

Ancestors or Ghosts: the Cult of the Dead in a Bai Village in Southwest China

Xue YANG

(Yangzhou University, Jiangsu Province, P. R. China)

Abstract: When it comes to ancestor worship, the basic belief is that the spirit of the dead would affect their living family. However, the cult of the dead in a Bai village in southwest China shows deconstruction and moral reflection of ancestors. From the perspective of social relationships, people separate their ancestors from other families' ancestors who are also recognised as ghosts or uninvited guests. Besides, they divided their deceased relatives into ancestors and ghosts through cultural definition of a good death and bad death, thus they need a bridge rite to help the spirit of the dead in a bad death to be an ancestor. In regard to the netherworld, people wish their deceased relatives go to western heaven at the same time they regard them as suffering ghosts in hell because of their guilty during their lifetime. Moreover, the living family have an obligation to provide and help their dead release from suffering. By examining the attitudes and acts of distinguishing, transforming, and equating between ancestors and ghosts, this article further argues that the cult of the dead in Bai is not only an ethical act of obeisance but also an expression of ideal personhood and a belief in living family as the salvation of the dead.

Key Words: Ancestor worship; Ghosts; Popular religion; Southwest China; Bai

Author: YANG Xue, Yangzhou University, Address: No. 180 Si Wang Ting Rd, Han Jiang District, Yangzhou City, Jiangsu Province, P. R. China. Tel: 18252729369. Email: graceyangxue@yeah.net.

As an important tradition in China, ancestor worship is thought as a cultural background that cast a shadow over the family's structure^[1] and social personality^[2]. Based on field work of Chinese religion in Taiwan since the 1960s, some anthropologists find that there are two other acts of worship for gods and ghosts that have significance in peasant life except for ancestor worship. Among these, David K. Jordan first proposed that the worship of gods, ghosts, and ancestors are the least common denominator among Chinese religion^[3]. Besides, Stephan Feuchtwang claims that gods, ancestors,

[1] Maurice Freedman, "Ancestor Worship: Two Facets of the Chinese Case, in Maurice Freedman", eds., social organization: essays presented to Raymond Firth, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967), 85-104.

[2] 许烺光 Francis L. K. Hsu, 《祖荫下: 中国乡村的亲属, 人格与社会流动》Zu yin xia [Under the Ancestors' Shadow: Kinship, Personality, and Social Mobility in China], 王芄 Wang peng 徐隆德 Xu Longde 译, (台北 Taipei: 南天书局 Nantian shuju [South Company]), 2001, 7-8.

[3] 焦大卫 David K. Jordan, 《神·鬼·祖先》shen gui zuxian [Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors], 丁仁杰 Ding Renjie 译, (台北 Taipei: 联经出版事业股份有限公司 Lianjing chuban shiye gufen youxian gongsi), 2012, 188.

and ghosts correspond to bureaucrat, kinship, and strangers in social counterpart^[4]. He believes that this kind of religious system is a metaphor of the state authority; gods are rulers and judges; ghosts are the supplicants; ancestors are respected natives^[5]. Instead of regarding ancestors and ghosts as agnatic ascendants and everyone else, Arthur P. Wolf claims that a finely graded continuum that extends from ancestors and ghosts and it is the living's obligation rather than descent that determine who could be enshrined on altars as ancestors^[6]. In his observation in San-hsia town, Wolf finds between true ancestors and ghosts are people who contributed to one's line but were not members of the line and people who died as dependents of the line and have no one else to care for them^[7]. Thus, he concluded that ancestor worship is an act of obeisance by showing respect to those one owes obligations.

Based on the fieldwork of a Bai village in southwest China, this article argues that the cultural definition of a good death and bad death and the recognition of the afterworld also affect the distinction and identity of ancestors and ghosts. By contrasting people's attitudes in the family and the netherworld, this article further argues that ancestors, as well as the living individuals, are constructed and defined by culture.

The Introduction of Bai and a Bai village

As a minority nationality centred in Dali Bai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture (DAP) in Yunnan Province, the Bai has more common with the Han than other ethnic groups in southwest China. In the 1940s, Francis L. K. Hsu did his research in west town which was actually a Bai community affiliated to Dali and found people there amalgamated with the Han^[8]. In his book *Under the Ancestors' Shadow*, Hsu regards its culture as prototypes of ancestor worship in Chinese culture. After the ethnic classification project of the 1950s, especially with the development of ethnic tourism in 1990s, the Bai began to construct themselves as a distinguishing nationality from the Han. Nowadays, the trends to acculturation are more stronger than those against on the whole.^[9]

The data in this article are mainly from the interview and participant observation in the biggest village of Bai in DAP called Chou village, just 3.4 miles away from the west town where Hsu once lived. From Jan. 2013 to Jun. 2017, I lived in this village to do fieldwork for 406 days in total. Living under the same roof of a local family, I could easily see how a Bai family regard the spiritual beings in their daily life. Also, I attended most of the rituals and festivals in the village around a year and kept

[4] Stephan Feuchtwang, "Domestic and Communal Worship in Taiwan", in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 105-130.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 128.

[6] Arthur P. Wolf, "Gods, ghosts, and ancestors", in Arthur P. Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 131-182.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 147.

[8] 许烺光 Francis L. K. Hsu, 《祖荫下: 中国乡村的亲属, 人格与社会流动》Zu yin xia [Under the Ancestors' Shadow: Kinship, Personality, and Social Mobility in China], 王芃 Wang peng 徐隆德 Xu Longde 译, (台北 Taipei: 南天书局 Nantian shuju [South Company]), 2001, 16-17.

[9] Colin Mackerras, "Aspects of Bai Culture: Change and Continuity in a Yunnan Nationality". *Modern China*, vol. 14, (1988), 77.

the pace with Bai villagers, which made me understand them deeper.

With a population of about ten thousand and a plantation of only 190 hectares, people in Chou village could not live on farming. Most men have to go to cities nearby as migrant workers in the building industry and leave women to take care of the family, do farm work and get involved in the tourism business. With Butterfly Spring located in the north of the village and ethnic folklore, this village is very famous for ethnic tourism in Dali.

Even though their religious activities inevitably become a tourist attraction, Chou villagers insist on their belief in real life. Almost all villagers claim themselves to be Buddhists while they worship gods from local tutelary spirits, nature deities, and characters in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism in reality. The religious centre in the village is around a temple and two shrines. The gods in the temple are a combination of three religions, such as Sakyamuni of Buddhism, Supreme Lord Laozi of Taoism, Confucius of Confucianism, which they regard as kuan (high officials in central government). Whereas, they regard the gods of local tutelary spirits who once saved the village in two shrines as kuan (cadres in a small village), which means they protect them and take immediate charge of their welfare. According to specific time, they would worship these supernatural beings to supplicate clean and peace for their families' sake in their houses, village, foothill, and lakeside.

Unlike gods, the supernatural governor, ancestors and ghosts are civilian classes and they are also in the charge of gods as the living. Local dead could scarcely become a god because villagers thought they are powerless, which is in accordance with Hsu's description that ancestors are benign^[10]. Although he saw the heterogeneous attitudes that people towards ancestors, Hsu regard ancestors as a prevalent culture and focus on its influences on social personality. Nevertheless, ancestors are multi-dimensional in the family's perspective and the recognition of the afterworld in the Bai village.

The Social Classification of Ancestors and Ghosts Among Families

In Chou village, ancestors belong to a family rather than an individual, which is different from Wolf's observation in San-hsia town. People distinguished ghosts from their ancestors based on the scope of lineage and dead's master. Whether the dead are ancestors or not depends on their position in the patrilineal family. The deceased who are not belong to dead's masters are all ghosts.

There are two kinds of activities for ancestor worship in Chou village, which is based on lineage and families^[11]. Sometimes, larger lineages would divide into small segments to perform ancestor worship because of the ritual's capacity^[12]. In the Bai's festival to offer sacrifices to ancestors or life rites of a lineage member, lineage or segments would play an important part in ancestor worshipping. Nevertheless, the family is the basic unit to perform ancestor worship, and the immediate jural

[10] 许烺光 Francis L. K. Hsu,《祖荫下:中国乡村的亲属,人格与社会流动》Zu yin xia[Under the Ancestors' Shadow: Kinship, Personality, and Social Mobility in China],王芃 Wang peng 徐隆德 Xu Longde 译,(台北 Taipei:南天书局 Nantian shuju[South Company]),2001,209.

[11] The only ancestral hall in this village that has ever existed belongs to the Duan lineage, but it did not function as ancestral hall after the elimination of lineage authority in the 1950s.

[12] 何菊 He Ju,《仪式容量:当代宗族裂变的新模式》Yishi rongliang: dangdai zongzu liebian de xin moshi[Ritual Capacity: a New Pattern of Contemporary Lineage Segmentation Based on the Data of Duan Lineage in Zhoucheng, a Bai Village of Dali, Yunnan Province],《民族研究》Minzu yanjiu[Ethno-National Studies], No. 2,(北京 Beijing:社会科学文献出版社 Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe [Social Sciences Academic Press],2013),54-59.

superiors are more personal and individual than in the lineage's worship^[13]. Every morning, most families would begin a day with lighting three incense sticks for heaven, earth, and ancestors in their house. Besides, a family would visit the gravesite of ancestors in the third lunar month and tenth lunar month, venerate the dead from 1st to 13th in the seventh lunar month, releasing loach to get merits for ancestors in 23rd in the seventh lunar month and so on. Therefore, the distinguish of ancestors and ghosts are more clear and close in the family's perspective.

For independent family, the dead are ancestors to the dead's masters sizhu who are the deceased's immediate relatives and ghosts to other family members. The dead's masters include the deceased's sons, daughters-in-law, daughters, nephews, nieces, nieces-in-law, and grandchildren. Sometimes an ancestor would give a dream to a living master, such as his son, nephew, or daughters, asking some clothes or food. An informant said to me, "I had a cousin who died in this house. He had everything except shoes. My son told me the other day that he dreamed his uncle was digging stones without shoes, and blood was coming out of his feet. Then my son and his wife burned some straw sandals in ancestor worship day in the seventh lunar month." For a married woman, she should worship his husband's ancestors, and she still had an obligation to bring some paper clothes, paper money to show respect to his father's ancestors.

The dead is an ancestor for agnatic descent's family but a ghost to another family. If a relative or neighbours died, people in the same village would go to extend condolence. After that, they would burn a straw fire and go across it to drive away ghosts before entering his own family. Occasionally, people would go around stove god after showing respect to the deceased. As a sign of family division and family establishment, stove god also helps family drive away from the ghosts that do not belong to their family.

When confronted ghosts, Chou villagers look upon them as the other villagers' ancestors and treat them as uninvited guests. Villagers think that the dead spirit that does not belong to one's own family should be treated as a guest, because he may be the ancestor of others' family. If children cry all night long or a family member is depressed while the doctor cannot recognise the cause, it is said a ghost may accidentally enter their family—that need to call one's living soul back and send off the guest, which are obscure words of driving ghosts away from their house.

It needs several steps to see the uninvited guest off. A woman in Chou village had a stomachache and went to the hospital because of kidney stone. She still felt dispirited after that. Then her family went for asking a witch, and they were told that their neighbour's spirit tangled her and they need to take some rituals. Firstly, they asked the witch to burn some paper money for the king of hell in Dongyue Temple in Dali. Secondly, the witch helped call her soul back with rice, salt, tea, incense sticks, paper money, and an egg in the crossroad behind her house. When the egg in her hand is erected, it means the woman's living soul is coming back. This same egg would be eaten by the woman in the next day. Besides, the family burnt paper money and incense to stove god according to the witch's instruction. Last but not the least, her family prepared a table for the guest with three bowls of rice soup, two joss sticks, four paper clothes, an egg, a duck egg, a bowl of rice, four paper

[13] Maurice Freedman, "Ancestor Worship: Two Facets of the Chinese Case, in Maurice Freedman", eds., social organization: essays presented to Raymond Firth, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967), 87.

bags filled with rice, salt, tea, and paper money. After showing respect and providing the feast to the guest, the host struck the peach tree branches and willow branches to drive the guest away. Through these rituals, they believed that they had called the living's soul back and driven away from the ghost who does not belong to their family.

In short, the distinction between ancestors and ghosts represents different families' relatives. In Bai village, it depends on the scope of dead's masters. Although people still honour their ancestors who are not of patrilineal descent, they would not write their name on their ancestral tablets. On this basis, the boundary between ancestor and ghost is a continuum from the paternal family having obligations to the paternal family having almost no obligations.

The Cultural Boundary of Ancestors and Ghosts in the Family

In addition to separating their ancestors from families, villagers also identify ancestors of a good death from ghosts among their family members, which mainly depend on the cultural definition. The difference between a good death and bad death shows the gap between the individual and the ideal expectation of family.

Good Death or Bad Death

Death is always as unpleasant as personal trauma. However, there are good death or bad death in public culture. Whether death is good or not depends on factors such as the age of death, the way of death, and the place of death. In Bai village, a good death of passing away means that a man died peacefully in his own house, in old age, and his eldest son's arms. After the funeral and a series of rituals held by the family, the deceased become an ancestor.

The real-life is always complex, and villagers have to face unexpected death in the village. Bad death means that the deceased died young, without descendants, and outside the family. In this condition, people thought the deceased would become lonely and wild ghosts [gu hun ye kui]. The word lonely means that the dead person has no descendants to worship him, and wild expresses that the deceased is not embedded in family structure.

If a child died, people regard it as the reborn of wandering and homeless ghosts in the hell. Chou villagers believe that if some wandering and homeless ghosts want some food and clothes, they would sneak away from hell and reincarnate in some family. As soon as they get some food and clothes, the children would die. In this situation, the relatives would send the coffin off quickly, and the funeral is also simple. The family would not write the children's name in the ancestral tablet. However, it is not to say villagers would not remember the dead. They just could not show kindness for the dead in the home and only venerating it in Jingwu Temple, an orphanage or asylum for pacifying the dead in Tsang mountain.

If young men or women died without married or have no descendants, their close relatives would write their name in their ancestral tablet and give provision for them. A man in Bai village worshipped his father's sister and brother who died in the 40s and 20s without descendants. He said, "I write my uncle's name and my aunt's name in my ancestral tablet because they are my family and did not die in their childhood."

If a man with descendants died outside the house, such as died from traffic or died of suicide, his name would be written in ancestral tablet while his coffin would not be placed inside the family house. Still, there are two situations. If the man died in the village, the coffin could be placed outside the family gate. If the man died outside the village, his coffin should not be placed inside the village and should be put in the roadside or field. In this situation, people would bury him in the mountain instead of in the cemetery. Although the name of the dead could be written in the ancestral tablet, the deceased would become a ghost. The dead were thought to have no family to give provisions for him and would become wandering and homeless ghosts just like beggars.

Bridge Ritual and Beggars' Day

If one died outside the house, the dead's spirit could not come into the house because of the family's threshold, a protection for a family from ghosts and evils. Almost every family in Bai village has some family members who died of bad death and thus became lonely manes or ghosts. It is unacceptable for the living descendants to think of their relatives becoming a wandering ghost outside their home. Bai society has a bridge ritual which could bring the wandering ghosts back home and become ancestors. Bridging is to help the spirits of relatives in bad death to cross the family's threshold to become ancestors. They would ask the Buddhist in the village to build a bridge on the threshold to help the deceased relatives return home to become ancestors and enjoy the incense of the descendants.

The Buddhist would build a bridge after sending the dead's body off. The bridge is made up of three upturned backless benches across the family's threshold like an arch bridge. The legs of the benches label four white or green papers written upper golden bridge, middle silver bridge, lower iron bridge, and the ninth rank bridge. All the children kneel outside the threshold, crying loudly for their father or mother to come back home. At the same time, the eldest son put a measure for the grain loaded with corn, a mirror, a towel, a comb, and a white streamer above the bridge covered by a piece of white cloth and move toward as the Buddhist instruct him. With the Buddhist chanting and guiding, the ghosts would come across the bridge, get food and clean up, and finally become an ancestor of this family.

After the bridge ritual, villagers would ask a sorcerer or witch assess whether their wandering ghosts coming back home. If it did not succeed, they would build a bridge for a second or even third time until their wandering ghosts come home.

Although people sometimes died in the home, whether his spirits stay in home or not is unsure. A young man who worked in Kunming city fell into a coma and was sent to his home in Dali. After one day and night, he died in his own home. His mother fell into great grief and also worried about his son's spirit, for she thought that maybe his son's soul had been lost when he fell into a coma in Kunming and thus did not remain in their home. Therefore, they ask the Buddhist to hold a bridge ritual, and they felt a little comfort after that.

Besides, people also plead the king of hell for their relatives who died abnormally to ease their guilty. People believe the ruler of hell would show mercy to the ghosts on his birthday in lunar March 28th. The days from 27th to 29th in lunar March are also called Beggars' Day because there are hundreds of beggars and handicapped people who rely on begging gathering outside the Dongyue Temple in Dali. When Bai villagers bring incense, paper clothes, and money to the temple and cry for

their dead who died abnormally, they would also give beggars money and rice along the way. The temple is full of crying and grief because people think their ancestors are also suffering from pains and hungry like the beggars and the disabled.

Whether the dead are ancestors or ghosts to their descendants, depend on cultural definitions. The cultural view of a good death and bad death divides the deceased family members into ancestors and ghosts, which reflects the ideal individual in Bai that a man should be embedded in the family relationship and his house from birth to death. According to the ideal personality, people have to accept that their beloved could not become ancestors in their home. At the same time, Bai society allows people to hold a bridge ritual and bring the ghosts back home to be ancestors. Moreover, they can ask forgiveness of guilty for their ancestors who are not at home in places such as Jingwu Temple and Dongyue Temple, reflecting the flexible interaction between cultural frameworks and individual practices.

Becoming a Ghost to Hell in the Funeral

From the perspective of the family, people distinguish ancestors and ghosts. However, when it concerns the imagination of afterworld, they tend to mix ancestors with ghosts. In desire, villagers wish their dead to go to western heaven, while they thought them as ghosts to go to the hell in practice, which was also found by Hsu^[14].

As soon as an older man died in his eldest son's arms, people would take a series of religious activities to comfort both the dead and the living. From the time of death to the time of bringing out the coffin, the family would prepare the way for the deceased from the world of the living to the world of hell.

For the living, some people inform this event to their lineage and people in the same village group, and these people would extend their condolence and help hold the funeral before sending the dead off. At the same time, people help decorate a funeral space in the main hall of the house and take out the white linen from the coffin. In the following several days, the main hall is a place for the coffin and the mourning people.

In Bai villagers' view, when a man died, his spirit and soul still exist and would start a journey to hell. The day before sending the body off is time to send his spirit off. At about 18 o'clock after dinner, all the sons, daughters, nephews, and nieces are mourning for the dead and wearing white linen. They kneel before the coffin and a Buddhist guide them on how to behave. The Buddhist chant the funeral oration near the crossroad, a bridge, or a temple and shrine, with all the relatives kneeling down and women crying. It is to notify the gods of bridge and roads to open the way of the dead to the hell. At the same time, it provides a chance of rehearsing for the relatives to ensure that they may perform rightly in another day.

Regarding death as being arrested by servants in hell which is like a jail, people take measures to

[14] 许娘光 Francis L. K. Hsu,《祖荫下:中国乡村的亲属,人格与社会流动》Zu yin xia[Under the Ancestors' Shadow: Kinship, Personality, and Social Mobility in China],王芃 Wang peng 徐隆德 Xu Longde 译,(台北 Taipei:南天书局 Nantian shuju[South Company]),2001,135.

help their dead. With a handkerchief on the face of the dead, the son would plug a silver ingot into the jujube and then put it into the mouth of the dead because they think all the property of the dead would be plundered by the servants of the hell. With hidden silver ingot in the jujube in the mouth, the servant in the hell would not notice so that the dead man could keep some property. When the dead feel thirsty in the way to the netherworld, he could spit out the jujube and use the silver ingot to change a soup with Mengp'o who is a female pedlar in the netherworld. As soon as the dead drink the soup, he would forget all the things in the past.

Before going into hell, the dead would assure their family's memory for him. From the day of death to the day of sending coffin off, the immediate relatives of the dead would make rice porridge within the head of a pig, pettitoes, and chicken claw for the dead after midnight. The children of the dead would bring the rice porridge outside the gate and kneel crying for their mother or father, with burning joss sticks and paper money. There is a terrace in the hell from which the dead could see his house at last glance. When the dead see his sons and grandsons hold a rice porridge is crying for him, he would feel comforted.

To ensure the journey to hell, the relatives also prepare the luggage for the dead. It is a straw mat with the dead's daily necessities, such as clothes, shoes, wash supplies, pillow, cane, ashtray, etc. People would roll up it and put it in the threshold against the gate, with men's in right and women's in left. In the day of sending off the coffin, the sons in mourning would bring this luggage out and burn it in the place of farewell at about 4 a. m.

Except for the luggage, the family would make a bowl of rice called begging bowl for the dead as food in his way. The eldest grandson would take charge to hold the begging bowl in the funeral rite. Villagers said the dead would be hungry all the time without the begging bowl, "my uncle died of hungry in the 1960s, and we sent him off without the begging bowl because we were all short for food. After then, the witch told us that she saw this ancestor of us have no food every day. In west town, we are also told the same information about the hungry uncle by a wizard."

Besides, the eldest grandson also needs to hold a white streamer with the Chinese characters "Namah Amitabha the Western Heaven Guide Promotes the Body and Spirit of xxx" [南无阿弥陀佛西方极乐世界接引导师提拔亡人 XX 之形魂]. Although it is written that the dead are going to the western heaven, villagers regard it as the pass to the hell, "the begging bowl is the food on the way, the straw luggage is for camping, and the streamer is the permit letter of introduction. If you are arrested by the servants in hell, you must have food, equipment, and the pass. If you do not have this three, you will become wandering ghosts." To prepare these three things is the responsibility of the relatives.

People send the coffin off in the day of divination after the feast at about 12—13 o'clock. As soon as the coffin is brought off, the eldest son would come back and walk three times around the hall, and then throw some coins backwards to send away the ghosts in the funeral hall. In the procession, the funeral band is in ahead, followed by the generation of grandsons holding colourful streamers, then the Tongjing Fellowship^[15] who are playing the music of lament, and after them are the man, the sons and nephews of the dead who bend over a piece of white linen tied with the coffin.

[15] A religious organization mainly consisted of older men in Bai society.

After the coffin is daughters-in-law, nieces-in-law, daughters, nieces and women villagers in sequence. The immediate women should cry louder to show their sorrow and love. In the way to the tomb, the sons-in-law and nephews would offer sacrifices on the route of the procession. In the place of the farewell, the immediate relatives and women go back to the funeral home while the other men help lift the coffin to the tomb. What's more, the relatives would bring meals to the tomb and burn the paper money for the dead for three days.

After sending coffin off, relatives would ask the Buddhist to chant for the dead the next day. In 12—13 o'clock, the men and women of the clan would go to the shrines to worship the local god. Because they think when a man died, he is going to see the local god and the local god would send the dead to the king of the hell. This day is also for commemorating and pacifying the soul of the dead in the house.

In the following lunar March or lunar October which is the month for worshipping the dead, the relatives should go to the cemetery to make a meal and dine with the dead just like he is alive. In the following first lunar June 13th, the clan would get together to burn some provisions for the dead and ask the Buddhist to chant for the dead and then go to worship the local gods. For three years the sons would live in mourning. And after that period, the sons would hold a ritual to get off the mourning. They would invite the clan and friends and ask the Buddhist to chant for the dead, with worshipping the local god in the afternoon. After this ritual, his mourning period is over, and he could go everywhere he wants. It's also a period that the dead is fading away from their living world and become a family's ancestor.

When a man died, people thought that he would have a journey leaving home for the hell and thus it is unpleasant but unavoidable. Except for preparation in the funeral, they would have to assure their dead that they would always provide and remember them after that. Through remembering activities, the deceased is not really departed with them and there are connections between the descendants and ancestors in hell.

Salvation From Living Family for Ghosts in the Netherworld

Regarding ancestors and ghosts as the same in the netherworld, people in the Bai village would provide and remember them in the same way. From 1st to 15th in lunar June, Bai people regard this half a month as ghosts' vocation in the hell and their ancestors would come back home during this time. In the morning of lunar June 1st, scriptures mother (jingmu) of Lotus Pond Fellowship would get together in the local shrines to chant the scriptures of opening the gate of the hell to help pick up their ancestors. At the same time, villagers in houses clean up the ancestral tablet and put it in the main hall with some offerings like fruits and flowers. In the evening of this day, every family in Chou village would make dinner for inviting their ancestors from hell to come into the home to spend holidays. Generally, the hostess of a family would bring the dinner outside the gate and kneel to invite ancestors, accompanying with the host and children burning incense sticks and paper money. They will call their ancestors name and welcome them to come back home.

Both the ancestors of good death and ghosts of bad death would be provided meals in the

following 14 days. The family would take every meal to ancestral tablet first, and then they begin to eat themselves. In every odd number evening (that is June 1st, June 3rd, June 5th, June 7th, June 9th, June 11th), the family would burn some paper clothes and paper money in the house calling their ancestors to come to get provisions. Besides, villagers also go outside the house and burn paper clothes and paper money for their relatives who could not enter the house for bad death and became the wandering ghosts. Just as an old man puts it, “if a family has some members who died outside the house, and the dead could not go back home and then become wandering ghosts. So from 1st to 15th in lunar June, the family would burn some paper money and paper clothes and bring some food for these ghosts outside the gate. Even though the ghosts did not belong to the family, we consider that maybe they belong to our neighbours or other families. So every family would burn the provision outside the gate even some family do not have members died outside the house. Just like a beggar come to our house, we would give some to him. If the dead could not come back to their home, they are very pitiful. We all would do like this.”

When concerning to distinction of one family's relatives who died outside their house and other family's ghosts, there are conflict behavior about provision. Some people would spread a circle with lime powder and then burn offerings inside it. They said it is to keep their ancestors of bad death from other ghosts to get the provisions. Some villagers are against these behaviours, “our ancestors are also ghosts and the line would not only block the other ghosts but also block our ancestors.” Almost in all rituals concerning ancestors worship, people would benefit the ancestors both inside and outside the house, and others' ancestors which could be called guests or ghosts.

When it comes to June 13th (for the dead from the last year to this year) and June 14th (for all ancestors) in lunar, villagers will not wander outside the house in the evening because the ancestors' vocation is over and it is time for them to come back to the hell. With so many provisions, they could not carry up and may catch somebody to help them. Therefore, villagers would stay at home or coming back home earlier than ever in case of being caught by other family's ancestors. If someone is tangled by the ghosts, he would lie in bed feeling cold and could not speak because his spirit and soul was caught to carry provisions. In this situation, people have to find a witch to call his soul back as soon.

Besides, people believe their ancestors or ghosts are suffering from punishment in hell. So they would help them to ease punishment by doing good deeds and pleading to the King of the Hell (yan wang ye). In the legends of hell, people who have no guilty would go to the western heaven and people who have guilty would be brought to hell to be on trial. In reality, villagers said there are no people who are good enough to go to heaven.

Therefore, people usually do not pray to their ancestors because ancestors are just ghosts which rely on the living family to provide them instead of bringing blessings. People tend to think there is no hotel and restaurant in the hell, and the dead may feel afraid and lonely, what they depend on are the living family's provisions and comfort.

In a word, ancestors and ghosts are regarded as the same in the public perspective, but different in people's relationship. On the one hand, people wish their loved ones who have departed to go to Western Heaven. With good intentions, the family members hold a series of rites to help the dead transforming into an ancestor. On the other hand, what they act in the ritual exposed that they

thought the deceased was going to the hell as a ghost. They pretend their loved ones to be in Heaven as ancestors, while they acted that their loved ones are in the hell as ghosts. In this sense, ancestors and ghosts are the same.

Family is not only a place that provides food and clothes regularly for ancestors but also a mediate for ancestors' salvation to the gods in hell. It sounds like through death, people leave the family to the jail instead of western heaven. Therefore, ghosts are also ancestors and ancestors are beggars; what they want are just food and clothes. If they have a perpetual family to provide them, they would be pacified; otherwise, they are beggars for another family.

Conclusion

The clarification and identity between ancestors and ghosts in Bai village illustrates ancestors are also under the shadow of culture which defines both the living world and afterworld. From the perspective of the family, one family's ancestors are another family's ghosts or guests and it is the family as dead's master that provide food and clothes to ascendants. Besides, whether the deceased is an ancestor or a ghost to one's family, depend on the death is good or not in Bai culture. Although people would still honour their relatives who died as bad death, they thought them as lonely and wild ghosts that need to transformation into real ancestors by bridge ritual. Nevertheless, a family is not only the harbour of the living but also the dependent of the dead. In regard to the netherworld, however, people mix their ancestors with ghosts in hell. In the funeral, they wish their ancestors go into western heaven in desire while they regard them as ghosts go to hell in practice. Through the provision and good deeds, the family could alleviate ancestors' suffering. The multi-dimension of ancestors in Bai village illuminates the contradictory attitudes toward death among the Bai and also in general Chinese culture.

中文题目:

祖先或鬼: 中国西南白族的死亡观

作者: 杨雪, 扬州大学社会发展学院, 讲师; 通讯地址: 江苏省扬州市邗江区四望亭路 180 号, 中国。电话: 18252729369, 电子邮件: graceyangxue@yeah.net

摘要: 相信去世亲人的灵魂存在并影响在世子孙, 是祖先崇拜信仰的基本观念。而在中国西南的大理白族村落, 当地人对亲人去世后成为“祖先”还是“鬼”的问题上态度暧昧。在社会关系方面, 人们从宗族和家庭角度区分了“祖先”与“鬼”; 在文化中, 人们根据死亡情况区分了家族中符合文化期待的“好的死亡”的“祖先”, 以及不符合文化理想而“死得不好”的“鬼”, 但后者仍可借助“搭桥”等仪式由“鬼”进入家庭成为“祖先”。在死后世界认知方面, 人们一方面希望自己的“祖先”前往“西天极乐世界”, 但在丧葬仪式中又将其看作“鬼”前往地狱受生前罪行的惩罚, 需要在世亲人在纪念仪式中供给衣食、积德减罪。白族村民对“祖先”与“鬼”的区分、转化与混同, 体现了中国西南白族的祖先崇拜不仅是一种礼仪表达, 也是理想人观的呈现, 并彰显出后世子孙对于“祖先”的救赎意义。

关键词: 祖先崇拜; 祖先; 鬼; 家庭; 白族;