

CHINESE FUNERALS: A CASE STUDY

DAN WATERS

*The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth ever gave
Awaits alike the inevitable hour:
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.*

Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in Country Churchyard.*

Introduction

This paper examines an actual, fairly typical, present-day Chinese death in urban Hong Kong and the funeral services and mourning that follow.¹ Comparisons are made with past customs in Hong Kong, with traditional Hong Kong New Territories funerals and European funerals. Because this paper is largely about Hong Kong, Cantonese terms and Romanisations are mainly used rather than pinyin. Currency quoted is in Hong Kong dollars.

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The Case Study

One November night in 1988, a couple received a call saying the wife's mother had been taken to hospital. Shortly after midnight the couple, together with the wife's two younger sisters and two granddaughters, gathered around the corpse.

Traditionally, Chinese hope for a peaceful death in old age with family mustered around the deathbed. In this case the end came suddenly. As Chuang Tzu, sometimes named as the first important Taoist writer, phrased it:

*We are born as from a quiet sleep,
We die to a calm awakening.*

The eldest sister said to the youngest. We must be good to each other, we may not be sisters in our next lives.

Close relatives, especially females, are expected to display grief. The three daughters and two granddaughters wept in unison, for about five minutes, interrupted by cries of love and affection for the dead mother.

When the author lived in Hoi Ping Road in the 1950s a Chinese woman in a nearby flat, on her husband's death, engaged in continual spells of pitiful crying, interrupted by high-pitched, stereotype wailing, over several days. Public demonstrations of anguish, partly as 'notifications of death', are common for widows, especially for the less well-to-do. Men also can be lauded for overt displays of grief. This serves as an incentive for the deceased's spirit to exercise benevolence on decendants. However, it is important not to cry on coffins as the character for 'tears' puns with 'tiresome'.

Mute dejection does not usually satisfy. After the funeral of Sir Edward youde (Governor of Hong Kong at the time) in 1986, a group of well-educated Chinese expressed surprise and tacit 'disapproval' that no outward expressions of grief were displayed by relatives.

Cultures obviously vary. As a child in England in the 1920s, the author recalls his mother sewing a diamond shaped piece of black cloth to the upper-arm of his father's jacket when uncle passed away. In Hong Kong, until the 1950s and 1960s, it was common for women to wear white, blue or green wool rosettes in their hair to signify a death. The colour depended on the relationship of the person to the deceased and the rosette had to be pinned on at the correct hour. If it fell off in the street the wearer was not supposed to pick it up. Children are sometimes scolded for putting white objects in their hair while playing.

Customs have changed rapidly in Hong Kong following World War II.² They have also changed rapidly in China since 1949. Today, in large cities in China, people no longer employ traditional Chinese funerary rites although they are still followed in rural areas.³ In the New Territories of Hong Kong, traditional Chinese funerals still take place,⁴ while urban Hong Kong, with its congestion and rapidly improving living conditions, has evolved its own style of funeral.⁵ Although all Chinese funeral follow the same basic format and are the same for emperors as for commoners,⁶ Cantonese have a number of

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unique practices as do, for instance, the Hakka, Chiu Chau and the boat people. Northern Chinese have no 'second burial' after exhumation as do southerners. Indeed funeral conventions sometimes vary slightly from village to village. Some believe that a menstruating woman must not touch a corpse as she is 'unclean'. Men, as a sign of respect, may comb their dead wife's hair.

In Hong Kong there has been considerable merging of customs by different regional Chinese groups, but the focus is still, especially for Cantonese, on veneration of ancestors. This has been construed as meaning, if the living pay sufficient respect to the dead they will, in return, exert benevolence over the lives and prosperity of present and future family members. Ancestor worship is practised in several countries especially where communities are composed of kin groups believed to be descended from common ancestors, like the Five Great Clans of the New Territories. Christian churches have difficulty accepting the word 'worship' and prefer the term 'ancestor reverence.' Filial piety has been described as the most powerful force in China for the past 3,000 years.⁷ Probably nowhere are family records as meticulously kept as in China.

Returning to the case study, while the deceased was alive, a western-trained Chinese physician suggested that she undergo an operation. She refused. Going 'intact' into the next world is still considered important by many. Thus Chinese medicine, with little emphasis on surgery, is not infrequently preferred to western medicine. This follows the Confucian dictum: 'One should not inflict harm on one's body, not even hair and skin because they were inherited from one's parents' (身體髮膚，受之父母，不敢毀傷).⁸

The human body is a sacred treasure which must not be marred by surgical incision,⁹ Eunuchs in Imperial China kept their castrated private parts in jars to be buried with them on their death. Not until 22 November, 1913, did an official edict in China grant permission for autopsies. The great shame with beheading was to have a dismembered body.

In Hong Kong, up to the 1950s and even later, if a patient had an operation and then died, some families would request that any removed organs be buried with the 'heavenly body'.¹⁰ Today, patients expect to be told whether something was removed during an operation. Donating of organs, such as kidneys for transplants or removing a beating heart,

is unacceptable to many Chinese. In China, therefore, organs are often obtained from executed criminals.

In this study the three sisters cried bitterly when informed an autopsy would be carried out on their mother's body. They were relieved when the authorities relented. The three blamed themselves because the mother was alone at the time of the heart attack. A soothsayer, however, said that nobody could have saved her. If she had been taken straight to hospital at the onset she would have died just the same. Because of her age and the hour of death it was prophesied the deceased would go to heaven.

That the dead person had not eaten that evening before death was construed as a good omen. Missing the meal signified she has left everything behind for her children. However, she was in the habit of drinking from a special mug. This had disappeared. It was assumed she had taken it with her. That three months before death she had given a friend a piece of jade and had told her: 'I may not be here for your next birthday,' was repeated frequently by mourners.

In her early thirties, influenced by eldest daughter, mother had been baptised a Catholic. But the attractions of a combination of native Taoism, Buddhism and folk religion were too great. By the 1960s, mother was no longer practising Christianity. She never expressly told relatives why she left the Church. It was probably because, to a very Chinese person who spoke no English, Catholicism was too western; in spite of the Church adopting a few Chinese customs, such as three bows to a deceased's photograph and the 'last glance' at a funeral. Many quote the saying: 'One Christian more is one Chinese less.'

A few hours after death, the mother's spirit, which left the body as visible vapour, was in limbo — 'wandering about'. Depending upon deeds performed on earth there are six possible 'destinations': hell, heaven, and becoming an animal, a ghost, a human again or a buddha. Everybody possesses a number of spirits, one of which first descends into hell (described as dark and *yin*) to await sentencing by 10 judges. There the spirit is tried, punished and purged. Those who have committed excessive evil spend longer in purgatory before going to heaven (seen as bright and *yang*). People can later be reborn as children, or, if sinful, as animals.

Although one of the above six destinations is the normal fate of a person's heavenly soul, earthly souls reside in graves or ancestral tablets to be worshipped by descendants. Terrestrial souls can even be divided between tablets on altars in family members' homes and in ancestral halls. Views vary on this 'multiple-soul' principle¹¹ As do those from theologians, regarding life after death for a Christian.

For the Chinese, ancestral spirits, gods, devils and ghosts play important roles. Supernatural intervention and magical powers have to be reckoned with. Malevolent, wandering spirits that have no male descendants to worship them must be appeased or they can bring bad luck, sickness and death. Makeshift altars are sometimes set up in streets, joss sticks are burned and offerings made, especially on the 15th day of the Seventh Moon at the Hungry Ghosts Festival (*Ue Laan*). With the fundamental dualism of Chinese cosmology, devils and their cohorts are *yin*, 'inauspicious and gloomy'. Conversely gods, idols and the like are *yang* and 'lucky and bright'.

In this study father died in 1959. When windows rattled, doors opened mysteriously, or troubles befell the family his spirit, rightly or wrongly, was at one time suspected. This had to be propitiated by visits to the temple. When death strikes a family tends to become even more superstitious. Scissors and knives are hidden to avoid children cutting themselves and thereby inadvertently hurting the corpse. This is termed *lei hei* (利器) meaning an edged tool or weapon which can injure.

In this study a Buddhist prayer in plastic holders was placed in strategic positions around family members' homes, including on the eldest daughter's bedside table. Although a person is a Christian there is nothing like hedging protection. One granddaughter who had *yam ngaan* (dark eyes 陰眼), namely psychic powers, heard a woman ghost wailing at night. When she placed the prayer on her bedside table it kept quiet. This prayer could be rendered ineffective if taken into a church. Chinese always seem much closer to the spirit world than the average Westerner. For example, some of the older drivers on late-night buses travelling along the Pok Fu Lam Road stop and open the door whether anyone is waiting there or not. This is said to be to allow wandering spirits to get on and go back to the cemetery for the night.

Chinese dislike people dying at home as it is considered 'unclean'. If they do, the body is removed as soon as possible, often in a woven,

basket-like container. A pail of water sprinkled with fresh pomolo leaves is sometimes left on the spot where death occurred and a pair of new trousers (these pun with 'rich' in Chinese) with a blue sash may be draped over the pail. As a more down-to-earth disinfectant, sulphur is burned.

In 1840s Hong Kong, the dying were often abandoned on hillsides, in open spaces or matsheds, although the Government tried to track down offenders.¹² Later an *I ts'z* (義祠), a public 'ancestral hall', was constructed. In places like Cheung Chau Island a 'death house' (something like the hospice of today), established in 1878, still stands where the very ill were taken.¹³ There was another at Tai O. A similar building now in ruins, built by the *Kai Fong* (neighbourhood welfare association), existed on Peng Chau Island where the destitute could die in peace.¹⁴ This was temple-like in appearance with three rooms, one for the sick, one for the dying and one for the caretaker. It also contained an image of the Lord of Purgatory, a Buddha who saves souls. Avoidance of death was not necessarily because of callousness.¹⁵ Many Chinese fear spirits of the dying or the dead will possess the living. This was why, of those that took their own lives, many preferred violent, bloody suicides, involving pain on the doorstep of their tormentors, so the unfortunate had the right to haunt the oppressors.

The Tung Wah Hospital was established in 1870, ostensibly to replace the above *I Ts'z*. It also provided free burials for paupers. Originally sited at Kennedy Town, it moved in 1899 to Sandy Bay where the present 'coffin home', on a 100,000 square foot site, provides transshipment — sometimes from overseas to China — and storage of bones, bodies in coffins or ashes in urns.¹⁶ The remains of the Tung Wah Director, who was instrumental in building the present home, have rested there since 1906. There is capacity for the bones of about 900 persons. Only about 200 remain at present. Some relatives spread bones of relatives out on sheets of paper to air. Some remains await an auspicious day to be interred. Many emigrants now take ashes of loved ones with them overseas so they can be properly tended.

Up to the 1950s, when people did pass away at home in urban Hong Kong, bamboo ramps were frequently erected so coffins could be brought direct, head first ('head should face heaven, feet should face earth': in England it is feet first), from upper floor balconies or windows to the ground.¹⁷ With narrow stairways and corridors, and coffins larger than in the West, knocking and scraping walls were considered harbingers of 'death tapping at doors'. With the construction of multi-storey

buildings, traffic congestion and increased costs, erecting stagings became impracticable.

With the advent of death the 'blue lantern' used to be hung outside the house. This corresponded to the mat black 'mourning boards' that were fixed outside a home in Britain. The latter went out of fashion in the early part of this century.

The three important events in a Chinese life are birth, marriage and burial. If a person is not 'buried well' he may suffer in the next world. A great deal of money can be expended on a funeral and giving a parent a good 'send off' epitomises filial piety. Relatives are unlikely to haggle over cost. Although the undertaking profession has few bad debts, and is said to enjoy a profit margin of from 30 to 45 per cent, it is not seen as a salubrious occupation: 'Such men are bad luck and their touch is very filthy.'¹⁸ Misfortunes of the deceased can be transmitted to the toucher. In slang, a corpse is known as 'salt fish' (鹹魚).

The Day Before the Funeral

In sub-tropical Hong Kong there used to be a 48-hour limit for storing corpses. With refrigeration and 70 to 80 per cent of bodies being embalmed, which includes injections, this is no longer so. A cadaver can be kept for two months. The ceremony in this study took place seven days after death and close relatives arrived at the 'Hong Kong Hotel' (slang for funeral parlour where a funeral is known as the 'complete menu') the day before, at three o'clock.

A multi-storey funeral home contains many halls to cater to both Christian and (like this one) non-Christian funerals. Two large 'blue lanterns' hung outside the hall. These are in fact white, with the family name in large, purple (at a Roman Court this was the royal or imperial colour) characters and the deceased's age in smaller red characters. On that day and the day of the funeral close relatives were 'not allowed to kill'; namely to eat meat, fish or eggs. Also, sexual intercourse should not take place during the mourning period.

In addition to the deceased's 16 by 20 inch photograph, incense was burning on the altar. Western candles (candles are normally burnt in pairs) symbolised Christianity and Chinese candles Buddhism, another example of hedging. Also on the altar were tasty snacks that the dead person

was especially fond of — like homemade, western-style cookies. There were traditional offerings such as roast duck, rice wine, fruit, cakes, cooked vegetarian food and chopsticks. Ancestors must be provided with sustenance. Even with Christian services food is still sometimes 'offered up' on the altar, for example for 'divided families'. Although not all mourners approved, because the deceased enjoyed smoking, cigarettes were placed on the altar. During the proceedings a butt was found in an ash tray which some were convinced had actually been smoked by the dead woman. Objects once placed on the altar should not be touched.

Although the deceased was a humble housewife, 37 suit lengths and blankets were draped on special fixtures around interior walls of the hall. These practical gifts from friends were overlaid with gold, red or white paper characters proclaiming slogans such as:

'Everlasting life in heavenly kingdom'; and another,
'Picture of her will live in minds of women',

There were 114 wreaths, many on eight-foot or so high bamboo frames each with a banner, sometimes black with white characters, giving names of donors and slogans. The family cobbler who owned a small street stall sent a wreath. Immediately after the ceremony these bamboo frames were appropriated by outsiders and reused for making wreaths for other funerals.

After encoffining, the body, lying in state with face heavily made up and looking peaceful, was placed behind a glass partition in a small adjoining 'farewell room' off the back of the hall. So that a person is in the 'mainstream' it is necessary the body be positioned in the centre of the coffin. The air was oppressive with candle smoke and incense, one of the main ingredients of the latter being sandal wood.¹⁹

The deceased wore four dresses and three pairs of trousers (for a man it would have been four and four). With *foo* being a homophone for both 'riches' and 'trousers', an odd number of pairs are worn by females and an even number by males. No fur, leather or rubber are used for fear of reincarnation as an animal. The feet are tied together with hemp cord supposedly to prevent jumping if tormented by ghosts. Feet of corpses in England are also bound, to keep them together before rigor mortis sets in, when a body is 'laid out'. This seems a more plausible reason.

A one-inch diameter, ancient bronze-coin, costing \$60, with a 1/4-inch square hole in the centre (a pearl or jade object is sometimes used instead), had been placed in the mouth of the corpse. This practice can be traced back to Liangzhu culture in ancient China 3,900 to 4,900 years age.²⁰ The purpose of this talisman is to deter evil, to prevent body spirits escaping before purification and to safeguard the corpse against rapid decay.

It was expected that the dead person's spirit would come to the funeral parlour. There were two bowls of peanut oil with a wick made from dried seaweed in the farewell room, 'to lead her on her way'. A packet of cooked rice and a pair of chopsticks lay on the floor to placate fierce dogs which she would meet three weeks after death on the road to heaven. Possessions she treasured, such as special clothes, a cassette of Chinese songs and her handbag with knickknacks, including magnifying glass, cigarettes, lipstick, compact and a piece of jade, were placed in the coffin. Coffin jade, which has been re-claimed after many years of burial, is valued for 'protective' properties. For practical reasons keys and a notebook, which contained telephone numbers, were not placed in the casket. Nor were spectacles. Cremation would splinter them and they could injure the corpse although there seems to be a contradiction here with the magnifying glass.

Also at the back of the hall, on the left of the altar, was a stove around which relatives and close friends, including children, folded 'gold' and 'silver ingots' out of tin-foil. These imitation bars, together with pieces of paper resembling bank notes (a tale has it that a little boy once found one and went to the bank to try to cash it.), were burned continuously until midnight.²¹ Money is needed by the dead, among other purposes, to bribe officials to obtain good positions in the after-world. Five Buddhist nuns with shaved heads and colourful robes chanted prayers. One had a series of initiation, incense stick burn marks on her scalp.²²

Chinese children take part in funerals, and, with the extended family, it is important they 'farewell the dead. This appears in no way traumatic. With English funerals children tend not to participate. Certainly with the author's generation (pre-World War II) death was a taboo subject for the young.

A Chinese saying has it:

*Be born in Soochow;
Live in Hangchow;
Eat in Kwangchow;
Die in Liuchow.*

The first is noted for beautiful women, the second magnificent scenery, the third tastiest cuisine, and the last durable timber for making coffins.

In 1988 coffins ranged from about \$2,500, for a humble pine 'box', to \$300,000 for one smelling of eucalyptus. The coffin in this study cost \$7,200. Coffins, known in slang as 'four half boards' (四塊半板), come, basically, in either Chinese or western styles. Timber for western coffins, say teak or rosewood, is often imported from Malaysia. For Chinese coffins, boards can be roughly hewn, up to four or five inches thick, retaining the curved outside of the tree trunk and hollowed out on the inside. Good quality China fir (杉木) from Luchow, in Kwangsi Province, can last, buried, for up to 100 years as demonstrated by old buildings in Hong Kong with their China Fir, piled, foundations. There are a number of coffin shops, some watched over by *Ts'oi Shan* the God of Wealth, at the western end of Hollywood Road. Many coffins with their white or yellow cloth linings are imported from China.²³

By comparison, a British coffin is normally made of English oak (elm was used for cheaper coffins before World War II) with boards one-inch thick.²⁴ This is usually rendered watertight with pitch or mastic and lined with a bed of sawdust, white drapery and a pillow stuffed with fine wood shavings.

Because of space, in present day Hong Kong it is not practicable for the elderly to have coffins made in advance and stored in an ancestral hall or at home, as was the custom in old China. They were revarnished every year. But if a person is too interested and 'finds the smell of coffins more appealing than the smell of cooked rice' (聞見棺材香過飯) the gods may come after him. (Similar words are occasionally uttered as a curse.) Some believe a small piece of coffin wood, if boiled and the water drunk, will keep away ghosts.

Continuously, from three o'clock the day before to the actual funeral ceremony in this study, relatives and friends visited the hall to give face to the family and the departed. It is a greater offence not to attend a person's funeral than not to attend his wedding. The author recalls

overhearing a person exclaim after he had been insulted, 'When his mother dies I will not attend her funeral!

On arrival at the funeral in this case study visitors signed the visitors sheet and each was given a red and white packet with two black characters, meaning 'lucky ceremony' (吉儀), printed on it. Inside were a sweet, a handkerchief (usually a facecloth) to wipe tears and a coin. For a funeral, the amount of money should be an odd number. For other events it is an even number: 'Good luck always comes in pairs.'

Mourners walked to the altar, bowed three times to the deceased person's picture representing the soul, turned left, inclined and bowed once to the lined-up family, some of whom kneeled or crouched low and stared at the floor.

Mourners are expected to sit and tarry awhile. Chinese are not too impressed by solemnity. You cannot live with the dead. Some relaxed, chatted about things in general, as well as confirming how good the dead person was. In fact the odd nervous giggle at things which should shock, in Chinese culture, are a sensible, natural escape mechanism to protect and keep the system in balance. Mourners later left the funeral parlour, ate the sweet, bought more with the coin they were given and threw away wrappings (which could bring bad luck if kept) while 'sweetness was still in their mouths'.

As in the West, funerals of important people are partially viewed as events where one should be seen. There are, however, some who should not attend funerals. For example, those whose birthdays fall during the same month (Chinese calendar) that the funeral is held. Neither should those who are already mourning attend another funeral or send presents. Not infrequently, parents still do not attend services of their own children who die before them.

At a funeral, immediate members of the family wear white (colour of deep mourning) shoes (no longer grass sandals) and traditional, cheap, undyed (white) clothes; with white shirts and trousers for men and white skirts for women. Over this is placed a thin, hemp, 'surcoat' of sack-cloth (披麻戴孝). One corner of part of the sacking attire may be worn, like a hood, for women. Men usually wear a 'skeleton hat' or white headband. On some, there is an auspicious red spot which counteracts evil. Although clothing can vary slightly in style it is basically a

manifestation of poverty to symbolise the family has sold everything to pay for an elaborate funeral. Two hanging bands of the attire are left of different lengths to imply the mourner is distraught and does not know how to tie it properly. Women do not make-up.

For Chinese Christian funerals family mourners wear black gowns, but it is not a 'good' colour as it absorbs bad luck. When Chinese wear a black necktie they often remove it as soon as they can after the service.

The dead person in this study, who for major events such as birthdays used the Chinese calendar, knew she was born in the year of the ram but she was never sure in which year of the western calendar she was born. Because she used Chinese reckoning she was one year 'older' than if she had used the Gregorian calendar. In addition, on death, three years are usually added, 'one each for heaven, earth and mankind (天、地、人)'. A little subterfuge regarding age seems justified. It increases importance at one's destiny. Emphasis is placed on prolongation of age and symbols of longevity are many. They include the peach, crane and tortoise. The God of Longevity is sometimes depicted riding a deer. Because in this study the deceased was around 70 it was described as a 'happy funeral' (笑喪).

By midnight all had left the funeral parlour except the three daughters, two granddaughters and two amahs (maids) who kept vigil, taking naps on the floor or on chairs. In the past gongs were banged throughout the night to keep away evil spirits. Noise restrictions today prohibit this. Although all-night vigils are not common in England now, they are still practised in eastern European countries and among those, for example, of Lithuanian descent in Scotland. Wakes are also held in Ireland, often accompanied by card playing, drinking and jollifications in an adjoining room.

Funeral Day

The same as the previous day visitors paid respects, some early, shortly afterwards leaving for work. Later, the hall filled for the service. Day and time were important, as with other events concerning mourning. The Chinese Imperial Calendar and Almanac (usually known as *Tung Sing* (通勝) meaning 'know everything book') was consulted. Some editions of this sell a million copies a year. Dating back before 2205 BC, it is said to be the oldest, continuous publication in the world.²⁵

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The stylised format remains similar to the 5th century edition. Traditionally, preparing this almanac was the responsibility of the Board of Astronomy.

The funeral service in this study involved five Taoist (sometimes Buddhists are engaged) monks who, as is customary, chanted mantras. They were accompanied by an orchestra. 'Wooden fish' (木魚), namely sound boxes, bells and small brass singing bowls were struck. A high-pitched flageolet, a musical instrument with six or eight finger holes, played what some would describe as discordant music. As the coffin was wheeled into the hall, head first on a bier, relatives crouched and mourners born in the Year of the Monkey were instructed over a microphone not to look at the casket. If they did it could bring bad luck. With the head of the corpse towards the altar (in a Christian church feet usually face east towards the altar) the 'body was shown to the gods'.

With patrilineal kinship ties, if there are sons or grandsons in the family a ceremony of 'buying water' (買水) takes place.²⁶ With a traditional funeral in Hong Kong's New Territories this still consists of the eldest son, the chief mourner, being escorted to the nearest stream or well, dropping three cash (old copper coins) in and bringing back a bowl of water. The ritual can vary from bathing the corpse to a symbolic dab on the dead parent's forehead. This, in Confucian tradition, signifies filial piety. It also helps to ensure the lineage continues. 'I have no sons to buy water!' is a not uncommon lament by some husbands, which, in the old days, meant taking a concubine because the first spouse did not give birth to an heir. As there were no sons in this study the three daughters kowtowed three times and walked around the open coffin three times. Other mourners then bowed.

The public 'lying in state' continued until the 'last glance, towards the end of the ceremony. With the upper portion of the body visible through a clear, plastic 'window' family mourners, followed by the congregation, filed around the coffin. There was weeping. Some children were held up to look at the corpse. (By contrast, I have heard it said a mourner should not get too close for fear of being 'possessed'.) The lid was then secured.

After the service the dead person's spirit was 'led' to *Chung Yam Fat Ser* (Pine Shade Buddhist Association). This hall is situated in multi-

storey, basically domestic, accommodation in crowded, busy Kowloon. The eldest daughter, in the front seat of the car, carried the enlarged photograph of Mother in her 'spirit shrine' (靈位), made from coloured paper stretched over a bamboo frame. A short ceremony was held at 'Pine Shade Hall' with two Buddhist nuns in attendance. Pine is an emblem of longevity.²⁷ It frightens away evil, such as ghouls that prey on corpses.

Later, a meal with three tables (about 12 people to a standard Chinese round table) was provided at a nearby restaurant. A place was filled at intervals. It was the first time relatives had eaten meat for two days.

It is bad luck to return to the funeral parlour on the same day (to retrieve something left behind, say) and it is not propitious to go straight home. One should 'leave' the bad luck elsewhere. All close relatives, however, were given a piece of bright red cloth, about eight inches square, cut from the shroud. This they still keep as souvenirs.

Because of congestion long funeral corteges with pedestrians, some in good spirits, and close relatives and professional mourners weeping unashamedly, are no longer allowed. Up to the late 1960s when these were still common, an elaborately carved, nine-foot high funeral chair with a portrait of the deceased would lead the procession followed by the hearse.²⁸ Large bamboo and wicker frames covered with silver and blue papers and flowers, with characters reading, for example, 'Funeral of Wong Family', and describing the dead person's outstanding characteristics, would also be shouldered by coolies or transported on tricycles. The names of the three genial Gods of Happiness, Wealth and Longevity, *Fuk*, *Luk* and *Shau*, would also sometimes be displayed as would names of donors. Chinese bands, some engaged by friends to proffer condolences, played western hymns: like *Abide with Me*, or pop tunes such as *Polly-wolly Doodle all the Day*. Paper scatterers left trails for souls to find their way back home.

The cortege of Kwok Acheong, who died in 1880, was supposed to have taken one hour and 13 minutes to pass.²⁸ The author recalls a quarter-mile long cortege in 1956, with 16 separate bands and musicians' uniforms ranging from white-water-style, to Salvation Army blue, to Confederate grey. The procession completed one circuit of Happy Valley before stopping at the then Colonial Cemetery gate. On such occasions newspapers recorded, 'The funeral passed the Monument at such a time.'

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This obelisk, now in the Government Cemetery, stood then at the junction of Queen's Road East and Leighton Road.³⁰ It commemorates officers and men of *HMS Vestal* who, in 1847, were killed, drowned or died in Hong Kong.'

Cremation

In this study cremation took place two days after the funeral service because the previous day was inauspicious. Only close family members sat in the hearse accompanying the body to Cape Collinson Crematorium. The ceremony was simple. All relations made three bows, each of the three sisters poured one cup of rice wine which was placed together with food on the altar. The dead person's 'spirit shrine', made of rattan and paper, was burned. The family then crossed back over the Harbour to the Buddhist Hall to pay respects. There a group of lay nuns, who addressed one another as 'brother' (師兄), chanted mantras.

Although until AD 1370 bodies of Buddhist laity were frequently cremated³¹, the Han Chinese have a long tradition of burial with human remains returning to nature and affecting *feng shui*. The body should remain in contact with earth it is traditionally believed. The final resting place should have good soil, luxuriant trees and grass. This belief is still strong in some quarters. To beat an April 1st, 1993, deadline, after which all corpses in Jiangsu Province have been cremated, 40 old people committed mass suicide in March so that they could receive a traditional burial.

Burial has been considered more desirable by Han Chinese than the custom of many Muslim Chinese minority groups with bodies being eaten by vultures.³² *The Book of Changes (I Ching)* records that in primitive society Han Chinese left their dead in the 'wilderness' covered with leaves. Later, when they came to believe souls went on to another world, they began to protect bodies by placing them in graves.

Hong Kong, like China, has for several years campaigned in favour of cremation. Feudal superstitions have had to be overcome.³³ In 1958/59, only 1.65 per cent of corpses were cremated. In 1989/90, the figure stood at 70 per cent.³⁴ Because of chronic land shortage there are few cemeteries in Hong Kong where the body can rest in perpetuity. When buried they are usually exhumed after six years (times have varied from five to 10 year),³⁵ The bones (designated *yang*, but flesh is *yin*)

are then ritually washed and cremated, or, in the case of New Territories' villagers, re-interred either in horseshoe-shaped masonry graves or in two-foot high, ceramic, funerary urns, called *kam taap* (金塔),³⁶ The bones are positioned in these pots, foetus-shaped, ready for reincarnation.

*'There is a time to live, a time to die, and
a time to be born again.'*

Spots selected on hillsides should have 'neutral' *feng shui*.³⁷ Like high voltage electricity, too powerful a 'charge' can render living relatives vulnerable. Hong Kong citizens can now occupy grave spaces at Shenzhen Overseas Chinese Mausoleum, just over the Hong Kong border in China, where they can be interred in perpetuity.

Incidentally, bodies were sometimes buried 12-feet under in cemeteries in Happy Valley (a lovely name), in early British Hong Kong, to protect them from grave robbers.

Graves should be sited on hillsides. At the base of a mountain ridge, where the dragon spirit of the mountain stops its run, between spurs to give an 'armchair' effect, is a good position. There should be a commanding view, preferably of water (representing money). The surroundings may take the form of a dragon, a snake, a crab or a prawn, and 'dragon's vapour' (*feng shui*) needs to be captured or restrained in the correct proportions. The siting of a grave metaphysically influences the lives of descendants. A body decomposes and the 'five Elements', minerals from bones and flesh, remain in the soil. Nothing dies. Everything is transformed. Universal impulses and high vibrational and spiritual frequencies are transferred from graves along electromagnetic lay lines, and resonances and energy are received and inherited from father to son and by other living relatives. Such activities are most effective when one is buried in one's native soil some believe.³⁸ Today however, in public cemeteries in Hong Kong, a person is allocated the next vacant grave space. He has little control over *feng shui*, although some people do try to change their position in a queue in order to obtain a 'good' grave number.

Return Visit

In this study, on the 12th night after death (duration depends upon deceased's date of birth³⁹), all close family members waited in the dead

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person's house, overnight, for her spirit to return. In death, mother is able to influence things by her spiritual clout. This vigil was preceded by a family visit, at 4.00 pm, to the Buddhist Hall. After crossing the Harbour back to the dead woman's home formalities were performed. The table was set with her favourite food and cigarettes. She would invite demons to this meal. Western candles and incense sticks were lit in the passage. a pair of scissors, again signifying *lei hei* (利器), meaning 'weapon', and also 'gain, interest or profit', was placed on the floor near the door to prevent unwanted spirits entering. Yellow papers with symbols on were lit and, while in flames, circles were made with them around all persons present to ward off evil. Copies of the Buddhist prayer, mentioned earlier, had to be removed from the flat. It is powerful and could keep the dead person's spirit away. This was expected to return between 3.00 and 5.00 am with two companions, one with a cow's head and the other with a horse's face. They could cause trouble.

All mourners dozed off in the early hours although one dreamed of the deceased. Second daughter remarked the following morning, 'If even it didn't it is better to believe it happened and the mother visited us.' That was the attitude throughout the mourning period. This family wanted to do the correct thing and gave the impression of believing, totally, in what it was doing.

An old colleague of the author recounts how an artist relative of his, who specialised in painting bamboo, died. While awaiting the return of his spirit family members spread a dusting of incense ash on part of the floor. When they awoke the following morning, the old colleague alleges, there were marks in the dust depicting bamboo.

Other Funeral Services

Tradition has it that it is possible, with rituals, to help the departed spirit by holding up to seven further services, one every seven days, for 49 days. These assist a soul with its tribulations through the '10 courts of the underworld'. But with present customs, and to reduce expense, usually not all seven are celebrated. The important ones are 21, 35 and 49 days after demise. For Chinese Catholics, masses can be said once a week to replace them.

In this study the second *tsat* (meaning seventh) was celebrated, but the eldest daughter and her husband did not attend. It was close to his

birthday and would have brought bad luck. Nor did he celebrate his birthday that year. Presents were returned with an explanation.

The third *tsat* (three times seven ceremony) fell on the 27th of the month. If a *tsat* falls on the 7th, 17th or 27th of the Chinese calendar this is propitious. Close relatives also attended the fourth *tsat* and there was a great deal of banter, such as, 'Hello Mummy, how are you!' in front of the altar in second daughter's home.

The most important of these weekly rites was the fifth *tsat* held at the Buddhist Hall where the dead person's *ling paai* (spirit tablet)⁴⁰, complete with small photograph, was placed. The function was advanced by one day and 2.00 to 7.30 pm was selected by the fortune teller as a propitious time. (Buddhist and Taoist priests sometimes supplement incomes by telling fortunes). Conforming with Buddhist doctrine close relatives were not allowed to eat living things before the ceremony. They also bathed in water purified with pomelo leaves. With the old Chinese day divided into 12, two-hour periods, it starts at 11.00 pm. One could thus bathe any time after that. Sexual intercourse was still forbidden (齋戒沐浴).

Close relatives wore the same white clothes and shoes as before, but the hemp surcoats had been burned after the funeral service. The same picture was placed on the altar and many mourners maintained the deceased looked stern when they arrived. Her appearance became cheerful as the service progressed. A cigarette was kept lit on the altar. There was food, such as cookies and oranges. It was an impressive spread so the dead woman could invite ancestors. The altar was surrounded by wreaths and paper offerings sent by friends. Many came to pay respects.

One ceremony was conducted by six nuns. A monk led the invocations. Some knew the long mantras by heart. At appropriate times the leader threw coins and flowers. Any mourner who caught one was considered lucky. The chanting Buddhist nuns were quite young with shaven heads. They wore green and the leader a red robe. For most of the 5½ hours, various ceremonies, some long, were conducted. Also, continuously, friends and relations painstakingly folded paper 'gold bars'.

A 'charade' was later acted out by close family members. The deceased person's new spirit shrine (one had previously been cremated)

was held by the eldest daughter. The spirit had to pay spirit money and cross the 'demon gate barrier'. Six weeks after death the 'gold and silver bridges' spanning rapids and whirlpools, with enormous snakes in the water, had to be crossed. The deceased was placed on a pair of scales. The good person is 'as light as air': the sinner 'weighs the balance down'. While all this was staged the son-in-law held a lantern and a granddaughter fingered her Buddhist prayer beads. All the time mantras were chanted, cymbals clashed and a flute was played. There was a paper bath house: the dead woman's spirit entered: the second daughter went through the motions of bathing her. This whole charade lasted about 20 minutes.

At seven o'clock everyone went up to the roof to burn the addressed, paper trunks, containing paper money, in a steel incinerator. 'Good' and 'silver bars' were also sent to long dead relatives. In addition effigies, made of coloured paper and cardboard stretched on bamboo or rattan frames, of a maid, a driver, a car (with lucky registration number 888), a house and furniture, and little black mourning strips which had been pinned on jackets, were burned. The names and messages of all donors were also burned so the dead person would know who had sent her presents. A Japanese business associate of the eldest daughter donated \$1,000 'condolence money' (奠儀) to purchase offerings. In 1988 an ordinary paper car was \$350-1500, a Rolls Royce \$2,000 and gold and silver bridges \$500 each. A television set cost \$100. It takes about two days to make a paper car. The middle aged and elderly craftsmen who made them had served apprenticeships.⁴¹

A young Chinese friend of the deceased had sent her a doll from Canada two years earlier. She had become very fond of this. It was therefore burned and 'dispatched' to her. But the donor telephoned from Canada to say the deceased had asked her in a dream, days after the doll had actually been burned, for it to be 'sent'. Everyone wondered what had gone wrong with communications.

This custom of burning offerings stems from earlier times when live slaves (later terra cotta warriors replaced them), sets of household utensils and elaborate paraphernalia were buried in tombs to 'serve' the dead.

In this study, at the end of this fifth *tsat*, all immediate family members kowtowed three times and receive lucky packages. The picture of the deceased's mother, who had died earlier in Canton, was also placed in

the Buddhist hall. After this *tsat* finished close mourners changed into everyday, brightly coloured clothes. A meal was held in a restaurant. There were seven (*tsat*) courses. about 50 people attended. Meat was served.

The immediate family members then went home and took a second bath with pomelo and wampee (variant spelling wampí) leaves to purify the water. Lucky packages were opened. Besides money they contained pieces of hibiscus, *foo paak* (芙柏), a homonym also meaning wealth or riches. Another packet contained, in addition to money, a needle and thread, and a ladies hairpin, described as *kat lei* (吉利). This is interpreted as *pierce* or *sharp*, also as *lucky* or *profit*. Anything that could bring bad luck, such as black objects, had been burned. Things that were brought home, for good luck, included white mourning shoes and white attire. These were known as *tsoi paak* (財帛), for 'good luck'. The large photograph used at services was later hung in the dead woman's home. Some maintain it should be packed away or it can bring bad luck.

Ashes

The day after the fifth *tsat* the immediate relatives went to the funeral parlour to collect the ashes. Everyone expressed pleasure that these were 'fairly white'. They are often blackish. There was a short ceremony. Joss sticks and 'gold bars' were burned, together with a rosette made up with yellow papers with blessings printed on them.

At *Ching Chung Koon* (Temple) permission to enter was requested from the two door (earth) gods.⁴² Everyone bowed three times. An orange was placed on each shrine. The niche selected two weeks earlier to hold the ashes of the dead woman, together with another alongside for her husband, was not too high so it was accessible. His remains were moved from another niche. The cost for each, in 1988, was \$10,800, increased from \$600 in 1966. (Business is thriving and extensions are continually being built to the columbarium.) The mother's niche number is '17' which can be interpreted, 'certainly you will get it.' The father's niche is '18', read as 'definitely will prosper'.

The mourners bowed three times to 'spirit neighbours' of father and mother and burned single incense sticks in all vases in that room. An effort was made not to offend and not sit on ledges in front of other

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niches. If this happened, one bowed and apologised aloud to the spirits.

The ceremony was conducted by a Taoist brother who carefully poured the ashes through a white cloth folded in the neck of a funnel. The deceased's gold bracelet together with a piece of jade were also deposited in the urn. The top was tied on with red ribbon. Her name was written on the outside of the urn with red paint, 'free hand' (without butt of hand resting on anything). The Taoist painted fine characters although he professed to have had little schooling. After mourners bowed three times flowers were arranged in vases. Paper rosettes were burned. Also, two tables were placed in front of the two niches and a feast, including fruit, cakes and rice wine, was laid out. The two urns, each covered in white cloth, were then inserted in their respective niches. the doors were sealed with plaster and more joss sticks and yellow rosettes were burned. The six mourners then lined up, recited Buddhist prayers and received lucky packets. It was necessary for the Chinese candles to burn out before bowing goodbye and leaving the columbarium for a late, 4.00 pm, vegetarian 'lunch'.

Sixth Tsat

Although official ceremonies ended with the fifth, the family paid a further visit to *Ching Chung Koon*, where the ashes are kept, on the sixth *tsat*. Joss sticks in clusters of three (one each for heaven, earth and mankind), paper 'gold bars' and a large rosette made up of coloured paper were burned. These eight-inch squares of yellow paper had been 'blessed' by an old woman. She meticulously burnt a hole in the centre of each single sheet with a joss stick. Also, single joss sticks were placed in all vases for other souls in that room of the temple.

Charity

At this stage, the three daughters were informed by a fortune teller that, for their mother to enter *kik lok shai kaai* (extremely happy world) it would help if they performed some charitable deeds. A donation of \$2,000 was made to a poor, elderly watchman to help with medical expenses. 'Give to a charitable organisation, with heavy overheads, there is no telling where the money goes,' one daughter said.

End of Mourning

Although many consider mourning lasts for five (or previously seven) *tsats*, namely 35 (or 49) days, a normally accepted figure is 100 days. Until this century laws laid down how long the five grades of relatives should mourn.⁴³ If these rules were breached punishment was administered by the state. It is unlucky for mourning to end on the exact day.

A simple ceremony to mark the end of mourning, after 101 days in this study, was held by relatives in the home of the second daughter where a permanent shrine had been erected to the deceased. This faces the main entrance door but as the flat in question had not been '*feng shui* oriented' its effects are likely to be negated.⁴⁴ There were the customary three bows and burning of joss sticks. Everyone was in good spirits occasionally talking to the dead person's picture as if she was actually there. Of course there was food. This plays a major part in a culture of a country where famines were common. Dishes included chicken properly 'assembled', complete with head and tail (everything must have a beginning and an end), fish, and Chinese sweetmeats such as yam rolls. Oranges were placed on the shrine. On that day a box of home-cooked walnut cake was on the table. It was later found untied and everyone denied undoing it. Those present questioned whether the deceased had opened it.

There was also roast pork, believed by some to replace, ritualistically, the flesh was losing in death. Pork is 'food fit for the gods'. Once placed on the altar before ancestors it takes on a sacred, magical quality which, some believe, can be likened to the host consecrated at the Eucharist. The Roman Catholic Church declares that, by transubstantiation (a custom continued since medieval times), bread and wine become the substance and form of the body and blood of Christ. Protestants believe the bread and wine do not take on physical affinity but convey a spiritual reality. By eating pork that has been offered up and 'ritually shared', ancestors and living descendants, so some Chinese claim, are not only able to fortify their *chi* ('cosmic breath' providing inner strength) but also capture special 'magical' powers.⁴⁵ Even non-lineage members are sometimes offered some pork as a special gift. Babies barely able to masticate have pieces pressed into their tiny mouths. Afterwards, mothers swear they are better behaved and illnesses cured.

There are different versions.⁴⁶ Leung suggests that the sharing of pork between ancestors and descendants renews the symbolic union in two worlds. The living know that to receive blessings they must continue to worship. Some do not share ritual pork with outsiders thus redefining membership of clan or family.

In this study, even after mourning ended there were visits. These could be to the temple where the ashes are kept, at *Ching Ming* ('Chinese Easter'), the day for grave cleaning in the spring; or at *Chung Yeung*, the ninth day of the ninth moon (in Hong Kong, until 1967, when graves were visited firecrackers were let off to frighten away malevolent spirits). Visits were also made by the family to the soul tablet at the Buddhist Hall in Kowloon, or to the shrine at the second daughter's home. Visits took place on her *sz kei* (死忌), the anniversary of her death, and her *shaang kei* (生忌), the anniversary of her birthday. On one visit to the second daughter's home she recited a Buddhist prayer 80 times over water which was later drunk by all present.

The eldest daughter was still unsettled, unable to sleep at nights and not feeling secure when watching television alone. Apprehensive about accidents, she instructed the maid to wash the car with water over which she had said a Buddhist prayer.

The deceased herself used occasionally to attend seances of *foo kei* (扶乩) seeking guidance at a small Buddhist Association hall in Western District. In this Chinese version of 'planchette' a spirit medium receives messages from the dead. These are written with a pointed willow stick in a bed of sand or sawdust,⁴⁷ *Foo kei* is also practised at the temple where the ashes of the deceased lie. However, relatives have not so far tried to contact the dead woman using divinatory means.

Dreams

Dreams played an important part in this study. The third daughter had given her mother a jacket and, after she died, the daughter retrieved it. The following night a friend dreamed the deceased complained of feeling cold. The jacket was promptly returned and hung in mother's wardrobe.

An associate dreamed the face of the deceased was black, covered with soot and her right arm was red like raw meat. It was concluded the dead person's spirit tablet in the temple was too close to the furnace

where offerings are burned. In another dream the deceased said money was wasted. Excessive food was placed on the altar. Conversely, in another dream she complained that people were *hon* (cold 寒) and *foo* (bitter 苦) because they did not put out enough for her to eat. But she was pleased with the arrangements for her funeral.

A friend was told in a dream to go to the home of the deceased to collect a piece of jade which she wished her to have. Another person dreamt that the deceased instructed the young to respect their elders more. In another dream an associate had been informed by the dead person that the maid had wiped her face, first with a cold and then with a hot towel. The previous morning, it transpired, the maid had, in fact, wiped the deceased's picture, first with a wet and then with a dry cloth.

In another dream the dead woman told a friend she was staying in the house of the Chan family and that she was to be reincarnated as a boy. 'He' would be easy to recognise, playful and would turn a somersault in front of 'her' eldest daughter. The eldest daughter later dreamt that the deceased, who seemed neither happy nor sad', appeared. She then disappeared and a little boy stood in her place.

Survey

During 1992 and 1993, the author questioned 122 Hong Kong Chinese men and women to ascertain whether they believe in reincarnation. This sample can be divided roughly into two. Most of the first section of interviewees (but not all) had completed secondary studies. Generally, they live in housing estates and work at white or blue-collar level, similar to the bulk of the population in Hong Kong. Of this group of 46 persons, 35 said in a convincing way that they believed in reincarnation, eight did not and three 'did not know'.

The interviewees in the second group work in the professions or at senior management level. They had all received university or college education and most had studied or worked for periods overseas. Of this better educated group of 76, 35 said they believed, 25 did not, and 16 'did not know'.

The conclusions emerging from this survey were not only that the better educated and the western-educated are less likely to believe, but that men are less likely to believe than women. In six cases women admitted they believed in reincarnation although they were Christians.

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Also, many who did not believe in reincarnation did believe in supernatural powers and in retribution. Namely, that one would be punished later for sins committed on earth. In the funeral in this case study, the three daughters and the two granddaughters all believed in reincarnation.

Conclusions

In his long, complicated, Italian poem, *I Sepolcri* (Graves), Ugo Foscolo (1778-1827) looks at death, the after life and how the dead are represented on earth. We see ourselves in the tombs we erect, he maintains. What is the cult of death? It began when civilisation began. When *homo sapiens* ceased to be animal and 'honoured its urns'. There is conflict between erecting tombs and the law of nature which recycles bodies back into the earth's system, Foscolo continues: 'The stink of the corpse mixes with the smell of incense.' In Italy, importance is attached to cypress and cedar trees which stay green with fragrances to record to eternity those who have gone. In England, these are replaced by aged yews and in the Far East sometimes by frangipani.

Funerals, along with food, festivals and weddings tell us much about a nation's culture. Former British Prime Minister William Gladstone (1809-98) asid:

'Show me the manner in which a nation or a community cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender sympathies of its people, their respect for the laws and their loyalties to high ideals.'

Certainly the 'cult of death' is complex and fairly clearly defined for the Chinese who, with their ancient civilisation, rich in folklore, have been 'honouring urns' in a similar manner back as long ago as the Chou Dynasty (1122-255 BC), although there are slight regional variations. The Chinese, more than any other poeple, are obsessed with the dead.⁴⁸ There is a fear of the dead. There is a continuing relationship between the dead and the living. Rituals demonstrate, resolve and change situations. Money, goods and food are 'dispatched' to the deceased. In return, from ancestors, the living expect luck, wealth, moral order, fertility and health. If punishment is meted out this is accepted. *Feng shui* plays its part.

When humans experience helplessness it is natural to turn to unseen powers for strength, hope and guidance. Typical Hong Kong funeral ritual paraphernalia, with many taboos, incorporate the trinity of the three Chinese religions: Buddhism (usually adulterated), Taoism and Confucianism — if indeed the last can be termed a religion. Buddhism is peaceful and gentle; Christianity is more aggressive; and Confucianism seldom considers the afterlife being more concerned with earthly subjects like filial piety. Folk religion and animism, with joss sticks placed at the feet of special rocks and trees in which spirits dwell, often play parts.

Interrelationships of the above and hedging are important. If one doctrine does not succeed in 'brightening a person's soul another may.' If you live on a precipitous mountain and pass both a Catholic and a Buddhist shrine every day while driving down a steep, dangerous road you cannot afford not to make the sign of the cross and bow; just as many people carry lucky charms to prevent mishap.

The wish of the average Englishman is for a simple interment, unlike most Chinese whose funerary rites are more complicated. Mourners usually require advice from priests, staff at funeral homes and temples, fortune tellers and others. Reasons for doing something are sometimes obscure and mourners, after asking 'why', are often told, 'It's always done like this.' Most want to believe they are doing the right thing for their dead. This was obviously so in this case study.

Although most Chinese funerals include supernatural beliefs and practices these are often related to basic values embracing rank, achievement and security. These are important to most people both in this world and the next. A funeral is also an expensive social event which can be noisy. In this study, a very average funeral in 1988 cost \$50,000 and there were seven ceremonies, some short, some long. In addition, the family had to gather together to perform other duties. These were time-consuming.

Nevertheless such ritual has therapeutic effects for mourners. Burning a paper car and various 'necessities', together with other rituals, are indicators of serious intent.⁴⁸ The family in surcoats of sacking symbolise relinquishing everything. Food, money, colour, symbolism and homonyms (*Sz* is the homophone for both 'four' and 'death') play prominent parts, not only in society as a whole but also at funerals.

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Topley asks whether the poor trace hardships, basically, to lack of money. Cash can solicit and secure worldly and spiritual favours, advantages as well as goods.⁴⁹ At a funeral there is abundant, cheap, 'mock' money which mourners 'remit' to the deceased. The dead can be 'looked after' in a style not often possible on earth.

Other ritual ingredients are belief in supernatural powers making up driving forces of the universe, whether these be magic, the complementary powers of *yin and yang*, 'dragon vapours' (*lung hei* 龍氣) of *feng shui*, *fuk hei* (divine blessings 福氣) or other superstitions. They must be handled correctly so no one is alienated.

There are, nevertheless, inconsistencies.⁵⁰ If even the average Chinese does appear to believe that everything depends upon impersonal whims and pulsation of *feng shui* through the universe he does not resign himself entirely to fate. The contradiction is that most Chinese display a strong motivation to achieve wealth, power and prestige. Ability and education are valued. To complicate the issue further there is the Buddhist karmic belief that one's afterlife depends upon morality and performing good deeds on earth. So with a broad streak of pragmatism, if, with ancestor worship, forefathers do not provide adequately for present generation - even though forebears' bones have turned white instead of black - the living will still try to achieve objectives in other ways, such as by following the Confucian work ethic. But the need to perform the will of the gods, if one wishes to be saved, is also stressed, although ascetic practices and abstaining from worldly comforts appeal to a limited number of Chinese. But effort on its own is not enough. Something else, something special, is required.

With Chinese civilisation going back to the Shang Dynasty (circa 1600 to 1100 B.C.) beliefs do not usually change overnight. Yet, as explained in this paper, a number of Hong Kong funeral customs have altered significantly since World War II, such as acceptance of cremation and streamlining of funerary formalities. In many ways, Hong Kong Chinese think differently to westerners and even to their mainland cousins. Yet, if a European reflects after attending a Chinese funeral, many aspects are very meaningful. These can help a westerner strengthen Christian beliefs.

Even those Hong Kong Chinese who do not profess a faith still usually engage Taoist or Buddhist monks to perform last rites. The author recalls

one simple funeral service which consisted only of basics, like the three bows and the last glance, with no monks chanting mantra or prayers. It is true Foscolo describes 'religious frills' in his poem as *inutil pompa* (useless pomp). But most people are left with horribly empty feelings after atheistic services. After a beautiful funeral of a friend who achieved something in life most are left with a self-righteous glow.

The author recalls comrades buried during a lull in battle during World War II — a single prayer said over the body of a dead soldier, in his blanket shroud, before he was slid over the side of the troopship into the ocean. These simple ceremonies had considerable meaning.

Francis Bacon the Irish artist, who died in 1992, was not a theatrical man.⁵¹ He insisted he wanted no memorial service, the barest formalities, no crowd weeping around his grave. 'I came into the world with nothing, I want to leave with nothing,' he insisted. These views differ from those of the average Chinese with their Taoist philosophy. But both they and westerners should find solace in the following, the author of which is unknown:

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
 I am not there,
 I do not sleep:
 I am a thousand winds that blow,
 I am the diamond glints on snow,
 I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
 I am the gentle, autumn rain,
 When you awaken in the morning's hush
 I am the swift, uplifting rush
 Of quiet birds in circled flight,
 I am the soft stars that shine at night...
 Do not stand at my grave and cry,
 I am not there,
 I did not die.

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NOTES

¹ This paper is based largely on the author's own experiences while attending and being involved with Chinese funerals over a period of four decades

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¹⁴ James Hayes, *The Rural Committees of Hong Kong - Studies and Themes* (1983), p. 45.

¹⁵ Frena Bloomfield, *The Book of Chinese Beliefs* (1983), pp. 100, 101 and 112

¹⁶ The author has visited this 'coffin Home' on various occasions

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- ²² Hugh Baker, 'Nuns', *More Ancestral Images*, op. cit (1980), pp 13-16
- ²³ Tin Sau Ho Coffin Shop, Hollywood Road, visited by author 20th July 1992
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- ³⁰ S.M. Bard, *Study of Military Graves and Monuments Hong Kong Cemetery* (1991), pp. 16 (B), 26 and 27
- ³¹ J. Dyer Ball, *Things Chinese* (first published 1903), p 166
- ³² Discussion between author and David Shu Tat-koon, *feng shui* master, 7 August 1992
- ³³ Hugh Baker, 'Burial', *Ancestral Images*, op. cit. (1979), pp 17-20
- ³⁴ Hong Kong Government Urban Services Department / Urban Council Annual Reports
- ³⁵ Hugh Baker, 'Exhumation', *Ancestral Images*, op. cit (1979), pp 110-104
- ³⁶ Hugh Baker, 'Exhumation', *Ancestral Images*, op. cit (1979), pp 110-104
- ³⁷ Frena Bloomfield, 'Fung Shui: Chinese Earth Magic', *The Occult World of Hong Kong* (1980), pp. 103-114; and Ernest J. Eitel, *Feng Shui* (Singapore, 1984).
- ³⁸ Discussion between author and David Shu Tat-koon concerning his own theories, 7 August 1992
- ³⁹ In other cases the author has been told of dead people's spirits returning home three, seven, ten or other periods after death
- ⁴⁰ All dead persons except infants and wandering strangers are entitled to a spirit tablet
- ⁴¹ Visit by Hong Kong Branch, Royal Asiatic Society, to Sang Woo Loong Art Advertising Model Work Company, 28 Western Street, 10 December 1988, second visit by author to same establishment 20 July 1992.
- ⁴² Hugh Baker, 'Earth God', *Ancestral Images*, op. cit. (1979), pp 1-4
- ⁴³ Hugh Baker, 'Mourning', *Ancestral Images Again*, op. cit (1981), pp 101-104, Laurence G. Thompson, op. cit. pp 54 and 55.
- ⁴⁴ Leung Chor-on, 'Blessings Are Not For All', *The Hong Kong Anthropologist*, no 5 (April 1992), pp. 26-28 (p. 27)
- ⁴⁵ Rubie S. Watson, 'Remembering the Dead Graves and Politics in Southeastern China', eds James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski, *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, op. cit., pp. 203-227.

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⁴⁶ Leung Chor-on, loc. cit.

⁴⁷ Frena Bloomfield, 'Automatic Writing (Fu Kay)', *The Occult World of Hong Kong* (1980), pp. 27-33

⁴⁸ Frena Bloomfield, *The Book of Chinese Beliefs*, op. cit. p. 12

⁴⁹ Marjorie Topley, 'Chinese Occasional Rites in Hong Kong', *Some Traditional Chinese Ideas and Conceptions in Hong Kong Social Life Today*, week-end symposium October 1966, brochure of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, pp. 99-117 (p. 116)

⁵⁰ Jack M. Potter 'Wind Water Bones and Souls. the Religious World of the Cantonese Peasant', *Journal of Oriental Studies*, 8 (1970), pp. 139-153

⁵¹ 'Bacon Receives Simple Farewell', *South China Morning Post*, 2 May, 1992