Boiling Oil to Purify Houses (*zhuyou jingwu* 煮油淨屋): A Dialogue between Religious Studies and Anthropology *

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The relationship between Daoism and local cults is one of the major concerns in Daoism studies. Previous research has approached this issue in a number of ways. Some studies consider Daoism as being capable of replacing local belief,[1] or see it as a high religion providing a structured liturgical framework for popular cults.[2] This view has been modified recently: Davis's work on Daoism and local religion in the Song dynasty has shown their relationship to be symbiotic, although sometimes antagonistic.[3] In Hymes's research on the development of the Celestial Heart (*tianxin jiaopai* 天心教派), he showed a Daoist "byway" having existed in Jianxi, exemplifying a personal, not a Daoist bureaucratic, model of divinity and of the divine-human relationship.[4] Lee points out that Daoism in Taiwan has both institutionalized and diffuse characters: it combines with local myth, ritual, and cosmology to work in local festivals, life cycle rituals, and ancestral cults.[5]

This paper aims to engage with the relationship between Daoism and local cults. I shall use an exorcism ritual, "boiling oil to purify houses" (*zhuyou jingwu* 煮油淨屋), to show how Daoism is deployed and extended in local society. This ethnographic case will discuss how Daoist *wuying* ideas work with popular concepts

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1 Michael Strickmann, Bernard Faure ed.: *Chinese Magical Medicine*, pp.2-4. Stanford 2002. See also Edward Davis: *Society and the Supernatural in Song China*, pp.8-11. Honolulu 2001.

2 Kenneth Dean: *Taoist Ritual and Popular Cults of South-east China*, pp. 14, 17,18. Princeton 1993. Kristofer Schipper: *The Taoist Body*, pp. 7-8. Berkeley 1993. For more discussions, see Paul Katz: „Doism and Local Cults: a Case Study of the Cult of Marshal Wen", pp. 172-208, in: Liu, Kwang-Ching & Richard Shek ed.: *Heterodoxy in late Imperial China*. Honolulu 2004.

3 Edward Davis, ibid.

4 Robert Hymes: *Way and Byway: Taoism, Local Religion, and Models of Divinity in Sung and Modern China*. Berkeley 2002.

5 For more on the institutionalized and diffuse aspects of Chinese religions, see C. K. Yang: *Religion in Chinese Society: a Study of Contemporary Social functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*. Berkeley 1961. Lee Fong-Mao 李豐楙: „Zhidu yu Kuosan: Taiwan Daojiaoxue Yanjiu de Liangge Mianxiang" 制度與擴散: 台灣道教學研究的兩個面向, pp.233-285, in: Zhang Xun 張珣 & Ye Chun-rong 葉春榮 ed.: *Taiwan Bentu Zongjiao Yanjiu: Jiegou yu Bianyi* 台灣本土宗教研究: 結構與變異. Taipei, 2006.

of body, place, and gender to purify a place and achieve reinvigoration of society. Therefore, this paper suggests that an evaluation of the impact of Daoism on society cannot overlook the importance of local culture.

Daoist Literature on the Ritual of Boiling Oil

The oil-boiling ritual does not appear frequently in Daoist literature. Only in Lee Fongmao's work on the inauguration of a new house (*rucuo* 入厝), the earth-thanking ritual (*xietu* 謝土), and the ritual of cosmic renewal (*jiao* 醮) can some descriptions of it be found.[6] For instance, he writes:

> In the ritual of inaugurating a new house, a rite called "boiling oil to purify houses" will be added to the exorcism rituals in Jinmen or Penhu islands . When the heated oil is burning in a wok, the priest successively sprays rice liquor into the wok to cause a flame. It can not only reinforce the power of exorcism, but also relieve the worries of the client. Therefore, carrying the oil wok to purify the place is a typical technique of exorcism. In this process, the ordinary people could listen to the sound and see the fire of the boiling oil … the whole ritual comes from the mythical thinking of purification.[7]

This rite can be practiced either by a Daoist priest (*daoshi* 道士) or a red-head practitioner (*hongtou fashi* 紅頭法師). For example, a description by Lee Fengmao of the rite within the context of the cosmic renewal ritual in Zhenhu Temple, Sucuo, Tainan Country, reads as follows:

> The adherents crowded the temple courtyard. A wok of boiling oil was placed above a burner. The Daoist priest wore a black robe, with a piece of red cloth tied on his head, red socks and straw sandals on his feet. ….. In one hand the priest held a yellow flag, symbolizing the center, and in the other he held a "dragon horn", a ritual instrument. The four ritual assistants each held a green, red, white and black flag and other ritual instruments. Each of the instruments is used to expel plague and inauspiciousness. The Daoist priest sprayed hard liquor from his mouth into the burner, causing flames to leap up, an act that also signifies purification.[8]

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6 Lee Fong-Mao 李豐楙: „Jinmen Lvshanpai Dianan Yishi ji qi Gongneng: Yi Jinhuzhen Fuguodun Guanshi Jiamiao Weili" 金門閭山派奠安儀式及其功能: 以金湖鎮復國墩關氏家廟為例, pp.395-463. In: *Minsu Quyi* 民俗曲藝 91, 1994. „Tainan Diqu Rucuo Xisu yu Daojiao Xietu Keyi" 台南地區入厝習俗與道教謝土科儀, published in Nanying Chuantong Yishu Yantaohui 南瀛傳統藝術研討會. Tainan, 2002/11/29-2002/12/1. „Wangjiao Keyi yu Yinwang Jidian: Tainan Diqu Wenshen Xinyang yu Difang Chuantong de Jiaoliu" 王醮科儀與迎王祭典: 台南地區瘟神信仰與地方傳統的交流, in: Li Zhi-tian 黎志添 ed.: *Xianggang ji Huanan Daojiao Yanjiu* 香港及華南道教研究. Hong Kong, 2005.

7 Lee Fong-Mao 2002:17.

8 Lee Fong-Mao 2005:467.

However, if we compare this rite with the elaborate rituals of cosmic renewal or earth-thanking practiced by Daoist priests, oil-boiling seems so minute as to seem negligible. For example, in Lee Fongmao's 40- or 50-page long detailed descriptions, this oil purification rite counts for not even a single page.[9] It is only practiced for less than one hour before the seven-day cosmic renewal ritual held in Zhenhu Temple in Tainan.[10] In the context of the large-scale Daoist rituals, oil-boiling purification appears to be an inconspicuous rite.

Indeed, not only in religious studies but also in anthropology can we rarely find any documents or studies on this ritual. The only exception among anthropologists is David Jordan, in whose book *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors* there are some more descriptions of oil-boiling.[11]

David Jordan's Description

Jordan's field site is in Boa-an, a village located in south Taiwan. The oil-boiling ritual here is known as "passing through oil" (*guoyou* 過油) and seems to be a much bigger event in this village than described in the Daoist literature cited above. He describes this ritual twice in the book; the first was a village-wide event,[12] and the second was practised by a group of families.[13] This ritual was conducted when local residents felt things "began to go wrong" in the village, such as unusual deaths, disasters, and illness. When these events happened, it was believed that the village was in danger of being invaded by ghosts. They hired a red-head priest, *an-thau-a* (Hokkien), to perform a purification ritual, "passing through oil."

> He [the priest] prepared five bamboo stakes, with magic charms written on yellow paper securely bound to the tops of them, to be driven into the ground at each of the five forts to supplement the power of the [spirit] soldiers. When the stakes were ready, the *ang-thau-a* busied himself with the preparation of purification oil.[14]
>
> About the same time the gods descended into the divination chairs, a medium….went into trance. With the gods in attendance and the oil hot, all was ready to purge the village of its ghosts. This was done by successively firing…. the oil. The *ang-thau-a* spat a fine spray of rice liquor onto the hot oil, causing a momentary column of flame and smoke to rise several feet in height, through which incense pots and other objects in the temple were

9 Lee Fong-Mao 1994: 435, 2002: 17, 2005: 467.
10 Lee Fong-Mao 2005: 481.
11 David Jordan: *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: The Folk Religion of a Taiwanese Village*. Berkeley 1972.
12 Jordan 1972: 53-59.
13 Jordan 1972: 119-128.
14 David Jordan 1972: 55.

> passed to purify them. When the temple building and its sacra had been purified in successive columns of flame …..the apparatus followed the medium and the divination chair to each of the five forts successively, where the oil was fired, a charm stake was posted….. By these comparatively simple acts the positions of the soldiers in the forts were strengthened, and the invading evil forces were frightened away.[15]

If the purpose is to exorcise special demons, such as water ghosts, Jordan adds that the local people shout, and throw burning firecrackers and sesame seeds into the water.[16]

In the second half of his book, when talking about the divine guardians of the family, Jordan again describes the same ritual, but this time it occurred on a deity's birthday and was organized by a group of families who worshiped him. The red-head priest was hired again and after the deity's spirit medium was possessed, they first purified that year's host family.[17] They then led a procession carrying the wok of burning-hot oil to visit adherents' houses and purified their central rooms by firing the oil. Finally, after returning to the host's house, the oil was fired a few more times and people passed their arms through the flames to purify their bodies.[18]

From Jordan's discussion, we see first that when the oil-boiling ritual is practised by the local people, it is not as minute as is in Daoist ceremonies. It involves almost all the people in the village or the adherents of a particular deity. Secondly, purifying the dwelling place, including the space of the village and the houses, is the major concern when people encounter misfortune or unusual death. In later sections of this paper, I shall examine the relationships between the body and dwelling places. Now I will describe how the oil-boiling ritual is practised in the village where I conducted fieldwork.

Wannian Village

Wannian is a village located in the north of Tainan county (fig. 1). It has seventy households composed of three main surnames: Gao, Li, and Wang.[19] From its early establishment into the present, farming has been the main economic activity, even as the villagers have also undertaken other kinds of manual labor to increase their income.

15 David Jordan 1972: 56.
16 David Jordan 1972: 59.
17 Different families take turns every year to host the god.
18 Jordan 1972: 125.
19 The village name and the surnames have been changed to protect their privacy.

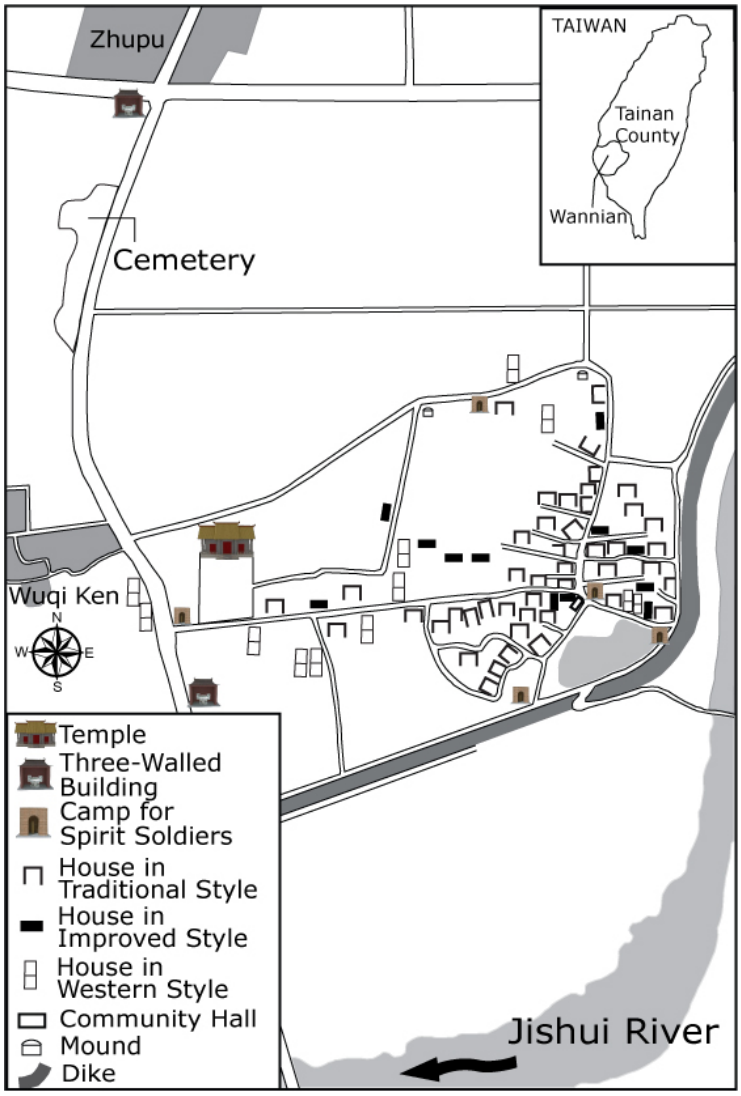

Fig. 1: Wannian village

Wannian has only one temple with six main deities. How five of the deities arrived there is related to the cultivation history of the village. It is said that the Li was the first group to come to cultivate land there. They brought with them their ancestral image (*zufo* 祖佛) Laoyegong (老爺公). Later, two brothers of the Gao family, carrying their ancestral deity Dadaogong (大道公) and wandering from the south in search of farmland, passed by Wannian. They put the deity statue down and

rested there, but it then became too heavy for them to lift up again. The brothers therefore stayed on and married into the Li family, and after a few generations the Gao became Wannian's biggest group. Last to arrive were the Wang, who moved from a neighboring village. Other independent households came later.

When the people settled down and the village developed further, the inhabitants decided to make public their respective ancestral images and to worship them as common village deities. The biggest group's deity, Dadaogong, was selected as the main deity. The next in rank was the second Dadaogong, a branch deity of the regional temple in a neighboring town, Xuejia, and according to myth a sworn brother of the first Dadaogong. The third was the Li family's ancestral deity, Laoyegong, and the fourth was the territorial deity Jingzhugong (境主公). The fifth was a tiger god, Huye (虎爺), who people say was cured by Dadaogong and afterward followed him as his mount. These have long been Wannian's five major deities. Around thirty years ago, You Wangye (遊王爺) from Liuying conducted a tour of inspection (*raojing* 繞境) in the proximate area of Wannian. As a result of solicitation by the villagers, a command tablet (*wangling* 王令) of You Wangye was set up in Wannian to protect the village, and he became Wannian's sixth deity.

Dadaogong, as the head deity, receives much respect from the local inhabitants and holds substantial power. However, all the first five deities have their own spirit mediums and mostly work as a whole.[20] They command five camps of spirit soldiers (*wuying bingjiang*五營兵將) who protect the territory of the village. The locations of the camps, at the center and four ends of the settlement (fig. 1), protect the residents from interference by ghosts.

Oil-boiling in Wannian

The ritual of oil-boiling in Wannian, similar to what Jordan indicates, is practised when consecutive misfortunes occur such as death and illness. The village deities, through their spirit mediums, command the residents to conduct this ritual. However, oil-boiling as performed in Wannian combines aspects of the village and house rituals in Jordan's description.

The ritual started at about 1pm or 2pm. Ideally, every household must send one man to participate in it. However, almost all the village men, as long as they were available, would come and help to prepare it.

The ritual began with the descent of the deities. Some descended onto spirit mediums and some on hand-carried divination chairs. In fig. 2, the person with half-naked torso is a spirit medium possessed by a deity. He is singing and transmitting the deity's will. At the same time, we see a red basin in which black beans and

20 Since the sixth deity, You Wangye, only came to Wannian 30 years ago, he does not have his own spirit medium yet, but uses the territorial deity Jingzhugong's medium to transmit his messages.

sesame seeds are mixed; one person fires the talisman and burns it in the basin. By doing so, the beans are transformed into spirit soldiers; they are then scattered along the boundary of the village to guard it.

Fig. 2: The beginning of the ritual

New bamboo stakes and hoes are prepared before the ritual. After the spirit mediums are possessed by deities, they command the bamboo stakes with their blood (fig. 3, left). The bamboo stakes are taken to replace the old ones in the five camps of spirit soldiers and the strongholds in the village to ward off the ghosts. Apart from the bamboo stakes, the hoes are also commanded by the spirit medium's blood (fig. 3, right), and are placed at important spots in the village to threaten the evil spirits away.

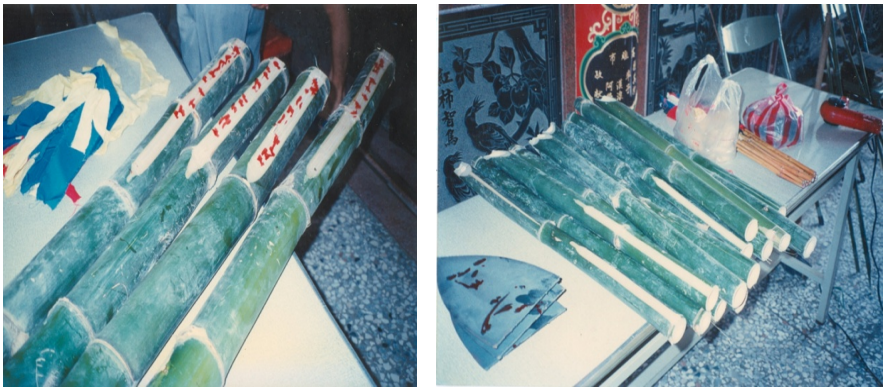

Fig. 3 the bamboo stakes (left) and hoes (right) dotted with spirit medium's blood

Next, the spirit medium commands five talismans and calls the spirit soldiers to guard the oil wok, the most important object in this ritual. After the talismans are stuck to the four sides and to the bottom of the oil wok (fig. 4), the oil is poured in and the fire is lit.

Fig. 4: the fired wok

When everything is ready, a procession composed of village men, led by the spirit mediums and followed by the divination chairs, walks along and inspects the village boundary. They first go to the mound located in the north of the village warding off the ghosts in the northwest graveyard. A spirit medium climbs onto the mound to renew the bamboo stake (fig. 5, left). He holds the flags of the five camps (*wuying qi* 五營旗) in his left hand and the hoes in his right to threaten the evil spirits not to come into the village. The parade then proceeds eastward, where the river flows by. They set up a new bamboo stake before the bridge to ward off the water ghosts. They reinforce the impact by making a huge noise, such as by lighting up firecrackers and shouting (fig. 5, right).

Fig 5: the rites on the earth mound and beside the river

After that, they go to the five spirit camps. Rice wine and “three little sacrifices” (*xiao sansheng* 小三牲) --a plate with a piece of raw meat, an egg and a piece of tofu -- are offered to the spirit soldiers, and spirit money is burned for them (fig. 6, left). The spirit medium mobilizes the spirit soldiers (*diaoying* 調營) and commands them to stand fast at their sentry posts. One person spits a mouthful of rice wine into the hot oil wok and the flame rises up to cleanse the spirit camp (fig. 6, right). The two divination chairs beside the wok shake up and down, showing the presence of the deities.

Fig. 6: the rites performed in front of the spirit soldier camp

While purifying the spirit camps, the whole procession also walks around the village to purify the houses (fig. 7).

Fig. 7: the parade heads for purifying houses

In each house, women prepare sacrifices to welcome the deities. An incense table *xianganzhuo* 香案桌) is displayed in front of the house on which an incense burner, some fruit, and a rice cake are placed (fig.8, left). The grass and water for the spirit horses (*macaoshui* 馬草水) beside the door are renewed so that the spirit soldiers could refresh themselves (fig. 8, right).

Fig. 8: The incense table (left) and the grass and water for the spirit horses (right)

The oil wok is carried into the central room of each house; rice wine is spat into the firing oil to create flame and heat and thus purify the house. Family members who are ill or have encountered misfortune stand in front of the oil wok to have their bodies purified by the heat of the flame. The whole ritual ends in the evening in the temple courtyard, where villagers gather to have their bodies purified again and celebrate the completion of the ritual.

From the above description we can see that there is no great difference between the oil boiling ritual as performed by religious experts or by lay people. The villagers probably learned this ritual from Daoist priests in the past, but are not able to offer any explanations of when and how. What we can say now is that when the ritual is practised by the villagers themselves, its scale, duration and effort are all much larger than when conducted by Daoist priests (as described in the Daoist literature). Furthermore, the high frequency of its performance also indicates it is very closely intertwined with the local people's lives and their ideas. Below I will discuss what ideas are imbedded in this ritual and how they work with Daoist concepts.

The Metaphorical Relations among House, Village, and Human Body

We may wonder: why do the local people have to purify their domestic space and the village to prevent frequent occurrences of misfortune such as illness or death? An

analysis of the metaphorical connections between body, house and village offers some clues.

House and Body

The residents in Wannian, as most Taiwanese people, usually consult fengshui experts to choose appropriate orientations for their houses. However, they already have a general understanding of what good fengshui should be like. Chi, light, and water were often mentioned when villagers talked about the fengshui of a house. They usually think of chi as air. Villagers like to talk about the smooth flow and freshness of air in a house. They also say that "to tell the fengshui of a house, one should observe if the house "has eaten" water and light or not. The view of the house as a human body becomes clearer here: just as a human body needs air, water, and light, so does a house.

Water represents wealth but it also has more elaborations. It is said that the water inside a house should not flow out in many directions, lest the wealth of the house disperse as does the water. Most of the houses in Wannian have specially designed drainage ditches to gather waste water.

Good fengshui not only includes these animating forces,[21] such as air or light, to provide the house with vitality, but also the environment in which a house, as a human body, is able to sit comfortably. Villagers say that a house should have a "leaning mountain" (*kaoshan* 靠山) at its back, so that the house, like a seated person, can lean against it.

The spatial layout of a house further reveals how it is built on the metaphor of the human body. The construction of a traditional Chinese house usually starts from the "three rooms" (*sanjian* 三間) -- the "main hall" (*gongting* 公廳) in the centre, with a "big room" (*dafang* 大房) on its left and a "second room" (*erfang* 二房) on its right. To the three rooms can be added two more – "fifth rooms" (*wujian* 五間), one on each side. These five rooms together are called "the trunk of the house" (*dacuo shen* 大厝身). After several years, when the children of the original couple inhabiting the house have married and the number of family members has increased, the senior couple will build wings which are called "extending arms" (*shenshou* 伸手) (fig. 8).

21 For a general discussion of the animating force, see Roxana Waterson: „Chapter 6", in: *The Living House: An Anthropology of Architecture in South-east Asia*. London, 1990. Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones ed.: *About the House: Levi-Strauss and beyond*, pp.23. Cambridge, 1995.

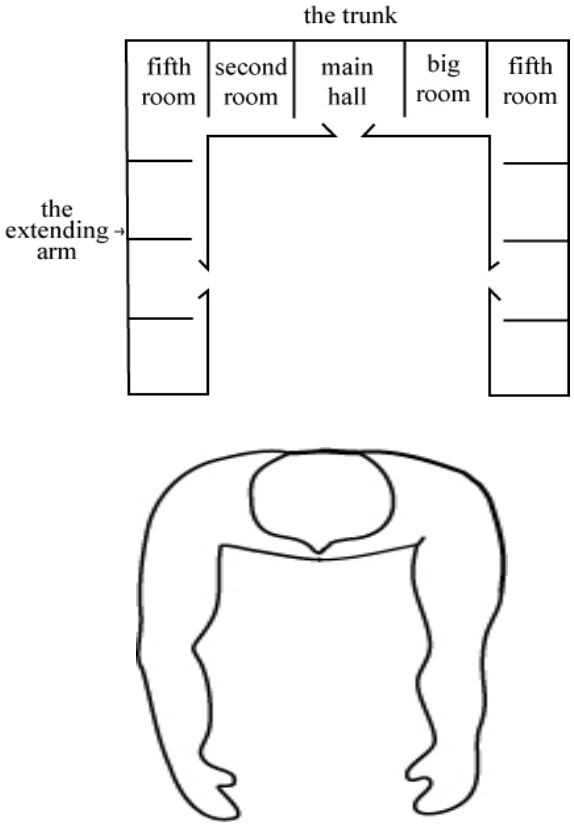

Fig. 8: The house as a human body[22]

The names of the rooms, moreover, make explicit the constituent parts of a human body. The main hall, for example, is where the eyes of the house are located. The rooms next to the main hall are called "ear rooms."[23] Wannian villagers say that if the dwellers want to add more rooms to the existing "extending arms", they should mimic the anatomy of real arms. That is to say, since arms have elbow joints, the added rooms also have to be set apart from the original "extending arms" by dividing walls.

22 The figure on the right is revised from Kuan Hua-San 關華山: „Taiwan Chuantong de Minzhai yu Minjian Kongjian Guannian" 台灣傳統的民宅與民間空間觀念, pp. 191. In: *Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Minzuxue Yanjiusuo Jikan* 中央研究院民族學研究所集刊 49, 1979.

23 See Chen Wen-Shang 陳文尚: *Taiwan Chuantong Sanheyuan Shi Jiawu de Shenti Yixiang* 台灣傳統三合院式家屋的身體意象. Taipei, 1991. But according to Kuan (ibid.), the rooms of 'the fifth' are called 'ear rooms' (ibid.: 196).

If the house is a metaphor of the body, then whose body is it? The answer becomes clear if we understand that the souls of household members are attached to the house in the same way as they are attached to the bodies. The Chinese lunar calendar, which hangs in almost every house in Wannian, shows how "the placenta god" (*taishen* 胎神) moves around the house every day, e.g. one day it may be on the hearth, the next on the door, the bed, or even the toilet. Although the villagers are not sure if the placenta god is the soul of the baby, the connection between the two is evident. For example, if someone damages the area where the placenta god attaches itself in the house, the baby's body will be in danger of being deformed. Thus, the facts that the placenta god moves around the house, and that a mother has to be cautious in different parts of the house, show that the body of the coming family member is gradually getting to know the house before its birth.

Similar is the case for another newcomer: the bride marrying into the family takes a certain period of time to become a member of her husband's family. Before she leaves her house, a bride has to 'worship her ancestors to inform them of her departure' (*ci gongma* 辭公媽). When she arrives at her husband's house, she cannot worship his ancestors immediately; in the past she had to stay in the "new room" (*xinfang* 新房) for three days before she could worship the ancestors and thus become a member of the family. Nowadays she still must wait until the feast of the wedding ceremony is over.

In short, the house is constructed on the image of a body, and its occupants strongly identify themselves with it. Thus, we can say that in this oil-boiling ritual, what the local people try to purify is not abstract and objectified houses, but personalized places, which can hardly be differentiated from their own physical bodies.

Village and Body

Like the house in which all the waste water and rainwater are collected into a single drainage and can flow out, almost all the drainage systems in Wannian are carefully guided to the public reservoir located in the southeast (see fig. 1) and then flow to the southwest. The public reservoir is often termed the "belly" of the village.

Another life-giving source of vitality for the village, the *chi*, is said to come from the northeast. Since some land in the northeast belongs to the neighboring village, Zhupu, the two villages have had a lot of conflicts over land use. The arguments are complex and cannot be discussed in detail here. In brief, some villagers of Zhupu wanted to build tombs there to obtain *chi*, but this was seen by Wannian people as polluting the *chi* flowing into Wannian. As the conflicts became protracted, the main deity, Dadaogong, commanded that a mound be erected in the northeast to protect Wannian from the polluted *chi*. Today we can still see the mound standing in the village (fig. 1).

The chi flowing into to village has its own particular direction. To understand this, we need to take another concept into consideration: villagers consider people living in the village as "sharing the same body" (*gongti* 共體) or " sharing the same veins" (*gongmai* 共脈). For example, a person whose house was located near the center of the village once tried to move his house physically to the opposite side of the road. The laborers dug deep into the earth, and, to everyone's surprise, the land started to "bleed" (*liuxie* 流血)! The explanation was that the professionals had dug too deeply and damaged "the veins of the land (or *chi*)" (*dimai* 地脈 or *qimai* 氣脈). It was only after a spirit medium buried two bamboo sticks (representing bones) wrapped with red cloth (representing blood) in the ground that "the veins were reconnected" (*mai jiu jieqilai le*脈就接起來了).

The concepts of fengshui discussed above and "the bleeding land" both show how the village is conceptualized as a body shared by all the people inhabiting it. The idea that "all villagers share the same body" conveys not only a strong identification of people living in the same place, but also their kinship-like sentiments towards one another.

If a village is built on the image of a body, how do the people define its physical territory? Now we have to take Daoist concepts of *wuying* into account.

Five Spirit-soldier Camps (*wuying*) and the Spirit Medium's Body

The five spirit-soldier camps comprise the village deities' army and are usually located at the center and the north, south, east, and west borders of the village to guard it and prevent invasions of evil spirits.[24] Every camp has a representative color, a general, an ethnic army, and a certain number of soldiers' horses. Among the five, the central camp is hierarchically highest. The five spirit-soldier camps and their related contents in southern Taiwan can be summarized as in Table 1.

Table 1: Five spirit-soldier camps and their characteristics[25]

Camp	East	South	West	North	Center
Flag Color	Blue	Red	White	Black	Yellow
Surname of general	Chang	Xiao	Liu	Lian	Li
Army	Nine Yi army	Eight Man army	Six Rong army	Five Di army	Three Qin army
Horses	Nine thousand	Eight thousand	Six thousand	Five thousand	Three thousand
Soldiers	Ninety thousand	Eighty thousand	Sixty thousand	Fifty thousand	Thirty thousand
Five phases	Wood	Fire	Metal	Water	Earth

24 See also Jordan, ibid. pp.50-51. and Kristofer Schipper: „Vernacular and Classical Ritual in Taoism", pp.21-57. In: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 45/1, 1985.

25 Huang Wen-Pou 黃文博: *Taiwan Xinyang Chuanqi* 台灣信仰傳奇. pp. 42. Taipei, 1989.

Spirit medium's sacred instrument	Sword of the Big Dipper	Axe or Spiked club	Spiked club or Sawfish sword	Sawfish sword or axe	Ball of nails

The concepts of the five spirit-soldier camps are based on the traditional Chinese center-and-four-directions, the five phases (*wuxing*), and numerological cosmology.[26] Later, these models came to include the five ethnic military troops (*yi, man, rong, di, qin*), which first appeared in Daoist scripture around the third to the fifth century in southern China.[27] In Fujien province, local people were further incorporated as camp generals of different surnames.[28] Ethnographies also show that the five spirit-soldier camps not only appeared in pre-modern China,[29] but also in parts of contemporary southern China, where they still exist.[30] As most early Taiwan immigrants were from Fujien, the five spirit-soldier camps are still widespread in Taiwan, particularly in the south. They form the most visible symbolic boundary of many settlements.

How do Wannian residents understand these *wuying* concepts? Although not every villager knows exactly the content shown in Table 1, most have a general knowledge of it. They consider the five spirit-soldier camps as having originated from the souls of the deceased, and that they were recruited as soldiers and trained by the deities. A deity can also obtain more soldiers (*qingbing* 請兵) from its root temple. In addition, the villagers believe that the spirit-soldiers protect not only the boundary of the village but also every household. Thus, in front of the main hall of every house, they place grass and water (*macaoshui* 馬草水) so that the visiting spirit-soldiers and horses can rest and refresh themselves. Once a month, each household holds a feast in the temple to reward them (*shangbing* 賞兵). After the feast, the spirit medium uses a sacred instrument, the sword of the Big Dipper (*qixing jian* 七星劍), to command the spirit troops to stand fast at their sentry posts.We may wonder why a spirit medium can command a deity's troops. The spirit medium is also called the "deity's golden son" (*shenming de jinzi* 神明的金子)。He is selected from all the men in the village, and represents the village in forging kinship relations with the deity.[31] After having been chosen by the deity, the spirit

26 Joseph Needham: *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 2. Cambridge, 1954.

27 Lee Fong-Mao 李豐楙: „Wuying Xinyang yu Zhongtan Yuanshuai: Qi Yuanshi ji Yanbian 五營信仰與中壇元帥: 其原始及衍變, pp.549-594, in: Guoli Zhongshan Daxue Qingdai Xueshu Yanjiu Zhongxin 國立中山大學清代學術研究中心 and Xinying Taizigong GuanliYuanhui 新營太子宮管理員會 Diyijie Nezha Xueshu Yantaohui Lunwenji ed.: *Diyijie Nezha Xueshu Yantaohui Lunwenji* 第一屆哪吒學術研討會
論文集. Kaohsiung, 2003.

28 Ibid.: 586.

29 Wang Mingming: „Place, Administration, and Territorial Cults in Late Imperial China: A Case Study from South Fujian", pp.33-78. In: *Late Imperial China* 16/1, 1995.

30 Kenneth Dean, 1993:65.

31 Donald Sutton: „Rituals of Self-Mortification: Taiwanese Spirit-mediums in Comparative

medium has to learn how to "open five camps" (*kai wuying* 開五營): he uses the sword of Big Dipper to cut his forehead five times. This is the way by which he will command the spirit-soldiers in the future. In the photos shown before (fig. 3), we have already seen how the new bamboo stakes and hoes are installed at the five camps and commanded by the spirit medium's blood to call the dispersed spirit-soldiers back to their sentry posts.

In this oil-boiling ritual, we see not only how the territory of the village is defined by the camps of the spirit-soldiers, physical markers of *wuying*, but also how these abstract Daoist concepts are further combined with the spirit medium's body. For the residents, both of them work together to define the territory of their village.

The Gendered Image in the Ritual

The photos I have shown above are mostly of men who are responsible for purifying the village space. At first glance, the oil-boiling ritual seems to be performed only by men. In a way, it is. When asked why women do not appear in the parade, villagers usually reply, "women are unclean."[32] "If there are unclean women around, the oil wok could be turned upside down, or the rising flames may not be able to be put out because of them." Thus we hardly see women in this ritual and their role in it has rarely received attention.[33]

In fact, women play an important role in this ritual. They stay at home to "welcome the deity" (*jieshen* 接神). They prepare an incense table in front of the courtyard to greet the visiting deities and renew the grass and water for the coming spirit-soldiers. After the deities and the parade leave, they have to burn spirit money and light firecrackers to celebrate and complete the ritual. In other words, men and women are responsible for different tasks. Men purify the village to guarantee the safety of the community while women stay at home to welcome the deity and facilitate the house- and family-centred parts of the ritual. To further understand the gender roles in this ritual, an important clue is again provided by the house, and especially its most important components, the main hall and kitchen.

The main hall (*gongting* 公廳) in the traditional house occupies a special status. In many respects, it demonstrates the significance of the male and of patrilineality. There can be only one main hall in a house, in which the patrilineal ancestors are worshipped by all the members. It is also where the two most important beams of the house -- the central beam (*zhongji* 中脊) and the lamp beam (*dingliang* 丁樑) -- are placed. The central beam is made of the most durable wood. It is painted red and hung with auspicious drawings. Two thin and long "sacks for producing male

Perspective", pp.99-125. In: *Journal of Ritual Studies* 4/1, 1990. Lin Wei-ping: „Conceptualizing Gods through Statues: A Study of Personalization and Localization in Taiwan", pp.454-477. In: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55/2, 2008.

32 See also Emily Ahern: „The Power and Pollution of the Chinese Women", pp. 193-214, in: Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke ed.: *Women in Chinese society*. Stanford, 1975.

33 For example, Jordan 1972.

children" (*chuding dai* 出丁袋), containing the first harvest of grains, nails, coins, and iron pyrites, are suspended from the middle of the beam. This is to express wishes for abundant food, many male descendants, and the protection of family members. The implication of the male and the patrilineal, moreover, is revealed by the lamp beam. In Hokkien, the word "lamp" is a homonym for "men". When a son is married, the family adds two more lamps on the beam. The connotation of patrilineal continuity in the main hall is apparent.

In contrast, the number of hearths (or kitchens) in a house can be many, depending on the number of families dwelling in it. In Hokkien, a family is called "people who share the same hearth." The process of household division is termed as "dividing eating." These sayings show a hearth is the defining feature of the formation of a new family.

The kitchen is a woman's place and the center of her daily life. When women visit each other, they usually walk directly into the kitchen. The hearth or kitchen is also symbolically related to women. When a house divides or a new house is constructed, the wife's natal family has to come to "uphold the hearth" (*jiazao* 架灶). They send "twelve items" (*shier xiang* 十二項) which include bowls, chopsticks, kitchen utensils, and a bucket of life-sustaining rice for the new family to eat. They also send a rooster and a hen which should be kept for breeding chickens. These gifts from the wife's natal family pragmatically and symbolically support the setting-up of a new family. We can say that the female aspect of the house emphasizes the independence and the prosperity of a family.

In short, the gender symbolism of the house shows that the "male" aspect of the house represents patrilineal continuation and the "female" symbolizes the independence of a family. The two aspects, however, are indispensable to, and complement, each other.

With this understanding of gendered symbolism, we can return to the oil-boiling ritual. Women's staying at home to welcome the deities very much parallels the female symbolism of the house. They represent the independence of each family. While men are responsible for purifying the village to protect the community, women are the guardians of individual houses. Both men and women have their own roles and contributions to this exorcism ritual; men and women work together to restore the community and family order.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how ordinary people can adopt, develop, or even reinvent the Daoist rituals to contend with the disasters, illness and death which they confront in their daily lives. By comparing this rite with those described in religious studies,[34] we see the minute rites practised by Daoist Masters are deployed and expanded by the lay people to resolve their own misfortunes. The frequency of the ritual is not

34 Lee Fong-Mao 1994, 2002, 2005.

constrained by Daoist schedules, but becomes more flexible and in accordance with the needs of the local people.

By making use of ethnographic fieldwork, this paper more importantly shows that when this ritual is performed by lay people, the Daoist ideas of *wuying* are elaborated to combine with lay concepts of body, spirit medium, and gender symbolism. In other words, what they try to purify is not abstract spaces, but personalized places. Daoist concepts and local cultural ideas are combined to become pivotal structural notions in this ritual. Therefore, in this popular oil-boiling rite, the Daoist concepts do not independently provide a structuring framework for local cults as previous studies hold,[35] but work intimately with important cultural ideas to confer potency to this ritual. This ethnographic research concretely exposes their combination and indicates that it is through their commingling that ghosts are exorcised and local society reinvigorated.

35 Kenneth Dean 1993, Kristofer Schipper 1993.