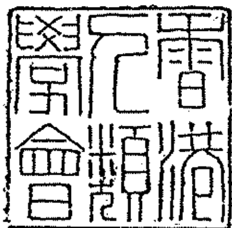
ASIA 2000
Produced by Asia 2000
Design: Renate Sautermeister
Typesetting: Design Communications
Printer: Sunning Production

Hong Kong Anthropology Bulletin

No 1 JUNE 1987

Domestic Ancestral Behaviour • The Historical Uses of Ethnography
Ghost Marriages • The Yao Programme in China • Forensic Anthropology



HONG KONG ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Hong Kong Anthropology Bulletin

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EDITORIAL

The following articles represent different aspects of the anthropology practised in Hong Kong. Hong Kong has long proved a fertile hunting ground for those interested in local history, Chinese kinship and religious systems, the relationship between ethnic groups, and the origins of mankind. Now that Hong Kong is moving towards a future as part of a wider Chinese society, anthropology has an increasingly vital role to play in a rapidly changing and multiethnic community. Apart from contributing to research, anthropology encourages intercultural understanding and a greater awareness of, and tolerance for, different customs. We hope that these articles will serve to demonstrate some of the wide range of interests of anthropologists working in Hong Kong, from the study of ethnic minorities in China to early primate development, from the uses of anthropology in history to the traditional rituals and religious beliefs which continue to play an important part in the life of the urban community. It is hoped that in the future, HONG KONG ANTHROPOLOGY BULLETIN will carry many articles summarising past and present research on Hong Kong and Chinese society in general. Hong Kong is one of the most intensively studied areas of the world. It is time for the findings of anthropologists to be brought to a wider audience.

The HONG KONG ANTHROPOLOGY BULLETIN is a regular annual publication of the Hong Kong Anthropological Society, which is chartered in Hong Kong as a registered Society. All correspondence, Mss. etc., should be addressed to the Editor, Hong Kong Anthropology Bulletin, Department of Anthropology, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, New Territories, Hong Kong.

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Editor: Nicholas Tapp
Editorial Advisor: Janet Lee Scott

Cover: Fa Paau Detail, Tin Hau Festival (Janet Lee Scott)

Domestic Ancestral Behaviour

William Newell

The People's Republic of China makes a distinction between two different types of cults, religious cults and superstitious cults. The distinction between these two has varied depending on the immediate policy of the government and the Party. At the present time, those religious practices which are connected with officially recognised societies are not only permitted to exist but the various religious workers connected with them have the "class" status of "religious worker" on their identity card and in many cases receive payment either directly or indirectly from the State through the appropriate danwei as well as through voluntary donations from believers. The ultimate control of such religious danwei rests with the government bodies connected with the United Front (in which they have no direct representation). Many rituals which are performed outside "religious cults" are classified as superstitions, for example ancestor worship, some burial practices and the private cults of mediums (wu shih or dang ki). The policy of the government has always been opposed to the performance of such "superstitious" practices as far as the Han people are concerned and the central committee of the Communist Party has recently asserted its determination to stamp these practices out as far as possible either by education or by political force. From the standpoint of social anthropology, this distinction between religion and superstition has no scientific basis and all forms of ritual behaviour are together classified as religious behaviour. From the point of view of anthropological science, we are not conerned with whether they are "true" but why they exist. To arbitrarily try to stamp them out by force until we understand the material basis of their existence, seems wrong to anthropological scholars. Social anthropologists also do not try to "explain" these cults in terms of their history but in terms of their meaning or their place in contemporary society. The term "superstition" is thus banned as a term in anthropological jargon because it implies a condemnation of a cult behaviour without understanding it.

During the Cultural Revolution, the campaign against the "four olds" was aimed at eliminating the distinction between religion and superstition and making all those concerned with supporting any form of cult practices, superstitious practitioners (and therefore wrong). This campaign against the "four olds" was primarily carried out by the Red Guards and over most of China, religious leaders of minority peoples were illtreated and sometimes killed and most Catholic, Christian, Buddhist and Islamic cult supporters had all their religious objects destroyed and were personally mishandled. I recently visited Mt. Emei and Lhasa and was astounded at the widespread destruction of temples.

As far as domestic ancestral worship was concerned, tablets on ancestral altars were piled in the streets (along in many cases with the actual altars) and burnt and all additional cult objects like censers and books were destroyed. Tombstones were defaced or destroyed or transferred to remote sites so that the land could be cultivated. In Guangdong which I visited some years ago, some of the Earth God shrines were not destroyed but converted into public urinals. What is the effect of this violence and destruction on the cult of ancestor worship now?

In order to understand the situation in China I wish to make two main distinctions, between religious and superstitious cult practices and between the worship of ancestors and the worship of forebears. The first distinction I have already dealt with. I will now deal with the second.

The term "ancestors" has been very loosely used in the past to include two different types of predecessors. On the one hand it may include all those persons living or dead who preceded the speaker in his capacity as a member of a family, tribal, national or other form of social group. On the other hand it may include only those connected with the speaker by some commonly recognised link, both the person concerned and the person from whom descent is claimed, being traced by named and identifiable persons in the chain (geneonymy). Such linked persons may be real or fictitious but they must be identifiable. For the first group I prefer to use the term "forebears" and for the second term I will use the term "ancestors". Forebears is clearly a more inclusive term than ancestors and all ancestors may be regarded as forebears.

In Taiwan among the MinNan speakers, ancestor worship has the following cult peculiarities:

a) Each particular line of ancestral tablets on the altar are separated from each other and have a separate censer. Gods also had a separate censer from ancestors.
b) At the graveside a personal tablet is brought back to the house from the grave and is sooner or later placed on an altar (except unmarried girls and babies).
c) Ordinary domestic food is presented to the ancestors before the family eats it.
d) Any member of the household (including non-related residents) may present the altar with incense sticks.
e) Because of the slotted Japanese type of ancestral tablet holder found in some places, there may be more than three generations in the one holder although the general rule is that tablets must be between three to five generations; and
f) There may be a small number of unrelated tablets on the altar who are not relatives but in some way were connected with the household (Harrell 1976).
g) Tablets at the grave side are "dotted" either with a pen or invisibly by the person conducting the graveside ceremony.

I wish now to deal with "ancestral worship" in the Hong Kong situation. Hong Kong is predominantly Cantonese speaking and it is extremely difficult to make a living in Hong Kong unless one speaks Cantonese (unless one moves exclusively in bureaucratic or government circles). In the New Territories there are of course villages which are rapidly becoming urbanised. One of these, Sheung Shui has been described by Baker (1968) shortly after much of its land was acquired by the state for a new town (which made many of the villagers landlords and also rich). Sheung Shui is still regarded as a Hakka village but in fact everyone in the village speaks Cantonese and only a very small minority of the villagers know any Hakka today. In popular terms the village is now known as Punti (local persons). This linguistic change seems to have taken place at least 150 years ago. Over most of Hong Kong all dialect groups are geographically mixed together except for Kwun Tong (where the former Teochiu villagers were resettled as a block about 30 years ago). Cantonese is almost exclusively used in primary schools as the medium of instruction (both government and "Anglo-Chinese" schools). Whereas in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Cantonese, Hakka and Teochiu villages were found in fairly self-contained enclaves along the south China coast (Hayes 1962), at the present time there has been a strong movement of "Cantonese language imperialism" which has resulted in all working Chinese using Cantonese as the lingua franca. There are many families in Hong Kong who, while ethnically continuing to call themselves Teochiu or Hakka are today Cantonese speaking. My argument here is that associated with the rapidly increasing use of Cantonese, there is also a gradual development of a specifically Cantonese culture especially to do with the family and ancestor worship.

As far as the family is concerned Lau Siu-kai (1982 and 1981) claims that the Cantonese-speaking residents of Hong Kong have developed a family system which he calls "utilitarianistic familism". By family, Lau seems to refer essentially to the parents and children and argues that where other kin are involved (such as cousins), the extent to which they become members of the groups depends on "economic utilitarian criteria" rather than the mere fact that they are kin. Assistance given to penurious cousins or even brothers and sisters would be based on whether they could be of economic assistance to the maintenance of this "utilitari-anistic family", which often had adopted persons as members. I was surprised to find in some of my work among factory employees that

eldest daughters (even after marriage) often gave as much as 20% of their wages to their mothers and that this applied also in decreasing frequency to youngest daughters and then middle daughters and to lesser extent to sons irrespective of whether the parents were well off or not (although in old age there was a general responsibility of the children to help their parents). It is clear therefore that the special feature of the Cantonese family is its economic base, this base being very small in numbers and resembling a household unit rather than a family unit.

It is not surprising therefore to find ancestral worship in the sense of named predecessors almost non-existent among Cantonese. The Cantonese household owes its existence to its own solidarity and hard work rather than to its connection to personal ties with its predecessors. One finds ancestral worship in the sense of emphasis on named predecessors as almost non-existent among Cantonese.

Last year I tried to circulate a questionaire among social science undergraduate students at the University of Hong Kong specifically asking for information about ancestral tablets in the home. Every single student who claimed to be Cantonese and who answered the questionaire had a tablet with some such heading as "to the ancestor of the Zhang family" with a red electric light bulb permanently alight at its base. Moreover as far as I could find out there was only a single censer which was used to worship both this tablet and such local gods as Ma Tsu or Kwan Yin if they both happened to be on the same altar. It is clear that the distinction between ancestors and gods in Taiwan (as shown by separate censers) was very unclear to Cantonese students at Hong Kong University who regarded original ancestors as deities.

I will try to compare "Cantonese" ancestor worship with Taiwanese ancestor worship using the categories already outlined earlier. There are

a) No individually named ancestral tablets other than photos of recently dead members of the household. There is one (not personally named) general tablet, which is not distinguished from any other god on the altar.
b) The paper tablet worshipped and used at the death ceremony is either burnt immediately afterwards or else burnt at the grave. (Thus no distinction is made on the grounds of sex or age at the grave or at home, by virtue of the position of the tablet).
c) Same as Taiwan in presenting food.
d) Same as Taiwan with no restriction on who presents incense.
e) Not even as many as three generations remembered personally in the home.
f) No tablets on the altar of unrelated persons.
g) No "dotting" as no tablets.

In Sheung Shui among the older inhabitants, there appear to be no ancestral <u>tablets</u> but often a large sheet of red paper with the names of all the dead patrilineal ancestors up to three generations (and sometimes more), plus some additional collaterals usually brothers of the household head plus some unmarried sisters plus some of their descendants are written on the <u>one</u> sheet of paper. Each time a member of the household dies the whole sheet is completely rewritten (although I cannot find out who is dropped from the list). It is clear that in Sheung Shui there is no emphasis on <u>family</u> or lineage continuity in the home, only household continuity. I think the criteria for inclusion on the sheet of red paper is former membership in the household (which of course may include unmarried girls, etc.) In Sheung Shui <u>family</u> continuity is emphasised by periodical festivals <u>at the graves</u> of those who continue to live in Sheung Shui from whom various <u>fang</u> can be traced. The individual graves of those who do not form a <u>fang</u> junction, cease to be worshipped within a comparatively short period of time and well within two to three generations. The apical ancestor of the whole village has an annual festival of all the villagers but I am informed that in fact there is no body within the grave as the ancestor was buried elsewhere in mainland China. His wife is however buried there.

There are within the village boundaries several "ancestral halls" of former male forebears of the village (plus some of their wives). The main hall in each of these buildings has long ago excluded new persons being added and the side halls would require some special qualification in addition to descent for a new tablet to be included. As I am writing here about "ancestor worship" and not "forebear worship" where the cult rules are different, I would refer to the reader to Baker's book. Today there is no automatic promotion from one to the other by descent.

This specialisation of "ancestor worship" among Cantonese speakers is in my opinion not connected with industrialisation especially, but with more fundamental ethical and practical ideals found among Cantonese in general. Perhaps it is these Cantonese ethical ideals which has made Hong Kong the successful industrial entrepot that it has become rather than the other way around.

Let me now deal with the situation in mainland China. In 1986 I spent some time in Wuhan undertaking other forms of research but I had the opportunity while I was there of visiting various homes and cemeteries. I think it is clear that ancestral worship falls into the "superstitious" category described earlier, and hence meets with various difficulties. During my period of stay in Wuhan, I was not able to find any family (including peasants in the immediate urban countryside) who had a properly organised domestic altar which was operating. Sometimes the actual table had been replaced in the guest hall with two (non-religious) <u>dueytz</u> on each side but in the centre was often a clock or vase of flowers or something similar. I could not find any tablets although private worshipping of the "ash box" (<u>qu hue ho</u>) may occur. During the Cultural Revolution many graves were desecrated or had their head stones smashed. In communes which had easy access to (municipal) crematoria, all newly dead were expected to be cremated and no paper tablets were prepared for use outside the crematorium. Processions were more or less

Paul Lee: Worship in Ancestral Hall.

completely banned although the crematorium provided closed trucks to carry the coffin and mourners from their home to the crematorium. These travelled through the streets quite rapidly. Only firecrackers were permitted en route. At the crematorium there were special halls (limited to 30 minutes per party) in which speeches eulogising the dead were permitted. These mortuary halls are very similar to those found in Hong Kong except that all bodies should be burnt and not taken to a grave.

After the body was burnt, the inheritor could either have the deceased's ashes dispersed or else could retain the "bone ash box", which he could take home or else store it in the crematorium for a limited period (for which he paid a rental fee). This box could also be buried on an approved site. Thus in the mid-China home as among the Cantonese in Hong Kong, the relationship between the inheritor and the "bone ash box" is a personal one. The relationship between the household and the ex-member of the living household is transferred to the grave or destroyed.

In HanYang there was one public cemetery outside the city at Five Peak Mountain where one could be allocated a piece of earth about 10' square for which one paid the sum of Y10 to the State. Since the earth was very rocky, the grave was built above the ground in a concrete mausoleum. The tombstones were mostly inscribed as follows from the year 1982. On the right facing were birth and death dates. On the left were arranged all the descendants in the following order. Sons (and their wives); daughters (and their husbands); grandchildren (of the sons); grandchildren (of the daughters). The term filial, xiao was used of all the descendants irrespective of the existence of children and included those of different surname. Presumably a person could have his name placed on two tombstones both as a person connected with the main name on the grave by ties of household affiliation and, also, if he wished on a tombstone of his or her own. The "precious box" can be deposited in the grave, kept in one's house or having it dispersed by the crematorium. It is permitted to have a self-employed priest or ritual specialist carry out a ceremony at the grave.

In HanYang and also at some other places which I visited there is a "national" cemetery nearby in which famous individuals, members of the military, Communist officials, etc. are buried. These tombstones are radically different from those in public cemeteries. They consist only of the person's name, his (or rarely her) birth and deathdate and the rank which they had. There are no biographical details for the most part and I never saw the name of any wife or children, which are presumably irrelevant. I could not obtain a copy of the regulations by which these special dead were admitted.

It seems to me therefore that ancestral worship as described for Taiwan has been practically wiped out on the mainland. In its place under government support or at least toleration we have a system by which persons can be commemorated by memorial stonesafter the body has been burnt. These memorial stones emphasise the status of the person while he (or she) was living. One's status in the public cemetery commemorates the size of one's household by ties of filiation. Another status emphasises one's individual official position in the State while one was living. To build either of these memorials after death does not imply any power to the dead person to continue to influence the living, a widespread belief in Taiwan.

In the questionaire that I submitted to the Hong Kong University students I asked one question as to whether they believed that the ex-dead members of the household had any power to influence the living. although most respondents stated that such photographs or objects associated with the dead had no influence over the living, a small minority gave examples of illnesses in the family ascribed to the dead household member. Notwithstanding the work done by Potter and others on shamanism in Hong Kong, I certainly felt that Cantonese were less fearful of their own dead than was the case in Taiwan. In the article translated by Richard C. Kagan, Develop the Struggle against Shamans (1980 from Jiefang Ribao 1944), all the shamans concerned referred only to goddesses and gods from the celestial hierarchy as responsible for illnesses and misfortunes. In the booklet by Raymond Fung (1982) dealing with the protection that shamans were trying to acquire by seeking the protection of Christianity, no reference was made to ancestral spirits whereas in Taiwanese ancestral worship certain dead ancestors play an active part in affecting the living. It seems to me therefore that in both Hong Kong and mainland China with the gradual emphasis on the utilitarian family and ties of filiation instead of the traditional Chinese larger family and the ties of patrilinearity and procreation, we have a secularization of the various beliefs to do with ancestral worship in the home and at the grave.

When Hong Kong reverts to the mainland, this question of the treatment of superstitious family practices will not become a problem as far as Hong Kong is concerned as it seems to me the practices already are very similar, in contrast to differences between Taiwanese and Cantonese speakers.

Note:
I wrote this article at the same time as I was preparing a paper for the Second International Conference on Sinology held in Taipei in December, 1986. There is thus a certain amount of overlap in the two papers.

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A Note On The Yao Programme Of The Chinese University Anthropology Department

Chien Chiao

As a subgroup of the Yao, the Pai Yao or Ba Pai Yao are mostly settled in Liannan Yao Autonomous County of Guangdong Province. According to the census of 1982, the total population of the Yao in China amounted to more than 1,400,000, most of them dispersed in Guangdong, Guangxi, Yunnan and other provinces. In addition, some Yao people inhabit Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and have reached as far as France, Brazil, and the United States, in the form of small refugee communities from Laos and Vietnam. The Yao peoples' long historical background and distinctive culture has attracted the research interest of many students in Yao studies around the world.

Studies on the Chinese minority groups and their cultures have been one of the fields of the undergraduate programme since the establishment of the Department of Anthropology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1980. Owing to limited manpower and financial resources, it seems impossible to maintain a permanent station for minority studies in a minority area in China at present, but a periodic visit to an outpost in Guangdong is very helpful for both teaching and research work. Having considered the accessibility of the location to Hong Kong and the lingua franca of the region, which is Putonghua and Cantonese, of most people, we have located such an outpost in Liannan Yao Autonomous Area with the generous help of the local authorities. The present project consists mainly of the following areas:

a) Population Structure and Family Pattern
Data is being collected to increase understanding of the Pai Yao population structure and its changes during the past three decades, especially those due to the recent family planning policies. The structure and content of various family forms of the Pai Yao are being analysed in terms of their different ecological conditions and subsistence patterns.

b) Social Organisation and the Kinship System
Areas of studies include chieftainship, tribal organization, descent rules, descent groups, kinship terminology, kinship behaviour and

the marriage system, as well as their changes and their general relevance to anthropological studies.

c) The Religious System

This includes such areas as world views, rites de passage, ancestor worship, religious organization and ritual activities.

d) Linguistic Studies

This includes sociolinguistic, syntactic, phonological, and phonetic studies of the two main Yao dialects spoken in northern Guangdong.

The Department is now in its fourth consecutive year of regular study tours to the Yao areas, and over the years this has meant that an impressive body of data has been collected, in both written and audiovisual form, which it is hoped will be of value to future researchers on the minority areas of China.

The encounter with another culture forms a vital part of undergraduate training in Anthropology as the study of mankind, and for most students from Hong Kong their study tours to the Liannan region have provided them with their first opportunities to practice field research. For the Yao people, too, these exchanges with members of another culture have brought benefits. In May 1986 the first International Colloquium on Yao Studies was organised in Hong Kong, in conjunction with the Hong Kong Institute for Promotion of Chinese Culture and the French Centre on the Anthropology of South China and the Indochinese Peninsula of the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). Besides local scholars, participants included fourteen scholars from China and eight from France, Sweden, England, Australia and the United States. Seven of the scholars from China were ethnic Yao themselves, and a Yao delegation of three came especially from the United States to represent the Yao people who have migrated to the United States from Southeast Asia. Concurrently with the Colloquium, and to promote the public understanding of the Yao people, an exhibition of 'Arts and Artefacts of the Yao Minorities of Northern Guangdong' was held at the Hong Kong Institute for Promotion of Chinese Culture, in conjunction with the Guangdong Research Institute of Minority Nationalities. Exhibits included some of the tools, implements and costumes, articles and religious items of the Yao peoples' cultural and artistic activities before the 1950's. Following the colloquium, participants set out for a field trip to the Liannan and Ruyuen Yao Autonomous Counties of Northern Guangdong at the invitation of the Commission for Minority Nationalities Affairs of Guangdong Province. Discussions were held during the trip with local Yao people and Chinese officials who were involved with the research on Yao culture as well as with socio-economic development of the Yao communities. Further major joint research projects on Yao culture were proposed and it was agreed that an International Association for Yao Studies should be set up.

Kwan Yiu-man: Traditional Yao Burial Costume.

There has been little research in the past on the 55 national minorities of China, who number 67 million people in more than half of China's total land area. In the mid-1950's Prof. Fei Hsiao-Tung, now President of the Chinese Association of Sociological Research, carried out his first ethnological investigations among the Yao of the Dayao mountains in Guangxi, and in 1936 R.B. Fortune, an English anthropologist, led a party of investigators to the Ba Pai Yao area of Northwest Guangdong. We hope that in the future, as Hong Kong draws closer to China, Anthropology will continue to contribute to the intercultural understanding of many different ethnic groups.

Ghost Marriages

Diana Martin

Mr. Li of Hong Kong's New Territories had a 14 year old sister who had died 30 years ago, childless, unmarried and unfulfilled. Then, in 1970, he told me, a friend of his mother's whose son had also died some years ago, dreamt that the son came and told her that he was now an adult; he wanted to get married and have a family. This lady told her friends, among whom was Mr. Li's mother, about the dream. Mrs. Li tentatively suggested marrying their dead children to each other.

Feeling a little uncertain as to whether this was what her son wanted, the boy's mother went to see a spirit medium in Kowloon, to be told that the ghosts were indeed content to be married. The spirit medium fixed an auspicious day for the wedding and the two families exchanged betrothal gifts. When the wedding day came, more gifts were exchanged and a feast held. It seems that only members of the family were invited, which greatly cut down the number of guests usually present at a wedding.

Mr. Li commented that in the old days, in Canton province, a ghost wedding would have been a much more elaborate ceremony than his sister's. The absent bride and groom were represented by wooden ancestral tablets and, after the feasting, these were carried into the main room of the boy's house where the ancestral altar is kept. As any other bride and groom would do, they were made to bow to the ancestors. And so they were married. The tablets were then placed on the altar and worshipped on festival days along with the other ancestors. Since then, the two families have kept in touch like any other in-laws and there have been no more dream appearances. Mr. Li told me he had not attended the wedding himself. "I didn't have the time," he said, "and anyway, I don't believe in such things."

Mr. Li's reaction was fairly typical. Throughout the two months I spent in Hong Kong last autumn, I found that raising the topic produced two distinct reactions: either that the practice must be very rare nowadays as they had never heard anything about it, or that it was very common and their brother, cousin, wife's sister or neighbour had participated in a ghost marriage. When I went to Taiwan, everyone considered it a fairly common occurrence.

A ghost marriage will take place some years after a small child has died. We all think the death of a small child a tragic event, something which ought never to occur. Among the Chinese, the death causes not only immediate sorrow but also long-term discomfort: the spirit may return to ask his parents for those things he did not live long enough to enjoy. People ought to grow up and get married and have children to fulfil their role in their family and in society. In a society which worships ancestors, it is naturally very important to have descendants. So years later one of the parents may dream that their child is lonely and wants to be married. With the help of a spirit medium or a go-between, they look for another dead child who will make a suitable partner. When all the usual betrothal negotiations are complete, the wedding takes place.

Mr. Li's story is a fairly typical example of a ghost marriage taking place to provide the dead with companionship. Another such marriage arranged for the same purpose in 1972 was followed in March 1976 by a letter from the girl's mother to the Home Affairs Department requesting permission to rebury the boy's body by her daughter's grave — and because the boy was buried in a temporary cemetery and the girl in a permanent one.

The girl's mother wrote: "My deceased daughter died in July 1968 and was buried in *** cemetery, grave number XXX. According to Toi Shan custom, since the girl died young, she had to look for a deceased husband. Then her soul would rest in peace, she would have someone to depend on, and her parents would be consoled. Therefore we found the son of Mr. Wong who died in April 1970, and was buried in *** cemetery, grave number XXX. Since the son had also died unmarried, his father was hoping to find a wife for him. So, following Toi Shan custom, we contacted a go-between. Both sets of parents consenting, we married them in April 1972 in strict accordance with all the customs of Toi Shan county. The ceremony took place at the Goddess of Heaven Temple in our

district. Now, since they are husband and wife, married before witnesses A and B, we request permission to move the remains of our son-in-law to be reburied next to his wife's grave."

The simple motive of providing the dead with companionship is sometimes combined with another: that of not upsetting the hierarchy of sons and daughters in marriage. Mr. Ng told me what had happened in Szechuan while he was there in the 1940s.

The eldest son had died at the age of 13. Some years later the second son collapsed shortly before his wedding was due to take place, and speaking with his elder brother's voice, said: "I'm the eldest son. I object to my younger brother getting married while I'm still single. There will be no peace for the family unless I'm married." Apparently ghost marriage was not very common in the area and the family was not sure what to do. In the end, since friends strongly advised them to appease the ghost, they decided to arrange a wedding. They contacted a go-between to find a ghost bride, being extremely careful to find a dead girl whose status and family background were appropriate to their own. They chose three names and then, after the horoscopes were checked for compatibility, one was selected. The girl's parents consented and the marriage took place. The younger son was then at liberty to marry.

Since one of the reasons for marrying dead children is said to be to provide them with heirs, it is perhaps surprising that I was told of only one case where this was done. In 1971, five years after the wedding, a girl-ghost's mother adopted, on behalf of the couple, her ghost son-in-law's brother's child. The child is currently being brought up by his natural parents. When he is older, it will be his duty to worship his deceased adoptive parents.

All the ghost marriages I came across in Hong Kong were between dead people, the initiative being taken by either party. By contrast, it is accepted in Taiwan that ghost weddings are always initiated by a dead girl who is always married to a live man. When I asked my Hong Kong informants what they thought of the Taiwan variation they said it seemed an unnecessary amount of trouble to go to.

It seems that in Taiwan the death of an unmarried girl causes more trouble than that of a boy. A girl is a temporary member of her natal family. When she marries she is transferred almost totally to her husband's family. On her death she will join his ancestors on his family's altar. so the unfortunate girl who dies before she marries has nowhere for her soul to rest until a husband is found for her.

When I was in Tainan, in the south west of Taiwan, I came across two recent ghost marriages.

The first I found through a report in the China Daily News, and managed to trace the family.

Mrs. Lin had been ill for some years. After attempting various medical cures, she had finally consulted a spirit medium. The diagnosis was that the illness was being caused by her two younger sisters who had died some years previously. They were trying to tell her that they wanted to marry her husband. Mrs. Lin told me that of course she'd come across that kind of story before, but she'd never thought it would happen to her. She had ignored the diagnosis for two or three years, but gave in finally as her illness continued to trouble her. Without telling her husband, she consulted the spirit medium for an auspicious day, and went ahead with the arrangements. On the wedding day, only family members attended. The two sister brides were represented by their spirit tablets, which, during the wedding feast were seated on chairs at the table. Everyone talked to them and offered them food. After they had been made to bow to the ancestors, the tablets were placed on the husband's family altar.

Mrs. Lin told me emphatically that since then her health had improved a great deal. It was she who told me most of the story. Her husband looked most embarrassed, said it was all his wife's doing, and that he hadn't known anything about it till just before. Ghost marriages were always happening, he said, it was just his luck that there was a witness around when his happened. They were both most reluctant to tell me who the spirit medium was and where I could find her. Eventually they took me some streets away to another medium, who, they said, knew something about ghost marriages. She turned out to be the one involved in their case.

It was the brother of a ghost bride who told me the second story. He was a young man in his early twenties whose sister had died at birth 38 years ago. Last year she appeared to her mother in a dream, saying that she had fallen in love and giving the name and address of the man concerned. The address was some way away: the brother assured me that his parents had never met this man. However, when they managed to trace him and tell him the story he agreed to marry their daughter. No doubt he was afraid that if he did not comply it would be his turn to be haunted. My informant told me that the ceremony, which he attended, was in every detail like that of a normal wedding, except that only members of the family were invited and the bride was represented by a doll. After the ceremony, the doll lay in the bridegroom's bed for three days and was then burnt like all funeral objects.

The day before I spoke to this young man I saw a doll to be used in a ghost wedding. It was in a shop specialising in paper funeral objects. She was made of pure white papiermache, with an expressionless face. The next day she was gone. Someone had bought her to participate in a ghost wedding, but the shopkeepers were unable or unwilling to tell me where she had gone.

There are common themes underlying all the cases of ghost marriage that I have come across in Hong Kong, Taiwan and pre-revolutionary China. (Unfortunately it is not possible to discover what has happened to the practice on the mainland since 1949.) The most obvious is that something has to be done for those who die in childhood. A ghost marriage can partly resolve for the living the tragedy of those who die young and unmarried. Since they do not fit into the model of the family and social structure — that is, they do not live to marry and produce children to continue the line — they are seen as a potential source of misfortune. Marrying a ghost is one way of neutralising its dangerous influence.

Of course, beliefs about the dead tell us more about the living than about the dead. Several anthropologists have noted that most ghosts — especially actively malevolent ghosts — are female. A ghost is one who has lived an anomalous life or died an anomalous death. As women's behaviour is more circumscribed than men's, it is easier for them to step out of line. Or, as the anthropologist Jack Potter suggests, "the frustrations of Cantonese women from one village could supply enough discontented, angry, revengeful ghosts to populate ten village hells".

Not all ghosts cause problems. Millions of those who die before their time are never invoked as agents of disaster. But the concept is there, to be retrospectively applied when an explanation of misfortune is needed.

Note:

This article was originally published in New Society, 17 March 1977.

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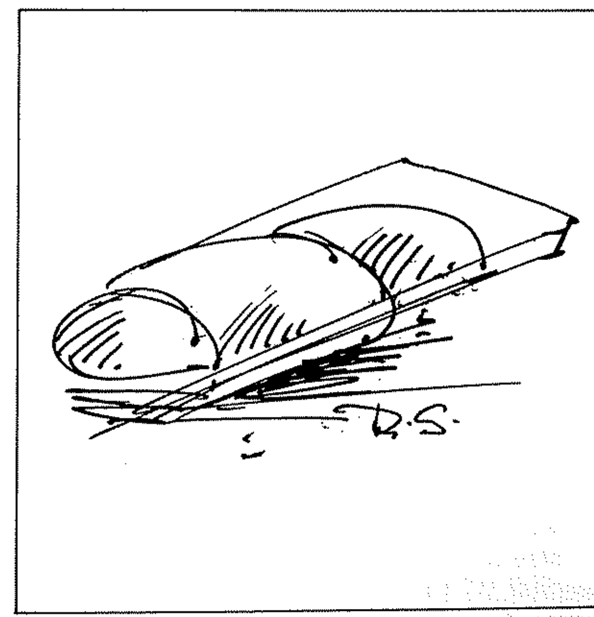


The Role Of Anthropology In Forensic Investigations In Hong Kong

or

How Did A Nice Girl Like You Get Mixed Up In A Messy Business Like This?

Nina G. Jablonski

Every now and then, usually as I'm drowsily sipping my morning coffee, an ominous report on the radio news rouses me from my bleary-eyed reverie. A decomposed body or a skeleton has just been found somewhere in Hong Kong and "the victim has not yet been identified." More often than not, this means that in a few days we will get a call from the police, asking for our assistance in identifying the remains.

In most Western countries, investigations into individual identity proceed according to a familiar, long-established protocol. Unidentified remains are first examined by one or more forensic pathologists. If little or no useful information (e.g., fingerprints) can be gained from examination of the remaining soft tissues of the body, the pathologists generally call in a forensic odontologist (dentist) and a forensic anthropologist to examine the remains. If, as is often the case, the victim is suspected to be a particular person, or one of several persons, the medical and dental records of the persons are requested from their physicians and dentists. When these records are received, they are compared with the findings of the postmortem examination, and a positive identification — or, as importantly, a positive elimination — is then made. In many such cases, a positive identification is made on the basis of a matching of antemortem and postmortem dental records: the elaborate dental work that many of us carry around with us, if it has been properly documented by our dentists, forms a unique set of attributes that can, if need be, positively establish our identity.

But, what if — as is often the case in Hong Kong and many other places in Asia — your suspected victim has never experienced the delights of professional dental treatment, or has only been seen by an unlicensed dentist who does not keep systematic records of his work? How then do you establish identity? It was in just such a case over four years ago that our assistance was first called for by the Royal Hong Kong Police.

There exists today at the Prince Philip Dental Hospital of the University of Hong Kong a group of five individuals — four dentists and one physical anthropologist — whose services are requested by the police and government forensic pathologists when assistance in identification of bones and teeth, or interpretation of other dental evidence such as bitemarks, is needed.

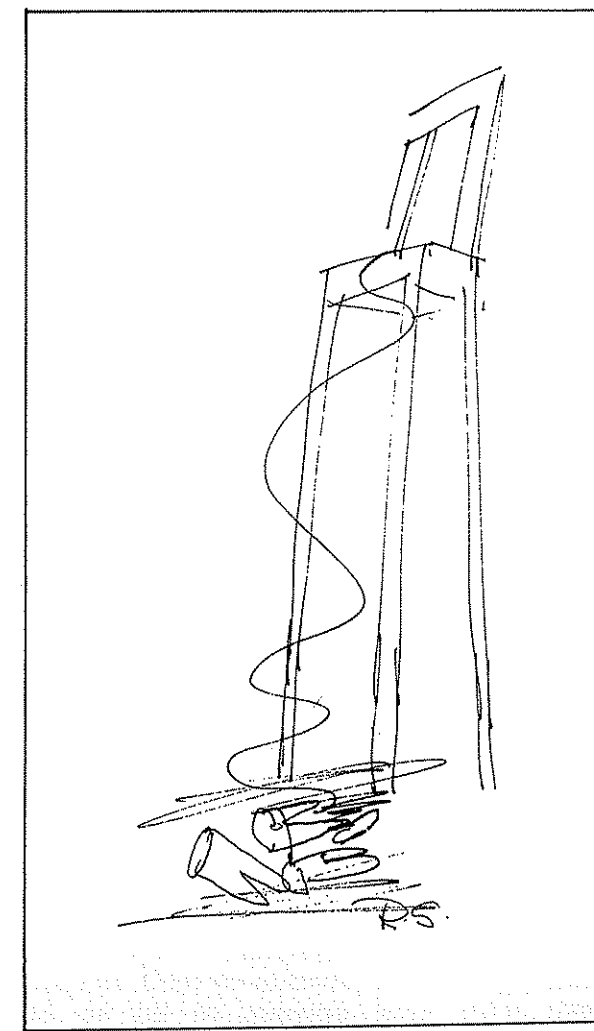
The primary role of the anthropologist in such investigations, in Hong Kong and elsewhere, is establishment of the so-called "big three": sex, age, and race. Occasionally this involves the sorting out of a mixture of remains of individuals of different races, or the identification of human versus nonhuman remains. (Two years ago, for instance, I examined a "human hand" that turned out to be a pig's foot.) In Hong Kong, however, the role of the anthropologist in forensic investigations has been expanded to fit the peculiar needs of the local situation.

Anyone who has studied human evolution in an introductory anthropology course knows that teeth are the mainstay of the human fossil record. This is because teeth, more than other parts of the vertebrate body, last. They can be subjected to all manner of physical and chemical insult and still retain the distinctive features of their anatomy. This is not only convenient for the paleontologist, but also for the forensic anthropologist. When all the identifiable soft-tissue features of a body have decomposed or have been destroyed, the teeth reamin essentially in their original condition. And, as we have shown in Hong Kong, teeth can be used to establish positive identifications even in the absence of dental work and dental records.

Although people in Hong Kong may never or only rarely go to the dentist, almost all of them, at one time or another, have their photograph taken. Apart from eating, amateur photography is probably the most popular pastime of Hong Kong's 5.5 million people. Unbeknownst to you, those piles of snapshots, which record everything from your friend's wedding to your company's barbecue, frequently make all the difference in identification. Although it is common for people to adopt a rather grim and down-trodden look for passport or identity card photographs, they usually smile when a photographer captures them in more relaxed surroundings. And when they smile, they often show their teeth. You may not think that the photographic image of your teeth would be terribly useful in identification, but in fact it is. Very. We first took advantage of this particular kind of dental evidence when we identified the victims of the so-called "Jars Murders" or "Hong Kong Butcher" case in 1982.

Positive identification of an individual from a photograph requires, first, that the remains of the individual retain the upper anterior (front) teeth and, second, that a photograph of the individual, showing those teeth in sharp focus, be available. The teeth serve a dual purpose: in the first instance, physical measurements of the teeth are used to enlarge the antemortem photograph to true life size. In the "Jars" case, for instance, the distance between the tips of the upper canine teeth of one the suspected victims was used to enlarge the image of the smiling face, which showed the same teeth in clear focus, from the antemortem snapshot. After the enlargement of the antemortem photograph is made in this way, the images of that photograph and of the postmortem skull are superimposed. If the person in photograph does indeed belong to the skull, there should be a perfect match between the images of all of the visible teeth — the second of their dual purposes — and the image of the soft tissues of the face as seen in the antemortem photograph should harmoniously and accurately overlie the bony landmarks of the skull. The number of points of correspondence between the ante- and postmortem images of the teeth determines the degree of certainty of the identification, in much the same way as a minimum number of corresponding points from two sets of finger-prints are necessary to prove identity.

So far, this method of dental identification developed in Hong Kong has been used in nearly twenty local criminal and civil cases, many of which have involved multiple victims. Papers describing the technique have been presented in several countries and have been published widely in professional journals. Furthermore, our positive identifications, based as they are on the correspondence of unique anatomical features, just as those used in fingerprinting, have set legal precedents by being accepted by the High Court and the Coroner's Court of Hong Kong. We are now attempting to further refine our physical techniques for photographic superimposition and, more importantly, carry out the exhaustive investigations necessary to establish — beyond a statistical shadow of a doubt — the uniqueness of an individual's visible anterior teeth. Our technique promises not only to be of continued usefulness in Hong Kong, but in many other countries where personal identification from medical and dental records in not possible. For a physical anthropologist, it's a perfect project to sink one's teeth into.



The Historical Uses Of Ethnography

David Faure

If history is the study of past events, today's ethnography must be tomorrow's history. The question that the editor has posed for me, therefore, must be not whether the subject matter of ethnography will go down in history, but whether what ethnographers write will be acceptable to historians as source materials. I think yes, but not because it is ethnography.

My first reason is trite. Every age seeks its own history, and so the future historian will seek a history that today's ethnography is unprepared for. And there is no reason why he should be prepared for it. Presumably, ethnographers are concerned with observations that satisfy their own curiosity, are funded by institutions that define their goals in terms of current needs as they perceive them, and write for their contemporary readers. One can hardly expect ethnographers to be other than people of their own time, and as long as they are, they can no more write for the favour of future generations than their contemporary historians can.

My second reason is more substantial, and it arises from reservations that historians tend to hold about their source materials. Because, unlike ethnographers, historians are almost never in direct contact with the people they write about, they draw a sharp distinction between documents that have been used by these people ("primary sources") and other people's descriptions of them ("secondary sources"). For instance, any historian worth his salt would much rather work through an account book himself than rely on an observer's descriptions of how accounts are kept. For this reason, historians will not accept for granted ethnographers' descriptions of native practices. They will want to turn to materials gathered by ethnographers that find their way into museums and archives. They will look for ways and means to re-work the ethnographers' written accounts, and they will be very suspicious of descriptions that are not supported by artefacts, including ethnographers' notes.

This second reservation about what ethnographers write relates to my third, and that deals with what appears to me to be ethnographic practices that historians would, with good reason, find unacceptable. I refer, in particular, to practices related to documentation. For example, ethnographers apparently find it justifiable, in order (so they claim) to protect the identity of their informants, to refer to people and places by pseudonymns. Unfortunately, the practice protects also the ethnographers: how does one check an ethnographer's statement for accuracy when the people and places he describes cannot be identified? Moreover, when one sees that so much of what ethnographers write about is unembarassing and mundane, does one really believe that it is the informants that need the protection? The objection is probably far less serious if ethnographers would document their statements more precisely, but how often is it clear what it is exactly that an ethnographer is told by his informants? In relation to this, I can think of few recent developments as damaging to ethnography as the current practice by academic publishers to discourage footnotes. Historians write in full awareness that each statement may be checked against the records by their colleagues. I have often wondered, as the only people capable of checking ethnographic accounts as they are now written are the people the accounts are about, how many of these accounts will have to be rewritten if they are published, not in English, but in the language that the natives speak. The more of their protective screen ethnographers are prepared to take down, the more attention, I think, historians will be able to give them.

I am prepared to argue that the above reservations are applicable to ethnographers and ethnography of most cultures, but to them I need to add a fourth that is peculiar to studies on China and other literate cultures. It is necessary to add this one specifically because the ethnographer's skill apparently was developed in the recording of illiterate cultures, and it is not clear to me that when they turn to literate ones, ethnographers have made allowance for the difference. How else does one explain the little use that is made of written genealogies, account books, almanacs, land deeds or religious texts in ethnographic studies of Chinese culture? If historians are strictly students of texts, and ethnographers are participant observers, then it seems to me in the study of literate cultures social history and ethnography must blend. One should not be at all surprised that some of the most interesting ethnography being published in recent years has come from social historians writing about medieval and early modern Europe. Unless Chinese ethnographers (of Chinese or Western origin) broaden their scope (so that those of Chinese origin will reach beyond the minorities and those of Western origin will incorporate some historical documents into their study), I think the same will soon be said about China.

So much for the objections, but I do not really want to be negative, and I certainly do not believe that readers of an anthropological bulletin will be convinced that ethnographic accounts will not hold some dominant position in future history writing, whatever I say here. Historians have always been, and will always be, short of records to study. The abundance of government records in the modern world at best supplements, but will not replace, the observations of ethnographers. Ethnographers will hold their own particularly where their skill can be applied to the best advantage, that is, in the study of small communities. But I do wish to go on with more precautions.

I suppose, for historians, ethnographic accounts will be "historical sources", and will be read in the same spirit as other "historical sources" are read, that is, with a strong dosage of skepticism. In this context, the following statement by Edmund Leach is a useful reminder:

> The data which derive from fieldwork are subjective not objective ... Every anthropological observer, no matter how well he/she has been trained, will see something that no other such observer can recognize, namely a kind of harmonic projection of the observer's own personality. And when these observations are "written up" in monograph or any other form, the observer's personality will again distort any purported "objectivity".

Historians have always known that they select their facts by subjective (but not arbitrary) judgement. Some historians may still say that they let the facts speak for themselves, but they know that many a time the facts have spoken differently when they are allowed to do so by different people. I would suppose that ehtnographers are aware of the subjective element in their craft no less than historians. That, of course, would imply that no ethnographer would claim that his study is "just ethnography". Every descriptive account is guided by and builds upon preconceived hypotheses: some observers are better than others because their hypotheses allow greater perception, some are more ready to revise their biases when they see that they are mistaken, and some, quite simply, work harder. I seem to be coming back to an earlier point, and that is, the more clues ethnographers are prepared to leave of the way they work, the more valuable their work is likely to be to historians to come.

Finally, ethnographers will be read, most importantly of all, as samples of the spirit of their age. Why English anthropologists continue to take an intellectual interest in the cultures of people formerly ruled over by England, and why American anthropologists run into the People's Republic of china for what so far seem to be rather superficial studies that have as yet to be related to Chinese culture are subjects that will be of interest to historians of the Western scene as much as of native cultures. What the same historians await is the day when ethnographers from these cultures will begin to visit Europe and North America and publish the results of their observations. That will probably be the next chapter in the history of ethnography.

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Summary of the Year's Activities 1986/87

The beginning of the year 1986/87 saw the departure from Hong Kong of our last Chairman, Hector MacCleod, in March 1986. After many years of happy association with the Society and a year of fruitful activities, Hector left Hong Kong on completion of his contract with the Legal Aid Department.

Hector broke new ground when he was the Chairman as he was the first non-academic elected to the post. Nevertheless, the year under review was one of intensive activities.

On 8 March Dr. R. Irvine of the Department of Geography at Hong Kong University led a tour of the Mai Po Nature Conservation Area.

On 2nd May Professor James Watson of Pittsburgh University gave a lecture on "Feasting in Cantonese Society".

In June Mr. Lee Sheung Yee, District Hygiene Superintendent, spoke on "Chinese Burial Rites and Rituals". Mr. Lee is an authority on this subject. The talk was illustrated with models and other equipment.

In July, through the kindness of the Muslin community in Hong Kong, the Society organised a visit to the Kowloon Mosque. More than 65 members were present. Mr. Eric Peake, a member of the community, gave a most interesting talk on "Islam Culture" which was followed by a tour of the Mosque itself. The whole event took over three hours.

On 6th September, the Society organised a visit to the underground Headquarters used by General Maltby during the defence of Hong Kong in 1941. The party was given a conducted tour of the bunker by Mr. David Russell of the Royal Hong Kong Police Force. The bunker was last used during 1967 during the riots. It was a valuable and memorable experience as the whole structure was due to be demolished for development.

After the visit, members of the Society also visited the Teaware Museum. Staff of the museum presented a colour slide show on Tea and Teaware during the visit.

On the weekend of September 13-14, over 15 members visited Macau. The group had a useful discussion with staff of the Cultural Institute of Macau on the latest cultural activities in Macau. After the discussion, the group was given a most fascinating guided tour by the eminent historian, Father Manuel Teixeira, in the San Jose Seminary and various Chapels and Social Welfare Institutions on Taipa and Coloanne Islands.

Dr. Nicholas Tapp gave a talk on "Miao Religious Beliefs" in October.

In November Dr. Anita Weiss gave a talk on "Women and Work in South and Southeast Asia".

In December, the Society organised two interesting outings, one local and one abroad. In the early part of the month, 10 members visited the Chi Ma Wan Refugee Camp. This was a rare opportunity to see the lives of the Vietnamese Refugess who are being kept in closed camps. Unfortunately, for security reasons, only ten members were allowed.

A few days after the visit, another visit to the Zhaoqing and Shaoguan regions of northern Guangdong Province was organized. The purpose of the visit was to become acquainted with the Pai Yao minority community. The Society is deeply indebted to the Guangdong Provincial Institute of National Minorities who rendered valuable assistance in all the logistical arrangements, and to the Department of Anthropology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong who helped organize the visit.

The last event of the current term was a talk on "Ritual Paper Art in South China" by Dr. Janet Scott. Towards the end of the year, members have been busy organising two significant events which will take place in the new term, that is, the Barbara Ward Memorial Lecture, and a visit to some of the minorities areas in Yunnan.

S-J Chan

Notes On Contributors

Chien Chiao is Chairman of the Department of Anthropology in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He has done fieldwork among the Navajo of Arizona and New Mexico, as well as in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, and has published widely as a result.

David Faure is Lecturer in the Department of History in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He is the recent author of The Structure of Rural Chinese Society (Oxford University Press 1986), and other works.

Nina Jablonski is Lecturer in the Department of Anatomy at the University of Hong Kong, and also works at the Prince Philip Dental Hospital in Hong Kong. She is currently undertaking intensive research on early primate development in China in association with the Institute of Palaeontology, Beijing, and the Institute of Zoology, Kunming.

Diana Martin is a freelance social anthropologist, resident in Hong Kong for nine years. She has worked in the Department of Sociology at the University of Hong Kong, and undertaken research on ghost marriages and spirit mediumship in Hong Kong.

William Newell is Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Sydney University. He is the author of Treacherous Rivers: A Study of Rural Chinese in North Malaya (University of Malaya Press 1962), and besides Malaysia has also worked extensively in India and in Chinese society.

HONG KONG ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The HONG KONG ANTHROPOLOGY BULLETIN aims to provide synopses of current and past ethnographic research, or articles dealing with issues arising from such research, in Hong Kong and related areas, for a general readership. Contributions to a maximum of 3,000 words are invited, and should be double-spaced on A4 paper. Signed articles represent the views of their authors only, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors.

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This issue is indebted to Anna Fung of the Department of Anthropology, Chinese University of Hong Kong, for her editorial assistance.

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