of Catholicism in Pear Area has been limited within the family (Ma Guoqing, 1999: 123-125) just as in Zhang Zhen, Shanxi province (Liu Zhijun,

2007:155), and *fengjiaode*'s population is less than three percent of the total Pear Area. On the contrary, local religions have always been under the shadow of superstition and the village temples are barely renovated. In order to justify their belief and ceremonies and seek political validity, doing-gooders, especially *xiangdaode*, go to the famous nearby Buddhism temples to convert themselves into Buddhists and receive their conversion certificate, or they try to join Taoism associations approved by the government. The exclusivity of religions and the feeling of discrimination make doing-gooders try their best to inherit and boom temple festivals from the older generations. Together with the nearby non-Pear Area villages, a group of the doing-gooders made up mainly with the seniors in Pear Area have formed more than one hundred associations that hold temple festivals with their intimate counterparts. They go to participate in others' temple festivals and worship and sing for each other's *shénshen*, forming a reciprocity circle of temple festivals.

Just like the doing-gooders, the grass-root cadres also grow up in the same folk culture, fettered by the clan and affinity and are members of the community of believers (Chau, 2006a: 69-72). As individuals living in that world, although they rarely attend such public religious ceremonies as temple festivals, they are not like those officials before the Reform and Opening-up who regarded as their vocation to demolish statues of gods and forbid festivals. On the contrary, following the guideline of building a vigorous economy on the base of cultivating healthy culture and the movement of intangible cultural heritage in China, they try their best to utilize the folk culture including temple festivals, and sometimes also turn to *xiangdaode* for help in other villages of Pear Area. Therefore, most of the time, religious rites such as public worship and reading-incense that were once cracked down have become one of the few "unspoken" practice in that area. Officials compromise on it and are actually complicit with the folk. In addition, different from those incumbent cadres who always face a difficult choice, most retired cadres often follow the religious habit of doing-gooders, even though they don't believe in *shénshen*. Due to their profound knowledge and rich experience about the world outside the village, they soon become the important members of these temple-festival associations. These retired elderly, in some sense, make the temple-festival associations less religious and more like clubs, which Hsu deems as the symbol of American society (1963).

In this way, the classification of *xinghaode* and *fengjiaode* and the fact that multiple associations actively or passively join in rural religion, not only further strengthen the game landscape of rural religion in Pear Area, but also make the "doing-good", an oral word, become a keyword to understand rural religion, temple festival and local society. Specially, the rich meaning of doing-good in Pear Area is as follows:

First, doing-good refers to all good behavior and character for others. In addition to burning incense and worshipping *shénshen*, it also includes all traditional virtues and spiritual civilization preached by the state such as a sense of justice, one for the public, repairing bridges and roads, being kind to others, no cursing and fighting, filial piety, respecting the old and cherishing the young, etc. And it has more specific emphasis on

good behavior, including all words and deeds of groups and individuals are in favor of others. Second, doing-good is an abstract and vivid local expression that originates from different traditional culture, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and folk religious sects, for example. Today doing-good is the result of diachronic cumulative expression. Especially for the overstocking of pear, doing-good euphemistically expresses the dissatisfaction with the real society and the meaning of attempting to influence and transform real society, a certain antagonism between the state represented by the grass-roots officials and the villagers, and the opposition between indigenous beliefs, values and the Catholic not yet fully integrated into the local culture, containing the existing and likely future conflicts between the East and West. In this sense, doing-good refers both the values and ethics accepted by the people, and behavior and actors reflecting these values and ethics. Furthermore, doing-good is the thinking patterns and analysis tools of locals, the symbol distinguishing between my groups and other groups, an important indicator of the self-description and self-evaluation, and, from my groups, the result distinguishing good and evil, right and wrong, beauty and ugliness, true and false. Third, doing-good, for *xinghaode*, often refers to the action such as taking part in temple festivals, burning incense and chanting scriptures as well as *xiangdaode* reading-incense for supplicants.(Yue Yongyi, 2004a: 26).

Since the beginning of the 1990s, many scholars have come to Pear Area in succession to investigate the temple festivals, especially the Dragon Plaque Festival (e.g. Bunkenborg, 2012; Feuchtwang, 1997; Gao Bingzhong, 2008: 293-306; Hua Zhiya, 2011, 2013; Liu Tieliang, 2000; Wang Mingming, 1998; Yue Yongyi, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2008, 2010a: 50-260; Zhao Xudong, 2003:160-212, 2011:163-197; Zhao Xudong & Duran Bell, 2005). They were followed by reporters. The scholars' enquiry and reporter's cameras have become a common scene at the temple festivals in Pear Area. Moreover, many words that scholars and reporters used have been recycled by local elites and doing-gooders. In short, both positive, present and negative, absent powers help to promote the prosperity of rural religion and temple festivals in Pear Area.

2. CONSECRATING THE DOMESTIC SPACE

When many researchers pay attention to the cognitive significance of the classifications of the living space and the kin relations in the Chinese rural areas (Hsu, 1949: 29-42, 56-58; Liu, 2000: 35-51) and gradual privatization of contemporary rural living space (Yan, 2003: 112-139), it is also noted that Chinese folk houses are actually the gods' houses (e.g. Goodrich, 1991; Po and Johnson, 1992; Knapp, 1999). Some folk houses, like Western Town houses in the 1940s, are shared by the living, the dead, the gods, spirits, and ghosts (Hsu, 1949: 40-41). Actually, the Chinese dwelling is often both home and temple and the rooms are added to both sides of the main hall, which is the primary space to worship ancestors and divinities (Wang Sung-hsing, 1974). Paper also indicates the form of Chinese domestic space is identical for Buddhist, Daoist, state-cult, and clan temples and the main hall in ordinary family functions "as the family temple, divining room, living room, and reception hall" (Paper, 1995: 42).

Due to the location of Pear Area in a plain, the folk houses there nowadays have a unified layout of courtyard styles, usually covering about 330 square meters. People rarely construct a building of two or more storeys for the convenience of production and life. The north houses remain the main rooms. The living space of doing-gooders is not only for themselves but also for *shénshen* to live. Because these *shénshen* and the daily life of doing-gooders have amalgamated into a ubiquitous one, families become “the sacred preserve secure from state intervention” even in the most severely-controlled era (Friedman, Pickowicz, Selden, 1991: 234). In fact, the sacredness has been an essential characteristic of human building for a long time because everyone is *homo religious* (Eliade, 1959: 17, 20-67). It is just because rations have been known by more and more people and the people in industry society and information society use “private space” and “individual space” to weaken its sacredness emphasized by the people in the pre-industry society.

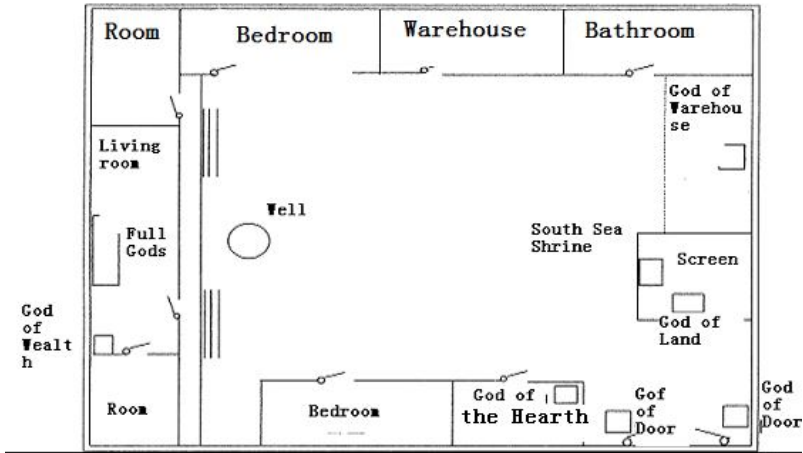


Figure 1: the layout of *shénshen* in the doing-gooders' house in Pear Area

With the amelioration of the economy since the Reform and Opening-up, the building materials in Pear Area changed fundamentally into basically brick, wood, steel and concrete, but the basic pattern of construction, including gate, yard, the north house, and wing-rooms, barely changed. This phenomenon reflects both the practical needs of people's living and the religious propriety passed down from the older generations. In the houses of doing-gooders, different *shénshen* have different places. Usually the main room in the north house is for the worship of Family God (家神, *jiashen*), Kwan-Yin, Emperor Guan and some local gods such as Third Princess and the Goddess of Nine Lotus. Family God is not the memorial tablet for the ancestors, but the Full Gods(全神, *quanshen*), which are the all *shénshen* from the Three Realms including Heaven, Earth, and Underearth worshiped by the local people and usually are drawn on a piece of big cloth. Some families also worship Chairman Mao Zedong (1893-1976) as their Family God.⁷ Generally speaking, God of Road is at the entrance; God of Door is at

⁷ The fact that the founders of P.R.C. like Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai (1898-1976) and Zhu De(1886-1976) etc.,

the gate of the courtyard; Earth God, i.e. Locality God is at the lower part of shadow wall (影壁, *yingbi*); Dragon King is beside the well in the dooryard; God of the Hearth, i.e. Kitchen King, is in the kitchen; God of Warehouse is in the warehouse. Some families have Horse King in their barn and God of Toilet in their toilets, etc. (See Figure 1). The layout of the *shénshen* today is similar to that of the 1930s in this region (Fu Zhenlun, 1930:33a).

As Figure 1 shows, the courtyard door of the house faces west and the main room locates in the north and faces south. Doing-gooders first set aside the places for those shrines when building the house. When moving in, the host will place these *shénshen* properly with the humans. Usually, except that God of Road and Dragon King do not have symbols, other *shénshen* have shrines or at least the Holy-Horse (神马, *shenma*) adhesive in the corresponding place. The Holy-Horse is usually a cloth picture or paper gods. In Pear Area, doing-gooders separate not only the property and domestic space but also *shénshen* at the time of separating the family. In other words, separating *shénshen* is an important part of separating family. As long as a family does not separate, even though the members live in different places or cook separately, they can only worship the same Kitchen King. This shows that *shénshen*, being independent, constitute the basic part of forming families and living space of the houses in Pear Area.

Nowadays, whether there remain places for shrine or not and no matter how simplified religious rites have become, the old men still treasure these places and these *shénshen*. Although the names of the gods might be the same and the Holy-Horse might come from the same folk limner or peddler or store, *shénshen* in each family still differ. Worshipped in one family, the *shénshen* is the *shénshen* of this family with characteristics of its configuration, color, property and style. Because there is a difference in the degree of efficaciousness, these *shénshen* are ranked differently. Most of *shénshen* are the family tutelary all the time which always end up as symbolic and habitual existence. But the *shénshen* in the house of *xiangdaode* who often hold successful religious ritual are efficacious, so the house of *xiangdaode*, different from that of an ordinary family, manifests more divinity and also has an alias for “Shrine of Spirits” (仙家堂/坛, *xianjia tang/tan*).

External force could destroy ancestral temples, rural temples, statues and incense burners, but it can never destroy the entire domestic space. And rural religion with a long history can never be eradicated. Meanwhile, it is impossible to eradicate *shénshen* in the house because the symbolic terrorism legends have been disseminated and the executors of destruction are usually locals, who also have the sense of identity and belonging of the community believers. As a result, such public festivals as the Dragon Plaque Festival had been inherited on family basis when politics controlled everything, during the Cultural Revolution, for example (Yue Yongyi, 2010a: 136-140).

It needs to be noted that in daily life, Chinese people tend to weaken the sacredness of folk houses and temples. Gallin once pointed out that as the main venue of religious ceremonies, the sacrifice lobby in Hsin Hsing of Taiwan serves not only as the place for holding sacred rites. Here, people usually entertain their guests, families get together, children play and do homework, women gather to weave straw hats. Paddies, fertilizer, sweet potatoes as well as agricultural appliances, such as threshers and winnowers, are also stored here. Therefore, the lobbies are always messy (Gallin, 1966: 239-240). Domestic space in Pear Area is also like this, especially in north house. The north house, which has the shrine of the family gods in it, is usually furnished with such expensive home appliances as TV set, refrigerator, electric fan and telephone as well as comfortable sofas and tea tables, which symbolize the social, political and economic status of that family in the community. Some families also preserve other things there. The north house is where people entertain their guests and family members gather to eat, rest, watch TV, and chat gaily with neighbors or guests from afar. Such tropism, which seems to be against the sacredness of the living space, actually illustrates the nature of rural religion—the amalgamation of sacredness and secularity. In addition, it also exhibits the arbitrariness of the form, content and meaning. What this article underlines is the close-to-life features of rural religion instead of the secular, utilitarian, and diffuse features relative to the sacredness emphasized by previous scholars, for whom religion is external to daily life and then permeate through the everyday life.

3. OLD-ROOT AND SPIRITS POSSESSED BY A PERSON

With openness of all faiths to varying degrees after the Reform and Opening-up, ritual practices of various number of *xiangdaode* openly reappear in Pear Area. In this region, *xiangdaode* refers to those people who can be possess specific *shénshen*, i.e. spirits, masters or deities, to prophesy one's fate (事儿, *shier*) and disease (病, *bing*). In fact, *xiangdaode* is a local appellation for “psychic medium”, “spirit medium”, and “magician”, etc. As mentioned above, *xiangdaode* usually read the burning incense before shrines to prophesy fortune and misfortune and provide solutions. Their ritual practices are thus often called reading-incense by doing-gooders and other local people. Most *xiangdaode* are over fifty years old and illiterate. It is noteworthy that not only are a few of *xiangdaode* the members of CCP and former cadres of their own villages or production teams, but also several *xiangdaode* are young and received good education. It is interesting that some of them claim to be members of Taoism while most of them claim that they have converted to Buddhism in the famous Bailin Buddhist Temple in Zhaozhou, which is very prosperous and famous for advocating Living Dhyana(生活禅, *shenghuo chan*) in recent years (Yang & Wei, 2005), and become lay Buddhists, well-doer.⁸ In

⁸ Just as the psychic mediums in Peiping that Li Wei-tsu studied (1941:140-142), the *xiangdaode* in Pear Area, possessing *shénshen*, not only recognize and are attributive to Buddhism and Taoism but also Shamanism which is popular in North China. However, the exact relationship between *xiangdaode* and Shamanism needs further study. The “possessed” and its meaning in the archival material of Qing Dynasty (1636-1912 A.D.) have already been well interpreted (Zhuang Deren, 2004: 424-438).

either case every *xiangdaode* stresses that he is doing-good and serving for *shénshen* (当差, *dangchai*) and reading-incense is only a hobby. They work in the field the same as their neighbors and their daily life does not differ much from that of ordinary villagers.

In Pear Area, one can become *xiangdaode* through afflatus and acquisition. Afflatus includes: 1. congenital psychic mediums without any omen; 2. occasional psychic mediums because of unexpected causes such as mental disorders; 3. “Old-Root” (老根儿, *laogener*). The acquisition group includes: 1. penance; 2. those who are enlightened by some psychic medium and whose year-long disease gets healed because they worship some spirits; 3. those who acknowledge a master (拜师, *baishi*). Of course, the process of being *xiangdaode* is very complicated. Some of them experienced more than one of the above situations.

When talking about their own reason of working as messenger for spirits, *xiangtou* of the Four Sacred Animals in Beijing in the 1940s will say that they have a vocation (仙根, *xiangen*), i.e. they admit that they are of the Four Sacred Animals ancestry, or they are spirits’ young servant (童子, *tonger*) descending to the world (Li Wei-tsu, 1941: 142). Nowadays, *xiangtou* in Cangzhou usually emphasize that they did not learn to read incenses and treat diseases; instead, they are born with the ability to do so. They mainly guide and refine the spirits which have already existed inside their bodies such as *hu xian* who has been worshiped by the people from North China for a long time (DuBois, 2005: 76-82). Similarly, Old-Root is the corresponding form of address by doing-gooders in Pear Area, i.e. in a family where there were people from older generations who worked as *xiangdaode*, but for various reasons the younger generation did not inherit their business that was gradually got lost on the way. The *shénshen* who are not willing to forget this family will come back to one of its members and bother him till he works for itself. People always emphasize that Old-Root’s possession is something that one cannot acquire through other ways. Most *xiangdaode* did not believe such a thing before they could possess; after a serious illness or mental disorder, they heard from other *xiangdaode* that their families had Old-Root, and then they had to work for the *shénshen* and listen to the *shénshen* to prophesy sickness and misfortune for people. Fan Xiao, who was born in 1942, had not been a servant of *shénshen* until she got serious and incurable disease and knew that there was an Old-Root in her family. She said:

My husband is a leader in the production team, and he is a member of the Chinese Communist Party. I have never believed in these things of *xiangdaode*. When I was 29, I fell ill. I threw up everything as soon as I ate it. I had a close shave with death a few times. My family was poor and the only money left was all spent on treating my disease. In the house, there were always weird noises but we could not find out where the noises came from. Water in the pan always could not get boiled. Sometimes even pans could be found in the yard for no reason and the lid and the body of a crock would separate themselves. How chaotic it was! People said our house was haunted. I did not believe this. My husband even knelt down in the yard, but it was helpless. Later my legs became paralyzed. I curled up in the bed. And I could neither move nor go to anywhere. There was no other

option. I had to turn to those *xiangdaode*. They said our family had the Old-Root. We could not afford to go to a hospital and believed in *xiangdaode*. Then, we lit the ever-bright light and sent for people to make oblation for the Old-Root, and my legs started to heal. However, I became lame because I curled up in the bed for too long. I visited the temples near Zhujia Village for two years then I became a *xiangdaode* and started doing-good. At first, it was done secretly. You know, that was still during Culture Revolution. I did not really know how to treat the disease of those supplicants. I just said unconsciously whatever the *shénshen* told me. When I was visiting the temples, I did not feel tired. I just could not help visiting there, burning joss-stick and kowtowing to whomever I saw. I went to burn joss-stick every first and fifteenth day of the lunar calendar till I was 31 years old.⁹

Medical anthropology has produced much scholarship on possession. Ward (1980) considered possession as a behavior aiming to relieve pressure and identified two kinds of possession, namely ritual possession and peripheral possession. Ritual possession is a spontaneous behavior. The possessed are not patients in their social and cultural background and the time they are possessed is relatively short. They are applauded, supported and respected by the public and the society. Ritual possession is a collective, typical and orthodox coping mechanism, through which one can relieve social and cultural pressure. Peripheral possession happens when pressure cannot be properly relieved. One tries to heal himself through possession and the time of possession is relatively long. Usually, peripheral possession is frowned upon by the society and is regarded as a mentally and physically morbid behavior. It is not a typical or orthodox coping mechanism, but rather an attempt of the possessed individuals to escape. It should be noted that, Lewis, even earlier, identified the attribute of Shamanism possession, which is the ritual possession put forward by Ward, as “a spirit possessed (voluntarily) by a person” instead of “a person possessed (involuntarily) by a spirit”. A spirit possessed by a person is “controlled trance, the essential requirement for the exercise of the shamanistic vocation”, and is authentic, positive, and under solicited possession. But a person possessed by a spirit is “uncontrolled trance interpreted as illness”, and is inauthentic, negative, and under unsolicited possession, namely the peripheral possession put forward by Ward. However, Lewis also put that the distinction between controlled possession and uncontrolled possession is not unambiguous (Lewis, 2003:48-49).

As a matter of fact, when possession is manifested in people’s daily life, we can find that whether driven by economic benefits, a personal desire to gain certain power, to get rid of personal and family predicaments, or to rise from lowliness, the two kinds of possession and their attributes do not exhibit neat polarities, especially for the Old-Roots in today’s Pear Area. Peripheral possession and uncontrolled possession are the premise and basis of ritual

⁹ Interviewee: Fan Xiao; interviewer: Yue Yongyi, Wang Xuewen; time of interview: July 26, 2003; place of interview: Fan Xiao’s home in Pear Area. The temple near Zhujia Village is the Temple of Iron Buddha. About this temple and its festival, see Yue Yongyi, 2004a: 104-113; 2008:185-188.

possession and controlled possession. These two seemingly opposite possessions are merely two different phases of possession and dealing with the abnormal, inharmonious and imbalanced state of individual, family and community. That is to say, a psychic medium who is just an ordinary person, under the condition that oneself does not know and is not willing to be possessed, first goes through peripheral possession and then ritual possession.

In this process, because the person involved, who was otherwise ordinary, is possessed by spirits for too long, he (or she) cannot work and is in an abnormal condition of physical disorder. The person and his family in agony are first sympathized with by others, yet then become disgusting and finally is denounced. After successfully holding ritual practices for people who turn to them for help disasters and the agony that happened to her as well as the abnormal, unorthodox and unusual coping mechanisms will turn into normal, orthodox, typical and collective coping mechanisms. Thus peripheral possession becomes ritual possession and uncontrolled possession becomes controlled possession. In Pear Area, except for Fan Xiao, other *xiangdaode* such as Qing Shan's wife and Duan Guang also had similar experiences. Witches (问仙婆, *wenxianpo*) in Qingyuan county, Guangdong province, likewise, all have a mentally abnormal experience called "bodhisattva befalling" (Li Xiyuan, 2001: 76). The famous psychic medium Leiwu, born at the Boluo Town in Yulin, Northern Shaanxi, experienced typically the process from peripheral possession to ritual possession (Kang, 2002: 84; 2006: 100-101). To the contrary, when a psychic medium's ritual practice is unsuccessful for a long time, she's likely to convert from ritual possession to peripheral possession and be laughed at and seen abnormal by others again. Furthermore, she will have to change her practice from public and collective to private and personal.

Li Yiyuan divided psychic mediums into three categories which has a long history of coexistence: innate, cultural and social (1998: 194-196). Nowadays, innate, cultural and social psychic mediums not only coexist but also interact with each other in Chinese rural areas. There are few psychic mediums that only belong to one category. It is especially so in terms of the process and the fact that they keep perfecting their skills of possession. Whether in the Cultural Revolution era or these days, many *xiangdaode* in Pear Area, just like the famous Hui Xiao, after they unconsciously became *xiangdaode*, persisted in kneeling down in front of their shrines facing burning incense at every midnight for two or four hours to enhance their communication abilities with *shénshen*. Meanwhile, the local culture of approving psychic medium can encourage and suggest not only those who want to be psychic mediums but also those who do not wish to become psychic mediums but are in bad need of psychic mediums' help with the adversities in daily life. That is to say, cultural encouragement and suggestion are not uni-directional but bi-directional. The culture of supporting psychic medium and the practices of psychic medium are always interactive.

Therefore, becoming a medium with supernatural ability to communicate with gods is not just an active or passive individual choice, at the same time, it is allowed by shared cultural tradition and develops under the recognition and encouragement of a community. When the

doing-gooders or supplicants meet all kinds of unbalance in an ever-changing and risky life in the “risk society” named by some sociologists such as Ulrich Beck (1992), the psychic mediums naturally become the optional asylum and hope of the disadvantaged villagers seeking help who are at the bottom of the society. But it doesn’t mean that *xiangdaode* enjoy a high social status and prestige in Pear Area. Under an anti-superstitious environment over a long time, the doing-gooders, including *xiangdaode* themselves, also regard reading-incense as not only supernatural and mysterious but also abnormal and backward. Therefore, *xiangdaode* often practice their rites semi-openly. Just as Fan Xiao said, most *xiangdaode* were not willing to work for *shénshen*. Li Wei-tsu once suggested that whereas reading-incense can bring income to a family and put *xiangtou* in an advantageous position at his or her home as well as for the believers, for those who do not believe, denounce excesses praise and they are always regarded as swindlers (1941: 120-122; 1948: 76-77) . That is also why many people are not willing to work for *shénshen* in Pear Area these days, although *xiangdaode* can obviously control his *shénshen*. This plight of psychic mediums also appears in contemporary urban and rural Sichuan province (Yue Yongyi, 2013).

In addition, from the life history of a rural doctor who totally accepts western medicine in Peiping, we can also see his contempt and hatred towards the *xiangtou* living in the same village (Ma Shumao, 1949: 39-53). Such contempt and hatred are caused not only by jealousy and potential economic loss brought by the competition with those of the same occupation, but also by the fact that the dominant ideology and discourse favor and recognize western medicine. The essence of contempt and hatred is foreign culture denying native culture and “science” mocking “superstition”. After more than one hundred years of development, such biased cognition also has become a part of the doing-gooders’ cognition in Pear Area. However, no matter what others comment, all *xiangdaode* always emphasize that they are devoted to good deeds and work for *shénshen* without any selfish and utilitarian desire. They also say that they despise those *xiangdaode* with a purpose of seeking wealth and fame. Jing Wang from CY Village in Pear Area once expelled a greedy apprentice. What attract people with unbalance in their lives are not the psychic mediums themselves in real life but the spirits possessed by the psychic mediums. Unfortunately, the unbalance has been normal and an indispensable part of life in Pear Area as well as the whole world because the risk is everywhere and even acts fairly to all men.

4. UNBALANCES IN DAILY LIFE: BING AND SHIER

As for psychic mediums treatment, the existing research mostly emphasizes that it is difficult for modern medicine to explain how psychic mediums operate and modern medicine cannot duplicate the results. Diseases are caused by the supernatural causes such as the ghosts, *Xianjia*, guilty consciences, etc., interfering with the human soul, and the folk call them the “imaginary diseases” (虛病, *xubing*), “evil diseases” (邪病, *xiebing*) (Gallin, 1966: 257-259; Li Xiyuan, 2001:78; Kang, 2006:102-105; Dubois, 2005: 65-85; Chau, 2006a: 55; Yue Yongyi, 2012b). But from the divination sticks (灵签, *lingqian*) in the Black Dragon King Temple in the north

of Shaanxi province (Luo Hongguang, 1997) and other temples on which pilgrims and interpreters rely, we can see that people want to solve more problems than imaginary diseases. The problems pertain to all aspects of the folk daily life and involve various kinds of life's unbalance and potential risk, including inharmony, injustice, bad luck, as well as negative feelings like anxiety, tension and sadness.

At the end of the twentieth century, pilgrims went to the Black Dragon King Temple to pray and draw divination sticks for the following fifteen reasons: 1. business, including long-range business, buying a truck or finding business partners and other special decisions; 2. financial fortunes, business or related or unrelated; 3. current general fortune; 4. the year's fortunes, in the first half or second half of the year; 5. marriage; 6. domestic affairs, such as a quarrel between husband and wife or divorce; 7. young people looking for or waiting for work; 8. examination and enrollment fortunes; 9. lawsuits, or expecting a person released from prison; 10. interpersonal relationships; 11. disease; 12. officials' luck; 13. praying for children; 14. searching for persons or things; 15. opportunity of switching jobs and others (Chau, 2006a: 101-102). In fact, the above-mentioned help-seeking items have always been a practice for Chinese people. More than sixty years ago, both the civilian in Peiping and Tianjing and West Towners in Yunnan province had substantially the same seventeen purposes turning to fortune-tellers, priests, Taoist and other spiritual specialists (Hsu, 1952:119-120; 1983: 138-139). Earlier, Hayes studied prayer slips collected in Tianjin, Chengdu, Suzhou, Shanghai and Fuzhou and noted that illness of most prayers for assistance to the gods often was followed by concerns over marriage, desire for wealth and travel safety(1924:97), nearly covering all possible wishes.

It can be drawn that as a tradition in Chinese rural religion, turning to unscientific supernatural power has not changed its nature, even though science has permeated the daily life of Chinese people. Therefore, it is more proper to define psychic mediums' treatment, adjustment and solving problems as "collective and interpersonal related" abnormal states (Li Yiyuan, 1998:192). Similarly, besides imaginary disease, psychic mediums also diagnose, prophesy, and solve other prays through possession and reading-incense. Thus, Shier referred to in this article include geomancy (风水, *fengshui*), graveyard (阴宅, *yinzhai*), domestic space (阳宅, *yangzhai*), fate (such as passing an examination, getting a promotion, becoming rich and famous, marriage and bearing children, travelling), and the abnormal status of one person or his family. Bing refers primarily to the imaginary disease or evil disease that the countryman so far is still talking. That is to say, Bing is not the physiological disease but feelings of discomfort caused by supernatural causes, including the unsafety of a family, bad luck, family disputes, children leaving home, discord with neighbors, etc. At the same time Bing also includes mental disorders and physical discomfort. In Pear Area, doing-gooders often mix Bing and Shier. In different contexts, they are equivalent or refer to different things.

There were seventy-four supplicants turning to Duan Guang for eighty-nine different Shier(Figure 2) from June 6th to 22nd of the lunar calendar in 2003 (Yue Yongyi, 2004a:

149-150; 2007: 124-125). Only one supplicant was from the same village as Duan Guang, and others were from other villages in Pear Area. This illustrates to some extent the limited influence of a *xiangdaode* in her own village. It is worth noting that this limitation is not necessarily determined by efficaciousness or inefficaciousness, but by the anti-superstition context and communication tactics people use, for instance, people often associate with the distant *xiangdaode* and attack the near ones because far *xiangdaode* fare best. Among the supplicants, there were forty-two women seeking help for themselves or their relatives.

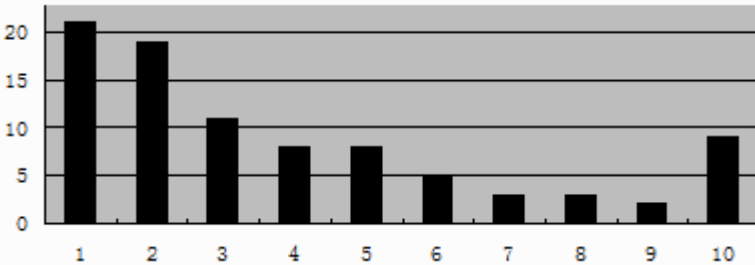


Figure 2: Shier or Bing supplicants ask for help from *xiangdaode*

In Figure 2, the horizontal axis refers to the Shier they seek help for while the vertical axis refers to the number of such Shier. They read: 1. twenty-one cases relating to home, tombs and caves (洞口, *dongkou*) where spirits haunt; 2. nineteen cases relating to the nature of real disease including body pain, low back pain, stomachache, hepatitis, pulmonary disease, brain tumor, vitiligo, eye problem, etc.; 3. eleven cases that don't indicate symptoms of diseases; 4. eight cases relating to uneasy mind; 5. eight cases of wealth seeking (including business and merchandising); 6. five cases of seeking safety; 7. three cases of praying for children; 8. three cases of family disputes; 9. two cases relating to exams and study; 10. nine cases of other things, including seeking marital success, paying back a debt, retrieving the vehicle after an accident, litigation, leaving hometown for work, eager to grant housing base, looking for lost property, job (such as seamen), and contracting the land of others. Items 2-4 are all related to the imaginary and real diseases with a total sum of thirty-eight cases.

Thus, it can be seen that 1. Shier also involve other aspects of daily life in Pear Area, although imaginary and real diseases account for nearly forty percent. 2. Imaginary and real diseases are related to houses, tombs and caves; that is to say, people associate their Bing or Shier with worldly and other-worldly residences where, in people's imagination, gods, ancestors, spirits and ghosts live together. 3. Supplicants have a clear understanding and imagination about their living space in which the conflicts among gods, ancestors, spirits and ghosts can be detected and adjusted through certain ways by *xiangdaode*. 4. People's good intention is for justice and luck and preventing risk, intentions that cannot be fulfilled by official methods given the limited life chance of supplicants. Dahrendorf has proved that people's behavior selection is affected by social relationships, responsibilities and expectations (1979). Moreover, unfair life

chance affects opportunity in individual or group life as well as their subjective view of the world, including religion and values (Zhang Maogui, 1985). Turning to *xiangdaode* for the Shier which could be solved by human effort and secular methods suggests unfair life chance of the doing-gooders and the sense of crisis, risk and nervousness caused by it. So, it is perhaps meaningless to analyze the religious practice of doing-gooders centering on *shénshen* with the opposite notions of sacredness and secularity.

Generally, the concept of cosmos and values of traditional Chinese culture is “pursuing neutralization” (致中和, *zhizhonghe*) or seeking harmony, including the harmony of the natural system (god), individual system (people) and interpersonal system (society) (Li Yiyuan, 1998: 203-221; 2000). Also, in rural China, interpersonal relationships are characteristic of a “differential mode of association” (差序格局, *chaxu geju*) that centers around oneself while putting oneself in the place of another (Fei Xiaotong, 1992: 60-70). Doing-gooders seeking harmony also perceive the world they live in with reciprocity of thinking and further decide how to communicate with others as well as to *shénshen*. For doing-gooders, including *xiangdaode* and supplicants, these Shier to be solved are the unbalances of nature, individuals and interpersonal relationship. Such view is not only a reflection of doing-gooders’ concept of the cosmos and the collective cognition, but also the true life itself. It is both whole social fact and the ideal type of a smooth, stable, harmonious and developed life for doing-gooders.

We can briefly classify these *Shier* mentioned above into three categories, i.e. unbalance of space, body and life chance. Space unbalance includes twenty-one cases related to houses, tombs and caves. Body unbalance includes thirty-eight cases related to imaginary and real diseases. The unbalance of life chance includes thirty cases related to fortune-seeking, praying for children, family disputes, study and exams, etc. (see Figure 3)

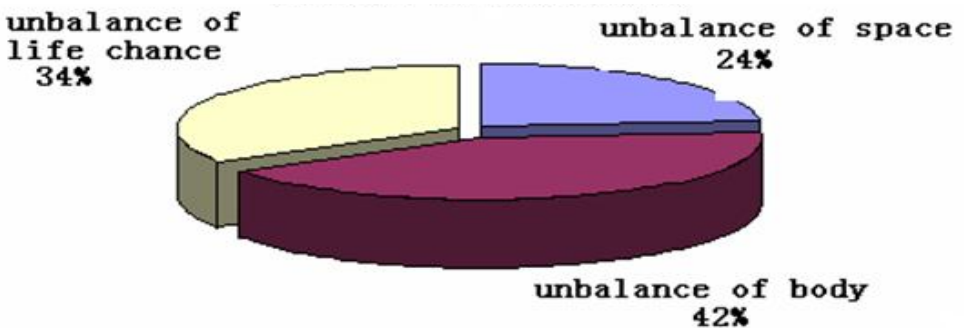


Figure 3: Unbalance of life world

Accounting for a comparatively small part, space unbalance is crucial among the three because doing-gooders consider houses, tombs and caves as a whole. Space unbalance affects not only the interaction of three kinds of space, but also body unbalance and the life chance of family members. Many imaginary and real diseases which cannot be diagnosed and cured by modern

medicine or diseases left untreated because of lack of money are considered a reflection of or related to space unbalance. Similarly, a family's worldly and other-worldly residences relate to the prosperity and harmony of this family. Although modern society offers more opportunities for fair competition and people of different social status enjoy many opportunities for changing their status and fate, the space in which a countryside man lives already prevents them from enjoying many life chances of urban residents. As a rural area, the limited resource of education, the involution production of pear, the scarcity of living resources and traditional mentality make most people in Pear Area hope to change their fate through attending school, doing business, joining the army and giving birth to a son, etc. This is why people, while working hard to change their fate, turn to *xiangdaode* for help. Therefore, seemingly secular Shier takes up thirty-four percent of the whole unbalance mentioned above. The vicious cycle among the three types of unbalance becomes a breeding ground for the existence of *xiangdaode* in Pear Area and makes the FTF possible though the house of *xiangdaode* is not a real temple.

It needs to be noted that with the rising popularity of western medicine and scientific knowledge, doing-gooders generally trust and partially agree with western medicine. Facing supplicants with real diseases such as colds, muscle injuries, burns and other physical diseases, *xiangdaode* usually suggest them go to the hospital and take injections and medicines and do so when *xiangdaode* themselves are sick. Many people only look for *xiangdaode* when they catch some real diseases which cannot be treated in the town, county or municipal hospitals. Of course, nowadays villagers do not necessarily believe that psychic mediums are more capable than doctors. But as Li Wei-tsu (1941: 109-110; 1948: 69-72), Ma Shumao (1949: 39-53) analyzed over half a century ago, we cannot ignore the reasons that people pay less, even free, in reading-incense and reading-incense is especially popular among women.

In short, psychic mediums today are people's second best choice. At the same time, when hospital could not treat certain disease, the patient was sometimes recommended by doctors to turn to *xiangdaode*. In other words, the heterogeneous groups in Pear Area widely believe in a power beyond modern medicine and science. This belief, from another level, shows the normal state of life unbalance. As the distinction between sacredness and secularity in Pear Area is somewhat meaningless in daily life, science and ignorance or witchcraft are not hostile to each other. On the contrary, they are both used and people often turn to whichever can solve problems in real life (Fei Xiaotong, 1939: 165-169). Actual and external factors will affect the public beliefs and values. The belief in the reliability of western medicine does not shake the old values and beliefs, but rather integrate a new concept into the old framework of culture and mind (Hsu, 1952: 79-118; Gallin, 1966: 259).

The integration of tradition and modernity has always been the essence of the real life of rural China, as well as the essence of rural religion. In an attempt to find more common ground between East and West, and even human society, Hsu refuted Malinowski's absolute distinction between witchcraft, religion and science and found:

If we followed the thought patterns and ways of a culture as expressed through the bearers of the culture, magico-religion and real knowledge are not only intertwined, but may not be distinguished in the minds of the people, so that to reach one and the same end they oscillate between one and the other or resort to both simultaneously, with the greatest facility and as a matter of course. I further found that this lack of discrimination is not something peculiar to the people of the community that I examined, nor to any nonliterate society, but common to the West as well (1983:7).

For this reason, he further advocated that when investigating the relationship between magico-religion and science, we should connect it with the main factors determining human behavior, which is “particular social organizations and patterns of culture” (Hsu, 1983: 8).

5. MEANINGFUL GOD SETS: SHRINE OF SPIRITS

Most of the doing-gooders in Pear Area make offerings to the Holy-Horse in their houses. The size of the Holy-Horse is closely related with the size of Chinese traditional nankeen and the bulk of the worshipping space (Shi Junliang, 2012: 54). Most of the Holy-Horse of Full Gods in Pear Area is about two meters tall and one meter wide. The Holy-Horse together with the altar in front of it and censer on the altar constitute the shrine. The texture of Holy-Horse of Full Gods is usually white nankeen with about ten lines of *shénshen* around it from top to bottom. These *shénshen* are placed in a certain order with a total number of more than one hundred.

Influenced by many secret folk sects, Full Gods enjoyed a long history in North China (Huang Yubian, 1982: 110, 121-122). However, the belief in Full Gods of ordinary villagers is different from that of folk sects. Instead, it is a creative integration of religion and polytheism worship of traditional rural society (Liang Jingzhi, 2004: 295). Because the government has intensively been trying to eradicate superstition since the 1890s, Full Gods in the doing-gooders’ home, although remaining the same in form, have significantly changed compared to the Full Gods in history, even the names of *shénshen* have been forgotten. Meanwhile, not only have Full gods of *xiangdaode* a different meaning from those of normal doing-gooders, but, even in the same family, the significance of Full Gods varies among all family members.

When comparing Chinese and Indian religious beliefs, Roberts and his colleagues proposed two concepts, personal pantheon and meaningful god sets. The former refers to the sum of the gods known to individual believers. The latter refers to the sum of the gods important to the believers. Meaningful god sets are meaningful and characteristic to individual believer, but, in a sense, believers do not need to cherish them (Roberts et al., 1975: 122-123). Generally, *shénshen* of Holy-Horse in doing-gooders’ family cannot be possessed by a person. Most of ordinary *xinghaode* make offerings to the *shénshen* which is only inherited from the ancestors as a habitual behavior. Therefore, doing-gooders do not know exactly the names of *shénshen* except for some common gods such as Confucius, Sakya Muni, Laozi, Kuan Kung and Kwan-Yin. Contrastingly, at the home of *xiangdaode*, some *shénshen* of Full Gods can be possessed, and *xiangdaode* know more clearly about the names of *shénshen*.

The Full Gods' shrine at Fan Xiao's home is called Five Flower Altar (五花坛, *Wuhua Tan*). There are nine lines of *shénshen* on the Holy-Horse. From top to bottom, the major gods in the center are: 1. Virgin Mother (无生圣母, *Wusheng Shengmu*); 2. Laozi; 3. Buddha; 4. Medicine King; 5. Banzhen Goddess, Yanguang Goddess, Third Princess, Qiongm Goddess (with umbilical cord), Granny of Child; 6. Children-bringing Mother; 7. Kuan Kung; 8. Green Spirit, Three Spirits, Harmonious Spirit, Grand Spirit, Jing Spirit, Flower Spirit; 9. Monkey King, Dragon Spirit, White Spirit, Long Spirit, Hu Spirit, etc. For *shénshen* in the 8th and 9th line, Fan Xiao told us on July 3rd, 2003, "I do not know what exactly these *Xianjia* are like, so I just tell what my mind tells me."

In July 2005, when He Ji from Village A was holding temple festival at her home, with the help of other doing-gooders, she stated the names of the nine lines of *shénshen* in the Full Gods' shrine very different from those of Fan Xiao. There are also nine line of *shénshen* in the Full Gods' shrine in Yin Xu's home from Village D. Similarly, Yin Xu can only state the names of the main gods from top to bottom, i.e. Virgin Mother, Old Lord, Jade Emperor, Third Princess, Children-bringing Old Mother, Kuan Kung. And the three lines of main gods at the bottom are "masters".

Generally, one *xiangdaode* mainly possesses one *shénshen*, but she invites and instructs different *shénshen* for different requests. When Duan Guang reads incense, she usually invites Monkey King for normal Bing or Shier, but when the request is about a lawsuit, she invites those honest and upright officials in Chinese history such as Kou Zhun (961-1023), Bao Gong (999-1062), Yue Fei (1103-1142) of Song Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.) and Hai Rui (1515-1587) of Ming Dynasty. When the request is about exams, she invites the wise man, Kong Ming (181-234) of the Three Kingdoms (220-280 A.D.). For Jing Wang, Monkey King is mainly to be possessed to catch devils. He said, "I invite specific *shénshen* for specific Bing. It is categorized just as in the big hospital!"¹⁰ *xiangdaode* know clearly about the rank of these *shénshen*. Yin Xu said, "When there is a God, there is a spirit. The ranks and status of *shénshen* also differ. The *shénshen* of lower status serve those of higher status."¹¹ But in belief of doing-gooders and the reading-incense practice of *xiangdaode*, spirits are much more important than the above named gods. For this reason, the home of *xiangdaode* is vividly called "Shrine of Spirits" or "Altar of Spirits" by doing-gooders. Obviously, the existence of gods above depends on lower spirits in rural religion. In other words, Shrines of Spirits are meaningful god sets for the supplicants, doing-gooders and especially *xiangdaode*. In fact, not only in the Shrine of Spirits, the surface hierarchy and the actual amount of incense (香火, *xianghuo*) of the gods in rural temples also greatly differ. Ordinary villagers consider efficaciousness as their

¹⁰ Interviewee: Jing Wang; interviewer: Yue Yongyi; time of interview: July 11, 2002; place of interview: Jing Wang's home in Pear Area.

¹¹ Interviewee: Yin Xu; interviewer: Yue Yongyi, Wang Xuewen; time of interview: July 24, 2003; place of interview: Yin Xu's home in Pear Area.

criteria and totally ignore the status of these gods in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism (Chen Yongling, 1941:104-105; Li Wei-tsu, 1941: 42-43; Kang, 2006:125-160).

Every time when Yin Xu read incense for her supplicants, she chants the scriptures to invite every *shénshen* of her meaningful god sets. While inviting, she must burn five incense sticks for Full Gods, a bunch of incense for the master and a stick of incense for each of the two Door Gods who stand on guard at the entrance. The incense-burner is very special. It is made of discarded hard paper boxes and takes a round shape of a diameter of around thirty centimeters. The brim of the censer has some hollow protrusions in which the incenses can be inserted. The five incense sticks for the Full Gods are evenly fixed in the protrusions on the northern brim of the censer and the bunch of incense for the master is in center of the censer which is often filled with incense ash. The incense for the two Door Gods is respectively at the southeast and southwest protrusions. It is obvious that the incense-burner is not just a place to fix the incense; it can be regarded as an epitome of a temple. More importantly, the censer specifies Yin Xu's meaningful god sets through burning incense. Namely, not the gods but the masters, i.e. spirits, are the core, playing the supreme role, and any other *shénshen* are just supporting parts.

As a form of materialization, Holy-Horse, incense-burner and the shrine specify the meaningful god sets of *xiangdaode*. According to the active *shénshen*, together with the efforts of *xiangdaode*, Shrine of Spirits now becomes a well-rounded micro-temple. Unlike *fengjiaode*, the religion market of doing-gooders is of relative shortage (Yang Fenggang, 2012:128-153) because few temples are permitted to rebuild in Pear Area. As a result, the shrines of *xiangdaode* become the center where the doing-gooders of the village assemble. Through burning incense and paper, making a vow and redeeming a vow, all the rites that the spirit-possessed *xiangdaode* hold are important to the supplicants. Further, the houses of *xiangdaode* may be transformed into the centers of religious practice for a particular village or region, not necessarily of the village where the *xiangdaode* is from. And the ritual activities in the Shrine of Spirits, in fact, turn to be the main rites of village temple festivals and multi-village temple festivals when *xiangdaode* take part in these temple festivals in Pear Area. The ritual activities in the family of *xiangdaode*, village temple and multi-village temple encompass each other and become intertextuality.

In the early history of Taipei, were the gods in the shrine of some households efficacious, this shrine would “grow” and “become a center of pilgrimage” in the end (Feuchtwang, 1974b: 268-278). When the shrine in a psychic medium's house becomes the center of successful ceremonial practice, such development will come into being (Feuchtwang, 1992:130). Similarly, the ritual practices such as worshiping Kwan-Yin of Sending-Boys and “tying up dolls” (拴娃娃, *shuan wawa*), which were held originally in Sun Juan's family, after about twenty years' transformation, now have become one of the most attractive ceremonies in the Iron Buddha Temple festivals in Pear Area (Yue Yongyi, 2004a: 110-111).

6. EFFICACIOUS READING-INCENSE: MAKING VOWS AND REDEEMING VOWS

The incense is more than itself. It incorporates within it divinity, the god's efficaciousness, worshiping of people and their sense of place and history (Feuchtwang, 1992: 23-24, 126-129). It is the unification of past, present and future, and the unification of space and time. Moreover, the burning of incense represents a transformative process, as well as "it is fire that possesses transformative power" (Sangren, 1987:162-165). Although grand ceremonies such as division of incense, censer and efficacy in Fujian and Taiwan are not held in Pear Areas nowadays, the sense of place and structure of feeling (Pred, 1983) or the feeling structure of place (Yue Yongyi, 2011: 311-313) which Shrine of Spirits refers to are still obvious through the cohesion of doing-gooders of the same villages and the attraction to the supplicants from other villages. Only by the incense burning can the dialogue between people and *shénshen* be conducted in front of Shrine of Spirits. When the incenses are burning, the particular *shénshen* would come to possess the body of *xiangdaode*, and then he can speak on the behalf of the *shénshen*, prophesying the good or bad fate the supplicant may have. The supplicants would only believe the speech of the *xiangdaode* through the burning incenses. Under this situation, the flames of one bunch of incense or three incense sticks would indicate the situation of the supplicants, i.e. whether their living world is unbalanced or not and how it is unbalanced.

Meanwhile, *xiangdaode* should also use a piece of yellow paper (黄裱纸, *huangbiaozhi*), which is approximately twenty centimeters by ten centimeters, for worshipping *shénshen*. The scene of burning the yellow paper before the censer is indicative of the sincerity of the supplicant and shows the feeling of the *shénshen*. Only when burning of incense and paper offering, "the worshiper hoped the deity would bless him or her (or the family) with blessing implied by the item" (Scott, 2007:22). Some *xiangdaode* will write down the supplicant's name and requests on the yellow paper for *shénshen* as petitions (表, *biao*) and burn these petitions to inform the *shénshen*.¹² The petition is given another vivid name, Rising Script (升文, *shengwen*) because it must be burnt to *shénshen* before the shrine, and only when its ashes are blown into the air, the supplicant and *xiangdaode* would believe the *shénshen* to accept their offerings and requests. The following text is the original script written by Duan Guang for the supplicant whose request is to prolong his or her life:

¹² Petition, as a writing style, is one kind of script that subjects wrote to the emperor in ancient China and the context of it must be big events. For examples, Zhu Geliang, i.e. Kongming, in the Three Kingdoms wrote the very famous "*Chushi Biao*" (the petition for crusade) to the succeeded emperor Liuchan of Shu Han (221-263A.D.). In the much earlier period, petition is a writing style or a compiling style of chronicling the events such as the Ten Petitions (十表, *Shibiao*) in *Historical Records* (史记, *Shiji*) written by Sima Qian, the famous historian in the Western Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-9 A.D.). Among the folks, petition reveals the relationship between the inferior and superior and is a written form of communication with the gods such as making wishes and redeeming vows and praising the gods. Of course, in the folk ritual practice, petitions also stand for some actions like revealing feelings to a god which contains a lot of meanings with local differences (such as Tao Siyan, 1998: 26-27). More Studies on paper offerings such as their designs, meanings, actions in today China, see Scott, 2007.

Somebody from xx room, xx village, xx town, xx county, Hebei province now is asking all the Buddha and Patriarchs to demand each master to manage all kins of Bing, and Kwan-Yin from South Sea come to rescue me. I will redeem my vow by lavishing money and treasures after recovery. Wugong Shi in the hell informs the bookkeeper in the sky to cross off my name and tells the bookkeeper in the hell to affix the age-seal which can add more years to my life and keep me away from real illness. The Seventh Master diagnoses the symptom of Bing in the sky and hell, and solves the disturbance of the souls. Master Sun of the Golden Dragon Five Star is responsible for sending my petition to the bookkeeper of my own place and return it after affixing the seal.

This Censor Master Tongtian (seal)

Master Du (seal)

So, at open ritual space of temple festivals attended by many people in Pear Area, the burning yellow paper for worshipping the *shénshen* before the shrines now become the criteria by which one's sincerity, kindness, justice and innocence are judged (Yue Yongyi, 2010a:114). The burning yellow paper and the incense are in a dynamic state different from the stillness of the Holy-Horses, censers and altars. The winding smoke, pervading fragrance and the blowing yellow paper or the ashes of the petitions deeply stimulate people's sensations, creating a special scene of reading-incense, i.e. a "mystery theatre" with some sacred meaning. In this theatre, everybody and everything is facing *shénshen* directly and controlled, communicating and dialoguing with *shénshen*. The *shénshen* at that time are used by people and every kind of inharmony and risk in daily life is examined.

The "incense spectrum" (香谱, *xiangpu*) popular in Pear Area under the influence of Buddhism (Yue Yongyi, 2004a: 151), together with the fact that many doing-gooders can easily read the incense, indicates that the flames of the burning incense have some kind of connection with assorted unbalance of life, and the inner rule can be found. Therefore, in a sense, the skill of reading-incense can be obtained. But due to the fact that one *shénshen* is possessed by *xiangdaode* not others, efficacy differs between *xiangdaode* and ordinary doing-gooders according to their levels of skill.

Although every *xiangdaode* has his or her own method of reading-incense, the basic procedures of reading-incense are all alike: 1. The supplicants kneel down in front of the shrine and give their names, addresses and requests. 2. According to their requests, *xiangdaode* burns three incense sticks or a bunch of incense in the censer, and erects the cylindrical yellow paper or petitions in front of the censer. Then *xiangdaode* burns the paper or petitions and waits for the ashes to blow up in the air, while chanting magic spell in a low voice or kowtowing to expect the *shénshen* coming. 3. Judging from the flames of the burning incense, the *xiangdaode* possessing their *shénshen*, will analyze the Bing's cause or the Shier's origins of the supplicants, and tell them the way to solve their Bing or Shier and the possible tendency afterwards. 4. After the *shénshen* leaves the bodies of *xiangdaode*, according to the real

situation, sometimes *xiangdaode* may draw magic characters or send the supplicants some pills made of incense ashes. Sometimes, *xiangdaode* will also make another appointment to go to these supplicants' home holding necessary rites. In this sense, not temples but families are the core of rural religion.

The efficacious stories of *xiangdaode* will quickly spread in Pear Area. As for those who have witnessed the efficacy but still bear doubts, they always say, "The famous hospitals are not capable of treating the diseases, but they are just cured by *xiangdaode*!" or "How weird it is! How can you explain it? It is hard to believe but you have to believe it." Therefore, the more miraculous stories a *xiangdaode* has, the more famous he or she will be. Grateful supplicants will not only spread the news of their being rescued, but also actively redeem their vows. In addition to kowtowing, burning incense and paper and offering again, the supplicants also express their gratitude to the *xiangdaode* and *shénshen* by giving banners, plaques or something that can be used at the FTF such as tables, chairs, wooden benches, bowls, chopsticks, wheat, rice, meat, cigarettes, alcoholic drink and some cooked food. Thus, the North House of *xiangdaode*' home can be usually regarded as an exhibition room, a museum or a memorial of the *xiangdaode* himself and his *shénshen*. On the wall or the ground of the main room, the banners, plaques and others are often placed everywhere.

Nowadays, the local government sometimes takes some acts to ban these "feudal superstitions", especially before the Spring Festival. Some famous *xiangdaode* can be arrested for several days. But to the doing-gooders, the apprehension of *xiangdaode* precisely shows their efficacy. They even receive more visits of the supplicants when returning home. At the same time, all *xiangdaode* always claim that they are doing-good and serving for *shénshen* without any intention of accumulating money or cheating. Among my several talking with Fan Xiao, she often asked in a rhetorical question, "What can I do when *shénshen* was possessed by me?"

Among doing-gooders in Pear Area, once an individual or a family seeks help from *xiangdaode*, they usually say "to see someone" or "have seen someone." From the perspective of linguistics, "see" originally means the action of looking combined with multiple meanings such as observing and understanding, etc. It is both an action and a process, showing a result that has already happened or might happen. *Xiangdaode*, *shénshen* and supplicants all keep exploring and recognizing each other, and each two of these three forms a relying and utilizing relationship. Being invited many times proves a *xiangdaode*'s reputation and the supplicants are able to place their trust in him. Through praising and propagating efficacy, the sense of place of *xiangdaode* is enhanced, and thus he and his house become a symbol of his village. His village might be publicized because he will be invited to other village temple festivals as well as multi-village temple festivals. Then, at the red-hot (红火, *honghuo*) or hot-noisy (热闹, *renao*) festival site¹³, people will say, "Here comes ×× from ×× village." or "×× is very efficacious.

¹³ The dialects, red-hot and heat-noise, have already been keywords of understanding temple festivals and rural religion in contemporary China. See Chau, 2006a: 147-168; Hua Zhiya, 2011: 120-143.

Let him have a look.” Of course, all these points directly and refers to the possessed *shénshen*. In a sense, these words and action also form the sense of place of some secondary group in Pear Area, such as *xinghaode* and *fengjiaode*, although the meaning is obviously different.

Supplicants, no matter how far they come from, all experience “the rites of passage” (Gennep, 1960). After investigating and recognizing the *xiangdaode*, supplicants go there with hope. The excursion itself is a buffer or transitional stage physically and psychologically. The life of the supplicant or his family might return to the way it was before by reading-incense. The purpose of taking this excursion featuring segregation and reintegration is not pilgrimage for self-purification and closer to God. Instead, the supplicants want to gain protection and bless from *shénshen* to solve the unbalance in their lives. This process also enhances the sense of place of the supplicants. Although the co-villagers of a *xiangdaode* do not always go to the Shrine of Spirits, it is always familiar to them.

In a word, there are three relationships of encompassing the contrary about reading-incense: successful reading-incense encompasses unsuccessful reading-incense, efficaciousness of *shénshen* encompasses the failure of *xiangdaode*; efficacious *shénshen* encompasses inefficacious *shénshen*. The relation of these three is as follows:

[successful reading-incense: unsuccessful reading-incense = successful reading-incense]:
 [efficaciousness of *shénshen*: the failure of *xiangdaode* = efficaciousness of *shénshen*]:
 [efficacious *shénshen*: inefficacious *shénshen* = efficacious *shénshen*] = efficaciousness
 of *shénshen/xiangdaode*

In the above equation, “:” means opposite relation; “=” means containing relation. The supplicants and doing-gooders would rather believe in the efficaciousness of *shénshen-xiangdaode*, that is to say, they always see reading-incense as a tactic as well as a way to obtain balance. For the bystanders, they either easily come to the conclusion that sacredness covers secularity, namely, reading-incense is absolutely sacred, or easily get to the conclusion that reading-incense is utter ignorance, superstition and hopelessness and must be eradicated. Evidently, the two conclusions, whether religious or political, are both superficial and one-sided.

While modern science and technology is mangling the folklore from the soil, it also integrates the whole traditional folklore at a quick pace partially due to its convenience (Bausinger, 1990). Generally, the technology that neither concerns with birth and death matters nor interferes with the existing social organization is more easily accepted and integrated into the existing cultural pattern (Hsu, 1952:125). Constructing a mutually antagonistic relationship between modernity and tradition only obscures the actual practice. Nowadays, telephone and cell phone are changing the way of communication between *xiangdaode* and supplicants. Supplicants can make appointments with *xiangdaode* promptly at any time. Moreover, as I have observed several times, the supplicants can absent themselves from the site of reading-incense after they tell *xiangdaode* their Shier by telephone. After a while, the supplicants will call *xiangdaode*

again and consult the result. Of course, whether efficacious or not, the supplicants, after a few days, will come to the *xiangdaode*'s home to burn incense and make offering (上供, *shanggong*) for the *shénshen* and also thank the *xiangdaode*.

Therefore, factors such as the frequency of the telephone call, how far the supplicants live and some common transportation like motorbikes, mini-vehicles or cars bring new criteria for the efficacy and reputation of *xiangdaode*. This change of criteria also takes place in Northern Shaanxi, the revolutionary sites of CCP (Chau, 2006a: 56). On July 11, 2003, Jing Wang said to me proudly in front of his shrine, "The telephone is ringing all the time and there is no rest for me. Sometimes I have to hide myself in the pear field or at my son-in-law's home. People come from everywhere, Shijiazhuang, Tianjin, Baoding, etc. Cars are parked before my house, especially during the FTF, there is an endless queue of cars outside my house."

While the above-mentioned criteria for the efficacy and reputation of *xiangdaode* are mostly from the viewpoint of the supplicants or outsiders, other criteria, such as the efficacious stories, banners and plaques and some objects that can reveal the efficacy as well as whether the *xiangdaode* was arrested or not, are from the viewpoint of the psychic mediums. These two kinds of criteria are mutually influenced without a clear dividing line and both are based on the efficacious ritual practice by *xiangdaode* and their *shénshen*. Because the revival and reconstruction of some traditional public places such as rural temples are lagged and are even forbidden, the higher reputation one *xiangdaode* enjoys, the more supplicants and followers he will have and the stronger his cohesion will be. Consequently, the *shénshen*, the shrine in *xiangdaode*'s house, the efficacious ceremonial practice, the spread of its efficacy, the banners and plaques, the supplicants, supporters and followers, taken together, supply enough essential requirements for FTF from every aspect and make it natural.

However, the temples located on the edge of villages are naturally regarded as public space and attract more scholarly attention. Gamble points out that owning one or more village temple is the basic characteristic of most villages in North China (1963:119). Village temple and related activities became religious body took up great amount of space in Ting Hsien social survey by the Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement (Gamble, 1954:398-425, also see Li Jinghan, 1933). During the Anti-Japanese War, Japanese also paid extra attention to village temples of Lengshui Gou, Sibeï Chai etc. in North China. Grootaers, the famous Sinologist, counted in his geography research that villages in Wanquan County have averagely 6.8 temples and villages near Xuanhua have averagely 4.5 temples (Grootaers, 1948:217; 1951:9). And there was the study of "temple religion" in 1940s (Chen Yongling, 1941). The temples and their related activities have also become one of the basic perspectives of Western scholars to understand the history, culture, and daily life of China cities (e.g. Shryock, 1931; Naquin, 2000). Furthermore, the temple festivals of sacred sites, e.g. the Five Mountains (五岳, *Wuyue*), have become a research priority and pilgrimage paradigm of Chinese rural religion (Naquin & Yü, 1992). Temple festivals are thus further improved, while practicing religion of

the secondary group, possession-centered, holding at home has been going far gradually with academia.

Indeed, just like the sketches of villages present in the *County Annals of Xinhe* compiled by Fu Zhenlun (1930), village temples is the basic characteristic in terms of human geography and social morphology in Earthbound China. In a sense, “No temple, no village”, together with the social fact of “idol worshipping”, makes western scholars realize the importance of village temple in rural religion. However, it also leads them into the misunderstanding of temple-oriented dual opposition between family and temple. Under this academic tradition, the most aforementioned scholars studying Chinese rural religion in North China either classify figures like *xiangdaode* into ceremonial specialists or special clergy, or regard their ritual practices as individual-to-individual behavior. While they are describing and analyzing the process of spirit possession, the rites of treatment and social reputation, they neglect the important linking function of these people as well as the fact that their family space is not only private but also open and public. Furthermore, they overlook these grass-root ceremonial practices taking place in the domestic space of psychic mediums and the characteristics of the morphologic and dynamic of Chinese rural religion, because the practicing religion always games with the great tradition in different historical periods and then makes Chinese rural religion go through vicissitudes synchronically and diachronically.

7. FTF: BEARING SOIL OF RURAL TEMPLE FESTIVALS

The bearing soil is a kind of regenerative soil in Chinese ancient myths and legends, for example, Gun and Yu once used the bearing soil to control flood according to the records in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (山海经, *Shanhaijing*). FTF of doing-gooders can be seen as the bearing soil of temple festivals and rural religion in Pear Area.

In Pear Area, the FTF differ in various families according to the criteria such as the efficacy and fame of *xiangdaode*, the number of their disciples and followers, their moral qualities, their hobbies, their relations with their own village temple festivals or other village temple festivals. Some *xiangdaode* hold temple festivals at home twice a year on the days of birth and death of their *shénshen*. A few FTF are held on behalf of the whole villages where *xiangdaode* are from, and sometimes *xiangdaode* even invite some temple festival associations or doing-gooders from other villages to take part in their FTF. For instance, in 2003, the Prosperous Driving Festival for Third Princess (兴隆驾会, *Xinglong Jiahui*) of the village M in Pear Area received an invitation on which wrote:

On the first day of the fourth lunar calendar month in 2003, the Goddess of Sky-patching (女娲老祖, *Nvwa laozu*) worshipping festival will be held in family shrine. We are honored to invite the temple festival association from village M to come to join the ceremony.

He Dongzhe from the Nvwa temple festival, Village XDL.”

Moreover, today, some doing-gooders, who are not *xiangdaode*, hold temple festivals at their home too.

Of course, most FTF in Pear Area are boxed in a small area and most participants are disciples of the *xiangdaode*, supplicants and other doing-gooders who are from different villages. They mainly live within about twenty kilometers radius that is in Pear Area. The friendly doing-gooders from the same village often take part in each other's festivals and thus form some core faith groups of doing-good centering on particular *xiangdaode* in the village. Generally, a doing-good group and the families of the group's members are not only close to one FTF, but also are the main organizers of some temple festivals and participants of other temple festivals in Pear Area. Except for the reasons of *xiangdaode* themselves, most FTF will not give out invitations or receive invitations because of some objective restrictions and the anxiety that the exchange and reciprocity will not form. On the same day, July 26, 2003, Fan Xiao told me in front of her Five Flower Altar, "We are holding a small festival. There are only dozens of people attending it. If we invite people to come here, yet fail to look after them very well and politely, they will probably be unsatisfied. Nowadays, people are afraid to send or receive invitations due to their poor treatment."

On the whole, in accordance with the agricultural production cycle, FTF are mostly held in spring, especially in the first lunar calendar month. Among the ten family festivals that I have surveyed, five of them are held in that month. On the day of the festival or one or two days before, the house of the *xiangdaode* has to be re-consecrated with the help of the doing-gooders. He Ji's family usually holds festivals respectively on the 9th or 10th of the first lunar calendar month and on the 6th and 7th of the sixth lunar calendar month. In the morning of July 11 (the 6th of the sixth lunar calendar month), 2005, He Ji laid out all Holy-Horses in the right location and worshiped them according to their different nature, hierarchy and meanings. The *shénshen* include God of Road outside the yard gate, God of Door at the gate, God of Fire and Kwan-Yin on the south wall inside of the house, Locality God at the lower part of shadow wall, Eight Immortals on the southeast of the courtyard, Heaven and Earth on the east gate outside the west room of the North House, Xi Beitian in charge of hail and rain to the west of the door, Upper Eight Immortals above the north-wall door in the west room of the North House, Earth Mother in charge of all the crops and the soil on which crops grow, Kuan Kung, Full Gods and God of Wealth in the west room two of the North House, God of the Hearth in the kitchen of the west wing, at last, Deceased Relatives (家庭/亲, *jiating* or *jiaqin*) at the south corner outside the west wing. There are several levels for these *shénshen* in terms of the number of incense, liquor, tea, main food and dish, etc (see Figure 4).

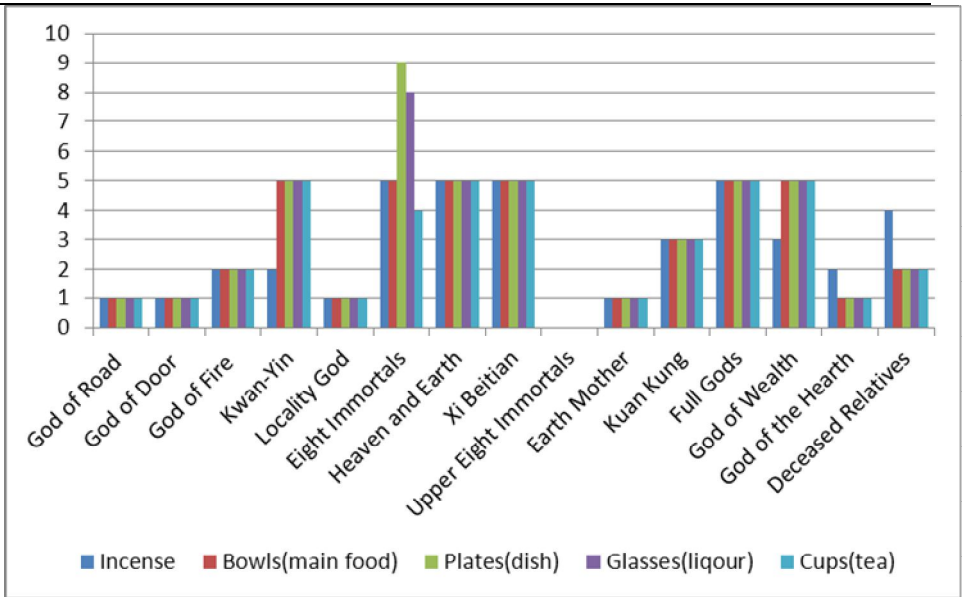


Figure 4: Offerings for *shénshen* and their difference in He Ji's FTF

In the chart, the unit of the offering is stick except the unit of incense offering to Road God being bunch. All the offerings of Eight Immortals are placed on an old-fashioned square table for eight people and plate offerings include chicken, pig elbow and fish, and the four-dimensional bench covered with red cloth. During the festival, nobody is allowed to get close to the table and benches. There is also a plate of fish in the offerings of Heaven and Earth. It is noticed that the plate offerings of Full Gods include chicken, fish, elbow of pork, bananas, eggs and cigarettes.

The procedure of FTF is similar to other temple festivals in Pear Area, including opening Buddhist Door (开佛门, *kaifomen*), opening altar (开坛, *kaitan*), burning incense, making offerings, inviting gods, seeing gods out and so on. Each practice of a Loud Shed Festival is accompanied with group chanting. The scriptures are similar to those chanted at village temple festivals and multi-village temple festivals, because those who chant scriptures are the same groups. A Quiet Festival does not have chanting and people just hold orderly their practices at fixed times. When inviting gods, they must invite all *shénshen*. At a Loud Shed Festival, doing-gooders chant different scriptures in front of different Holy-Horse. While at a Quiet Festival, after people open Buddhist Door, open altar, burn incense and make offerings, *xiangdaode* will say a silent prayer and *shénshen* will show up. At different FTF, the names, order and number of *shénshen* people invite and farewell are different. Besides these group rites, doing-gooders, talking and laughing, always burn incense and kowtow, read incense to check their Bing or Shier, make a vow and redeem a vow, or conduct such rituals as tying up a doll, hanging lock (挂锁, *guasuo*), and sweeping shrine or altar (扫堂/坛, *saotang* or *saotan*). The “lock” is put a common sixty centimeters blue or black thin wire through the hole in the middle

of a coin, and then the two ends of the wire are knotted to form a closed ring. Whether it is a group or a person, participants must worship all *shénshen* including the deceased relatives of *xiangdaode*. Then, for the doing-gooders from far and near, the *shénshen* in the domestic space of *xiangdaode* become public and popular gods.

Among these activities, sweeping altar is especially eye-catching. Sweeping does not mean cleaning the shrine, but cleaning the child in the shrine. It also means to clean the relationship between the child and the shrine because this child has become an adult. Strictly speaking, sweeping altar is a form of redeeming vows. In many areas of Earthbound China, children are often symbolically adopted and fostered (寄养, *jiyang*) at an altar or in a temple simply because they are too weak or their parents worry that it would be too difficult to raise them smoothly. The Monks or Taoists Jumping off the Wall (*tiaoqiang*, 跳墙), also known as Registered (*jiming*, 记名) Monks or Taoists, in old Beijing were those children who were too weak and had to be adopted and fostered in a temple. Three days before the wedding of the child grown up, there is a rite of Jumping off the Wall of Temple to express the child has been secularized (Chang Renchun, 1990:251-253). In Hong Kong, when a kid is adopted and fostered by a deity, the people need to write a sheet called Three Star Card: “[Name of god] and [Name of child] today his/her parents represent him/her in asking for adoption from [Name of the god], hoping that the god will bless his/her to grow up well. Thanks to the god.” The parents must burn the sheet and thank the deity when the child grows up and is married (Scott, 2007:61-62).

In Pear Area, children, who were prayed from an altar or were symbolically adopted and fostered at an altar, before them twelve years old, have to go to hang lock and clean shrine when the *xiangdaode* is holding FTF. This is to show their gratitude and hope *shénshen* will continue to bless the healthy growth of children. Hanging lock is a routine duty for these children before they reach twelve years old and is sweeping shrine in a broad sense. In a narrow sense, sweeping shrine specifically means that the children come to the house of *xiangdaode* when they are twelve years old to hold a ceremony that ends their relationship with the shrine and cut off all the locks in front of the shrine. Because sweeping is the key action, children’s parents should prepare some articles such as a new dustpan (i.e. sieve), a broom, a towel, a fan and other offerings. Among these things, the broom and dustpan, which are “the spirit-possession of the divination instrument” (Chao, 1942: 21-26), are particular important. When sweeping the corresponding body part of the children with the broom, *xiangdaode* or those active doing-gooders who assist in the sweeping will chant the scriptures to thank or pray for *shénshen*’s grace and blessings. Some scriptures are like this: “Sweep upward to the emperor and downward to the subjects, and sweep the kid himself. Sweeping his head he would be smart. Sweeping his body he would be lucky. Sweeping his breast and back he would be strong. In spite of leaving the altar at the age of twelve, the *shénshen* will bless you forever.” It should be noted that the children in the sweeping shrine are always silent. Even when the rite is over, the children have to bite a biscuit and run out of the courtyard.

On July 10 and 11 (5th and 6th of the seventh month in the lunar calendar), 2005, a baby of less than one year old, was brought to the altar by its grandmother and mother to be symbolically left there during Duan Guang's FTF. There were fifteen children coming to sweep altar altogether at the FTF. Among them, six children (including one girl) were to hang lock as a routine; nine children (including one girl) were twelve years old and swept the altar for the last time.

If we take consideration of the current popularity of child marriage in Pear Area, a marriage in which the children exchange little notepaper (换小帖, *huan xiaotie*) without their names before they are twelve years old (Yue Yongyi, 2010a: 29-30), we can easily find the richer meanings of sweeping shrine. The religious cleaning rite is closely related to the doing-gooders' outlook on life, world view, and the conception of adult and marriage. These ideas are both mutually restraint and mutually shown: 1. Bring up children for one's old age. There are souls and ghosts after death. Eventually, one person will become orphan souls and wandering ghosts without descendants. 2. Bearing children is not a simple result of mating, but related to whether the ancestors accumulated virtue, whether the *fengshui* of the Yin and Yang House is good and whether *shénshen* bless them. 3. The healthy growth of a child is not only a matter of food and nutrition, but needs the blessings from *shénshen*. 4. Growing up means getting married, and getting married means growing up. So little notepaper have to be exchanged for children before the age of twelve—symbolic marriage. It is from these meanings that we can tell that the seemingly simple religious practice is just a part of the doing-gooders' life in Pear Area, rather than an “enclave” irrelevant to life. The life-oriented character of Chinese rural religion is reflected in these minutiae. Furthermore, as mentioned above, sweeping shrine is not only a ceremony frequently held at FTF but also at the village temple festivals and multi-village temple festivals centering on *xiangdaode*. So the “total social fact” of Marcel Mauss is still far-reaching. He wrote:

Any social fact, even when it seems new or revolutionary, e.g., an invention, is, on the contrary, heavily laden with the past. It is the fruit of circumstances extremely remote in time and of extremely manifold historical and geographical connections. Hence it never be completely detached, even at the highest level of abstraction, either from its local color or from its historical matrix. (1979: 8-9)

Nowadays, unlike village temple festivals and multi-village temple festivals in Rural China, no matter how large scale a FTF is, neither a *xiangdaode*'s FTF nor an ordinary doing-gooder's FTF can form a temple fair or a market, i.e. *miaoshi*.¹⁴ However, if the exchanges are not only confined to barter or trade of goods, the exchanges at FTF will still work. And there is a market at FTF, the value of which, to some extent, can fulfill people's wishes and fit in their view of the world (Shinyo Watanabe, 1998: 23).

¹⁴ On *Miaoshi* in contemporary China, especially the “temple-less temple fairs”, Cooper recently reassembled it according to some Chinese materials and his own fieldwork, superficially despite from the dimensions of economic, cultural, religious, social and political function (2013: 65-216).

In Pear Area, *xiangdaode* or doing-gooders would collaborate with each other, and to create a contract or a system called “mutual courtesy” when holding FTF. And the relations between the *xiangdaode* and their disciples would be much closer. Meanwhile, the *shénshen* that correspond to different *xiangdaode*, too, have such collaborations like flattering or praising each other. In the afternoon of July 11th, 2005, despite burning hot, enticed by many people, Duan Guang, who was almost at the age of sixty and had not slept for two days, possessed Master Qi and came to play a game with another female *xiangdaode* who came to the FTF and possessed Master Sun (孙悟空, *Sun Wukong*). Master Qi with a pear in hand teased Master Sun in the beginning. Master Sun, fully energetic, ran after Qi and sprang up and down, trying to eat the pear. At last, Master Sun gave up in half an hour. With the stormy applauding, praising and surprising, two masters both calmed down eventually. When people were talking about Master Sun’s bravery and failure, the female *xiangdaode* invited Duan Guang to her FTF in the future.

Among FTF, the status of *shénshen* is sharply different because the main god will change all the time. *Xiangdaode* make their own house the altar of *shénshen* and let themselves possess *shénshen*, revealing *shénshen*’s efficacy. Simultaneously, *shénshen* endows supernatural power to *xiangdaode*, who become nonhuman, “a God that is very close to life” (Shinyo Watanabe, 1998:25) and enjoy fame, fortune and status in particular villages, especially in the group of doing-gooders. Different from the reciprocity between *xiangdaode* and *shénshen*, the exchange between supplicants and *shénshen* is made through *xiangdaode*. People’s offerings to *shénshen* or to the reward that goes to the *xiangdaode* are all for *shénshen*’s blessing. While the reading-incense adjusts the supplicants’ unbalance, the banners or the plaques that are rewarded to *xiangdaode*, in fact, are tributes to the controlled *shénshen*. Moreover, by the time the FTF is proceeding, the incense, yellow paper and candles which the *xiangdaode* have accumulated in daily life, in the name of *shénshen*, will be shared by every *shénshen*. And some offerings like fruit, biscuits, bread or meat will be doled out to the doing-gooders and kids in the neighborhood. In other words, sharing is everywhere at FTF, either on this shore or in the other world. The bigger the sharing is, the more possible it will have a much bigger exchange. In the following years, maybe more *shénshen* and doing-gooders will join it. Therefore, the market of FTF can be regarded as both fictitious and real.

For those *xiangdaode* who not only take part in other temple festivals in Pear Area but also invite other associations to join their own FTF, their collaboration with doing-gooders becomes secondary to the reciprocal exchange between FTF and other temple festivals in Pear Area. Within Pear Area, people highlight the notion that “temple festivals are held in temples, while FTF are held in families.” It is not just a matter of the difference in place or scale, but also concerns the issue of “private” and “public,” especially for those low-key FTF with *xiangdaode* and the FTF whose villages also hold other public temple festivals. However, in a village where there’s no temple festival, when *xiangdaode* invite temple festival associations from other villages to join their own FTF, this FTF has developed an equal exchange with village temple festivals or multi-village temple festivals. At this moment, to the *xiangdaode* or the foreign

villagers, the difference between temple festivals and FTF actually becomes blurry. In other words, when a FTF branches out into a large-scale activity, if there are no other temple festivals in the village, this FTF, of course, can be regarded as a temple festival in the village. Moreover, with the spread of efficacy and increase of foreign visitors, if the social environment allows, a FTF would probably develop into a multi-village temple festival.

Many elements make FTF intensively scattered in Pear Area, like the stars in the sky, such as the sacredness of domestic space, the inherited belief in Full Gods, the existing tradition centering on the Tea-shed Festival (茶棚会, *chapeng hui*) of Third Princess on the Mount Cangyan, *xiangdaode* as a cultural system, and all kinds of unbalance in the real lives of the people. When *xiangdaode* and the primary group around them desire to create more communication, exchanges or receive more recognition, some large-scale village temple festivals and multi-village temple festivals such as the Water Temple Goddess Festival (Yue Yongyi, 2004b) and The Dragon Plaque Festival will be conducted. If these temple festivals are not allowed in public space by some external conditions, they will, just as happened in the past, break into parts, spreading among countless families to pass on from one generation to another. Consequently, FTF, whose core is *Xiangdaode* and possession, is turning to be the bearing soil of the temple festival system and the local religious life in Pear Area. And the relationship of encompassing the contrary, i.e. the flexibility of the temple festivals, is also the essential relationships among FTF, village temple festivals and multi-village temple festivals in Pear Area. In this sense, the one-dimensional promotion model Sangren had summarized, that is, from neighborhood, village, multi-village to pilgrimage, shows only one part or even one image of Chinese temple festivals and rural religion.

8. CONCLUSION

Most Chinese and foreign scholars have been used to applying the concepts of Christianity and their ways of explanation to research on Chinese rural religion and temple festivals. As a result, over a long period of time, such questions as whether China has religion, the features of Chinese religion, the difference between Chinese religions and western religions, why Chinese people do not believe in Christianity, and what lead to the religious revival in contemporary China, have become the basic topic or potential interest on Chinese religious investigation. Furthermore, superstition or idolatry created by a number of missionaries has become the basic label of Chinese religion and the important politic language and slogan almost for the last half millennium, especially since 1840. In a certain sense, the fact that both Folk Religion and Popular Religion still widely used in academic circles per se is the result of the stigmatization of Chinese religion by those elites who are from home and abroad and own discourse hegemony of different period, such as Christianity, Western science and Marxist-Leninism (Paper, 1995: 4-12, 15-17). Certainly, this is also intermixed the rationalistic interpretations of religion that had become normative for the educated elites since the adoption of Zhu Xi(1130-1200)'s understanding as official, orthodox one, that is to say "except for sacrificial rituals and private meditation, all modes of overt religious behavior were considered

superstition”(Paper, 1995:111). The sensibility of religion is ignored to varying degree. Many western concepts such as sacredness and secularity, carnival and daily life, pilgrimage and others things of Christian culture now permeate the research of Chinese religion and temple festivals.

So the existing research of group activities like ceremonies or sacrifices conventionally held on particular days in rural China are all basically framed by the concepts of sacredness and secularity with two tendencies arising: one is to separate those particular days from ordinary life and highlight the “extraordinariness” and “carnivalness” of those special occasions (Li Fengmao, 1993, 1995; Zhao Shiyu, 2002); the other is to stress the secularism and utilitarianism of Chinese religion. It is obvious that both tendencies are based on sacredness, yet sacredness, carnival and unusualness are but one facet of group worship in events such as Chinese temple festivals. Likewise, secularism and utilitarianism can be a description or designation of one of the features of Chinese rural religion, but these two concepts obviously ignore the actors’ voluntary choice and their cognition of the sacredness and mystery of supernatural power. Additionally, secularism and utilitarianism, in fact, are the basic features of all religions in the world. Whether it is to emphasize the extraordinary, carnival and sacredness, or to stress the utilitarianism (and diffused) and secularism, the existing (or previous) research always tries to separate rural religion from life world and the stream of daily life from two opposite extremes, and neglect practicing religion.

Fortunately, new trends have emerged in the study of Chinese rural religion and temple festivals with emphasis on process since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Except for doing religion as above mentioned, making religion (Ashiwa and Wank, 2009) and negotiating religion (Poon, 2011) have become striking terms. However, with the cultural heritage, tourism economy, globalization, these new theoretical constructs, adopting top-down external perspective, not only are surrounded by state, politics, economy, culture, public space, civil society in order to explain religious survival, revival and innovation in China today but also basically focus on the religious ideology and professionals’ religion. The religious practice and initiative of ordinary believers have not received enough attention (e.g. Yang Fenggang and Tamney, 2005; Oakes and Sutton, 2010; Chau, 2011c; Hua Zhiya, 2011; Palmer, Shive & Wickeri, 2011; Yang Fenggang, 2012). That is why I enter into households to observe the religious activities of secondary groups and explore in this paper the rural religion which the bottom people practice in daily life.

Of course, whether as a social unit or living space, the family has always been one of basis points of studying Chinese culture, religion. Jordan Paper, an important comparative religionist, particularly stressed the cognitive significance of the family-based religion, i.e. familism, especially reverencing ancestors (敬祖, *jingzu*) in China, for comprehensive understanding human religion (2005: 61-68; 2013). In other words, Paper, who is an antichristian, at least an uncompromising critic of the cognitive models of Christian, thinks the reverencing ancestors and families in China is positive, praiseworthy and Chinese should be confident and proud of it.

Unlike Paper, as early as over sixty years ago, Hsu, a pro-Christian, used the term, “family religion”, whose core is ancestor’s cult, and stressed its negative significance as shadow. Although family religion is not a key concept in his academic empire, Hsu wrote:

The cult of ancestors, as it is found in West Town, is more nearly a matter of plain everyday behavior..... Therefore, this family religion requires no validation by means of miracles, as was once asserted by Bronislaw Malinowski, for the miracles are inherent in the family continuum, through birth and death, which are an integral part of the configuration. The family is a part of the religion; the religion, a part of the family (Hsu, 1949: 242).

But as Hsu and Paper themselves research mentioned above, the existing researches about family religion mainly refer to the ancestors’ cult of primary kinship groups, and the efficaciousness is not the core of their religious practices. Therefore, there is a black hole or a big fracture between the “family religion” and “temple religion” in China religious studies. In other words, the efficaciousness-centered religious practice at home held periodically by secondary unrelated groups has long been academic research scotoma. The theories were based on the practice and in turn obscure other practice. This is the first and foremost significance of practicing religion and FTF in this paper. In fact, most intellectuals are interested in how many people have become Christians in China, but few intellectuals concern, at the practical level, the believers of different religions freely convert between, as occurred the transition between *fengjiaode* and *xinghaode* in Pear Area (Yue Yongyi, 2012a: 77). At the same time, for the ordinary believers to take part in a temple festival, Taoist temples and monasteries are no difference. In this sense, Rural Religion emphasizing the practicing is completely different from “Chinese Religion” emphasizing the ideology which is asserted by Jordan Paper (1995, 2013). Moreover, if it is not within the Han Chinese but concerns the whole China, the landscape or morphology of Rural Religion in today China consists of the Shamanism and the Four Sacred Animals in North China, the Five-Fury Spirits in the regions south of the Yangtze River (江南, *Jiangnan*), *gu* (蠱) in the Southwestern, as well as Tibet Bon of Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

The ethnography of FTF in Pear Area demonstrates that FTF is the bearing soil of both temple festivals and rural religion. Through FTF, *shénshen*, *xiangdaode*, supplicants, disciples, followers and other persons involved or implicated in their families and villages are publicized. This makes the transitions from the FTF to village temple festivals and to multi-village festivals possible and the counter-transition will also come true in certain circumstances. A temple festival is of great flexibility and can, in a certain range, expand and shrink itself according to external circumstances.¹⁵ Further, one can have a clear understanding about Chinese rural religion through temple festivals.

¹⁵ Why a temple festival in Mainland is limited expansion would be a subject of further study.

FTF in families on particular days are no more than a collective performance in people's daily life. They are the great tributes people pay to *shénshen* for their blessings and show the collective wishes of the participants who long for the continuous blessings from *shénshen*. They are the extensions of people's daily life rather than the break of daily life. And they are a conjunction of the life world for the people in Pear Area. Further, holding collective worship in a particular time and place is in nature the extension and collective performance of daily religious activities; it is a total representation of daily practice. The word "mystery" would be a much better choice to describe the feature of Chinese rural religion than the word "sacredness." But the mystery, which is more of a feeling rather than an unexpected and unforgettable experience, is also different from "mystic experience" by Paper recently studied (2004). So in this way, some local and dialect expressions such as *chaoshan jinxiang*, *xingxiang zouhui*, *guohui* (过会, holding temple festivals or attending temple festivals) and *ganmiao* (赶庙, attending temple festivals), truly contain people's real attitude towards life, humor, and game spirit as well as their initiative to master the world. In most of Chinese people's life, they believe in the existence and power of the so-called gods or spirits, who are superior but accessible. *Shénshen* are controlled and possessed by people such as *xiangdaode*. It is this very mystery that renders inexhaustible vitality and great attraction of the complicated, seemingly disordered rural religion. When people bring this mystery into life and make it more specific, the unbalanced essence of life will simultaneously create a new kind of mystery on the basis of religious tradition and the call, lure and instruction of some efficacious legends.

Therefore, as to the some particular or regional gods, people's worship depends on the efficacy of the gods. Those who are inefficacious would probably be estranged or even deserted, and then replaced by other gods who "may be more helpful" (Paper, 2005:14). People always stay hopeful in despair and never stop conversing and communicating with gods. It would be much more proper to use the word "life-oriented" to describe the feature of rural religion than words like "secular" or "utilitarian" which actually try to point to the secularity of their beliefs. In short, maybe "life-oriented" would break through the paradox and traps set by a dualistic mode of thinking of "sacredness or secularity" used in the analysis of Chinese rural religion and directly address practicing religion itself.

Though my expression and thinking are based on people's practices, my experience in the field during the last fifteen years and the researches done by predecessors, it's obvious that they are comparatively limited. Durkheim arrived at the conclusion that "religion is society" (1976). I cannot say that Chinese rural religion is people's life itself, but the diffused, which is derived from Christianity and the result of misleading comparisons (Overmyer, 2009: 4-5), is not one feature of Chinese rural religion because religion is not outside the life world but a part of daily life. At the same time the gods, ghosts and ancestors is far apart from what the *shénshen* of doing-gooders mean. If we want to have a clear cognition of Chinese rural religion and temple festivals, we must move beyond the preconceived fixed ideas and the academic discourse

dominated by Western hegemony. Otherwise, the prejudice will belie the truth (Li Wei-tsu, 1941: 1).

All in all, we must understand and grasp people's belief in their stream of life and cognize "religion as a cultural system" (Geertz, 1973: 87-125) in a bigger cultural system. It is not merely a technical issue; in fact, it is a change of epistemology and methodology which goes much deeper into the essence of Chinese rural religion than western terminologies. Thus, the revival of contemporary rural religion and temple festivals, which the scholars spent at least half of their energy to answer, will become a pseudo-problem. This is not just because the personality cult of Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) and Mao Zedong, which were once strong implemented respectively by the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party, fits with the basic logic of rural religious making gods, but also because the elite advancing personality cult is used immediately by the people. It is better to be "recycling tradition" (Siu, 1997) than "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Because "the system is flexible and geared tightly enough to the changing realities of Chinese life that it cannot be subverted by gradual social change". (Jordan, 1972:77) As on July 25, 2003, in Zhu village in Pear Area, *xiangdaode* Lee, who was at the age of seventy-five, said to me: "When I am reading-incense for supplicants, I am possessing Chairman Mao. Chairman Mao, Premier Zhou and Yang Kaihui (Chairman Mao's wife, 1901-1930) have all become *shénshen*. Chairman Mao is my *shénshen*!"

Obviously, it is needed to further research the rule of production of Gods in rural religion. After all, relative to polytheism, monotheism, such as Christian which is still strong, is only a small part in the history of human civilization (Paper, 2005: 1-5, 121-144; 2013). Its epistemology and methodology neither can rule over everything nor can interpret everything, past, present and future.

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