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The Competition for Gifts: The Social Mechanism of the Revival of Popular Religion – An Ethnographic Study of Fu Village in Eastern Zhejiang

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Abstract: This article uses the “gift paradigm” to understand the social mechanism of the revival of popular religion in developed rural areas. In eastern Zhejiang, peasants burn “Buddha paper [money]” (*fozhi*)¹ as a gift when making vows and praying to deities. They consider the fulfillment of their prayers repayment by the deities. The reciprocity between human and deity forms a chain of return gifts, with the household as the unit and the year as the interval, which is permeated with affection and morality. In recent years the economic growth of rural economies in eastern Zhejiang has synchronized with social diversification. Village upper classes, which are the most sensitive to risk, have become the main bodies of faith consumption, purchasing masses of Buddha paper or even hiring people to chant scriptures. Their potlatch-style gift display has led to imitation by other classes. Different classes have gone into intense competition over the degree of intimacy with the deities. The competition for symbolic capital is the driving force of the constant expansion of popular religious activities in this area. The rapid growth of Buddha paper consumption has made it impossible for household providers who offer ritual services to meet the demand. They therefore convene older people to form scripture-recitation groups to enlarge their supplies. The use of scripture chanting (*nianfo*, literally “reciting Buddhist texts”) results in a redistribution of superfluous wealth in villages to their

middle and lower classes, via acquaintance networks. Everyday practices of eastern Zhejiang villagers show that popular religious activities in their society have a self-contained logic that has brought about an expansion in the competition for intimacy with deities. Society, on the other hand, has achieved integration in the circle of gift exchange between human and deity. Although the holistic view of the “gift paradigm” is the key to unlocking this popular religion revival, both the “power paradigm” and the “society paradigm” of gift exchange are indispensable in understanding the nature of the relationship in local popular religion.

Keywords: religious revival, social mechanism, gift exchange, social stratification

Question and Literature

Secularization theory, which traditional sociology of religion has used to predict that modernization will lead to religious downfall, cannot explain the continuation and expansion of religion (Berger 1997, 974). The paradigm having shifted, new secularization theory approaches this from the secularization of religion itself and internal reform, emphasizing doctrines and the organization of religion that has broken away from a strong exterior structure and turned faith and religious activities into private, personal business, as well as the reforms and reinventions of different sects that cater to the needs of their followers. Religious diversity has brought about an overall flourishing of religion (Fan 2005; Hu 2013). However, the new secularization theory resulting from the experience of Christian societies in the West since World War II, especially the United States, has encountered problems in being applied to Chinese societies (Lu 2008). Popular religion in Chinese society is not exclusively religion for salvation, as in the Western context. It is mundane and plural and permeates everyday life.

1 Although *fo* literally means “Buddha,” in the local dialect of Zhejiang it is better understood as a generic term for “deity,” including Buddha. – Trans.

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In his classic study of Chinese religion, C. K. Yang (2007, 270–74) calls popular religion in traditional Chinese society “diffused religion,” which is diffused throughout families, lineages, communities, and guilds; integrates secular institutions through rituals; and gains space by using the effective functions of secular institutions. It was precisely because of this diffused nature, he believed, that the revival of the religious dimensions of secular institutions would be almost impossible when those secular institutions to which popular religion attached itself declined. However, reality did not follow this prediction. With the rise of the fluid migrant economy and amid the grand changes in villages in contemporary China, ancestor worship and traditional village communities are facing decline. It is not uncommon to see stripping at funerals. On the other hand, official statistics and investigations by researchers all indicate that all sorts of folk temples and shrines, as well as the masses who pour into those temples and shrines, surrounded by smoke coiling up from burning incense, are constantly increasing (Chen and Liu 2012; Meng, Gao, and Zhu 2010; Ye 2009).

Regarding the “unexpected” development of religion in rural areas, scholars have three major interpretive schemes, which can be summarized as market competition theory, social demand theory, and policy space theory. The first is the application and expansion of religious market theory in the China case. It considers the rural religious arena as a market. Various religions compete against one another, striving to provide better faith products, more convenient means of dissemination, and more effective organizations. Such competitions have resulted in the development of relatively better organized religion and the decline of less organized religion (Lu, Johnson, and Stark 2008; Ruan, Zheng, and Liu 2013). Yang Fenggang (2006) uses “triple-color religious market theory” to explain this development. He concludes that reinforcing religious control leads to the complication of the religious market, forcing religious activities to move from a legal red market to a semilegal gray market or even an illegal black market.

Social demand theory imitates the research approach of the new secularization theory with a focus on understanding the inner worlds of peasants in a transitional period. Researchers have started from the basic subject of “the individualization of Chinese society” (Yan 2012), emphasizing the dissolution of mutual aid networks, the decline of public life, and the desertification of public culture in rural areas (Wu 2014; Yang and Chen 2011; Ruan, Zheng, and Liu 2010). With the decline of the village community, the disadvantaged in villages seek spiritual

support through conversion to religion while facing various survival risks and life events, forming a new sense of belonging, emotional identification, and construction of self-esteem in order to release huge psychological pressures (Gui 2013; Chen 2012; Chen and Liu 2012).

Policy space theory stems from studies of multiple religious modernities and is embedded in the “state-society” frame. Its basic idea is that the adjustment in religious policies in the “Reform and Opening Up” era and the modes of operation of grassroots organizations in rural areas provided enough space for religious development (Bi 2001; He and Chen 2005). In some cases, grassroots organizations became driving factors of religious development. In the processes of contacting overseas Chinese, attracting investment, developing tourism, seeking recognition as intangible cultural heritage, and so forth, the state attempted to use cultural religious symbols for certain political and economic purposes, whereas local elites borrowed state symbols to reconstruct popular religion (Chau 2006; Gao 2006; Jing 2013).

However, these previous explanations have some imperfections. First, as noted above, religious market theory, which grew out of the sociological study of Christianity, encountered difficulty in trying to adapt to the nonexclusive religions of Chinese societies (Lu 2008). Even though it explains the rapid dissemination of rural Christianity, it lacks explanatory power regarding the revival of local religion with relatively low organization and without a systematic doctrine or clergy. The practicality and historicity of Chinese religion also determine that religious behaviors are not based on instrumental rationality (Fan 2008). Second, social demand theory attempts to understand entire villages in transition in order to interpret the development of rural religion. But empirical studies have changed the unit of analysis and become psychological-style reductions of peasants’ individual motivations for participation. However, what is more important than the psychological motives of followers is how the individual needs of villagers can turn into continuing religious behaviors at the collective level. There is an issue of social mechanism that one cannot avoid when interpreting religious revival. Moreover, religious policy should be considered as a background to religious change, which itself cannot provide an explanation of the dynamics of religious development. It cannot explain why, with the same background, the structural change of rural residents is bigger than that of urbanites. It cannot explain either why “religious craze” is more apparent in some developed rural areas than others. Also, the dual structure of “state and society” easily

reduces religious change to the interaction of political power and religious groups and obscures complicated social processes in religious practices.

To deeply understand “self-contained” village religion in peasants’ lifeworlds, we should not simplify religion as “economy” or “politics”: studying religion has to return to society and to religion itself (Liang 2015, 179). The reason that previous studies have reduced religion to commodity or power lies in two essential paradigms in the social sciences – individualism and holism. The former is premised on the idea that individual reasoning existed prior to society, whereas the latter assumes that structure comes ahead of the individual. To break through the dichotomy of those two, we have to return to religion itself. Therefore, the gift paradigm, originating from the principle of the construction of social bonds and also called “the third paradigm,” will be an inspirational scheme.

The gift paradigm is important in revealing the irreducibility of religion in society. “The exchange of merit or forced distribution alone could not establish the solidarity that social order needs, and social solidarity cannot exist without affection and morality. Also, religion is always closely tied to morality” (Ji 2009, 10). Returning to the gift paradigm means returning to the vantage point of the sociology of religion – the construction and expression of human-deity relations – to rethink religious transformations and to search for the coordination mechanisms of society in the web of obligations that people have voluntarily established (Li 2010; Yang 2009). If we construe “gift” abstractly as a medium that enables “coming” and “going,” “repayment” and “compensation” between human and deity, it is not difficult to discover that peasants’ worlds are full of reciprocity and anticipation between human and deity. Villagers’ sending and returning gifts and the protection and blessing of deities form a spreading stream of gifts. Making vows, praying, and anticipating “manifestations of efficacy” in yearly intervals constitute basic patterns of village religious life. In the gift paradigm, peasants’ religious life presents itself in a lively and processual way, which goes beyond the static and typological description of Chinese religion, and its comparison with others, and into the level of abstracting the social mechanisms of rural religious transformation.

This article uses the gift paradigm as a theoretical reference to reinterpret religious revival in rural China, based on an understanding of the social foundation of religious transformation. Between July and September 2014, we carried out residential investigation in Fu village of Cixi city, Zhejiang Province. We discovered that scripture chanting had recently surged in rural eastern Zhejiang, where the trade of “Buddha paper” had also

appeared, which prompted us to wonder whether in Buddha paper – a gift that villagers burn for deities – we could find a secret mechanism of this expansion of popular religious activities.

Gift Exchange: Reciprocity between Humans and Deities

Buddha Paper: Gift Burned for Deities

Rural eastern Zhejiang is near the Buddhist sacred site Mount Putuo, so orthodox Buddhism has influenced its popular religion. Most statues of divinities in various local temples are bodhisattvas. But they also have other deities, such as Highest Elder Lord (Taishang Laojun), the God of Wealth (Caishen), the local deity Princess Shengshan (Shengshan niangniang), Judge Bao (Baogong), and even Chairman Mao. Villagers need to burn Buddha paper – yellow paper with signs of Buddhism – in everyday worship, yearly rituals of the four seasons, and ancestor worship.² As C. Fred Blake (2005) has said, paper money plays a pivotal role in the rituals of Chinese popular religion. With it, concrete existence and nonconcrete existence are able to communicate with each other. These rituals start with the lighting of candles. Burning incense symbolizes the establishment of connections between the worlds of yin and yang. To reinforce these connections, people offer sacrifices of food and then burn incense as gift, which symbolizes separation. Finally, fireworks mark the end of the ritual. During these rituals, the more elaborate the preparation of the paper money and other offerings, the more familiar the sacrificers are with the imagined subjects.

² Paper money was created with rites of sacrifices in ancient times. It is closely tied to ancestor worship and beliefs in spirits. Burning paper money became popular in the Tang dynasty, thanks to the advocacy of Buddhism at that time. Buddhist monasteries, for instance, held the Ulambana ceremony every year, when people strung together paper money, paper humans, and paper horses and incinerated them in incense burners for the dead to retrieve and use after the ceremony. In the Song dynasty, paper money was brought into royal rites of sacrifices. Local society eventually created the custom of “consigning money” (*jiku*) – that is, burning paper money or performing Buddhist rites in payment to underworld officials while one is still alive in order to use them after death. After the Qing dynasty, burning paper money became popular in local society. People printed “afterlife chants” (Sukhavati Vyuhā Dharani) on paper money and burned it in monasteries. See Xia 2013.

In the folk culture in rural eastern Zhejiang, numinous power must be conferred on Buddha paper through scripture chanting: only with the reciting of scriptural texts over Buddha paper and its burning to deities and ancestors can one get protection and blessings. Otherwise it is no different from ordinary paper. Because of this, scripture chanting is called “efficacy conferring.”³ While burning Buddha paper in front of statues of divinities, villagers pray and make vows to them. Buddha paper burned while making vows or praying is just a gift to deities. In the year that follows, the realization of these prayers (called “manifestation of efficacy”) is the deities’ repayment of their followers. One year’s vows and prayers are closely intertwined with those of the next year, all which are both repayment for the bestowals of deities and the sending of gifts to deities again. In this fashion, with the year as the interval, villagers’ sending and returning of gifts and the protection and blessings of deities form a continuous stream of gifts. Moreover, making vows, praying, and anticipating “manifestations of efficacy” in yearly intervals constitute a basic pattern of village religious life.

Circulation of Buddha Paper

For villagers asking for the protection and blessing of deities, producing and obtaining numinous gifts is the core of their daily religious activity. According to the testimony of some older people in Fu village, the production of Buddha paper was relatively simple during the collective era. Scripture chanting to “confer efficacy” (*fuling*) on Buddha paper took place in households. Older people would beat wooden fish and repeatedly chant “Amitābha” in free time to accomplish “efficacy conferring.” Consecrated Buddha paper was only for oneself. It is a widespread practice for acquaintances and friends to send Buddha paper as gifts to one another, but this does not involve real money. On holidays, it is common for friends and relatives to borrow Buddha paper in cases of emergency. But if someone asks for real money for this, it will damage their reputation.

³ *Ling*, “efficacy,” is a concept in Chinese popular religion that is worth exploration. Zhao Xudong argues that *ling* in efficaciousness (*lingxing*), efficacious response (*lingyan*), and manifesting efficacy (*xianling*) is a “concrete connection immediately established in the triangle structure of the self of the ‘pilgrim,’ the medium as an other, and transcendent yet less visible spirits” (2013, 21), which is different from the epistemology tradition of Western rationalism. “Efficacy” is people’s instantaneous recognition of supernatural power.

In the 1980s, popular religion in eastern Zhejiang revived. Scripture chanting slowly moved beyond the household. In the 1990s, the occasions, frequency, and amount of burning Buddha paper increased. The phenomenon of hiring people to recite the applicable scriptures appeared and expanded. Since 2000, Buddha paper that is consecrated (*nianhao*, literally “chanted”) has been available for sale. In addition to traditional Chinese-calendar and “red and white events” (*hongbai xishi*, referring to weddings and funerals, respectively), opening factories and shops, buying cars, and so on require the burning of Buddha paper. The types and prices of Buddha paper also increase with the level of sophistication of the Buddha chanting activities.⁴ The greater the number of participants, the longer the scripture chanting, and the harder the scriptures, the more efficacious the Buddha paper is believed to be and the higher its price. The types of Buddha paper are classified according to factors such as the number, age, surname, Chinese zodiac sign, and hour of labor of the chanters. Different Buddha papers also have different marks (Table 1).

Table 1: Common types of Buddha paper.

Name	Production process	Chanter payment
Four-Person, Eight-Surname Buddha	Four people who have different surnames and whose spouses have different surnames (for a total of eight) chant scriptures for four days	Two Buddhas (bundles of consecrated Buddha paper), each worth 120 yuan
Ten-Person, Five-Hundred-Year-Old Buddha	Ten people whose ages total between 500 and 505 years old chant for ten days	Two Buddhas, each worth 240 yuan
Thirty-Three-Day Buddha	Thirty-three people chant for thirty-three days	Three Buddhas, each worth 800 yuan

(continued)

⁴ There is an advanced form of Buddha paper, called “Buddhist scripture,” whose paper quality and packaging are more sophisticated. Because reciting scriptures is more complicated than saying “Amitābha,” Buddhist scripture is more expensive and includes scripture for business, scripture for health, scripture for trips, and scripture for buying cars. Some major constructions also have ceremonies in which Buddha paper or scriptures are burned to pray for the safe progress of the project. Villagers said that thirty-three highly qualified and reputable ladies were hired to recite Buddhist scriptures at the construction ceremony for Hangzhou Bay Bridge.

Table 1: (continued)

Name	Production process	Chanter payment
Twelve-Zodiac Buddha	The owner of a new house invites twelve people with different Zodiac signs over to chant scriptures together for one day	108 yuan
Golden Dragon Buddha	One hundred people chant together for a month	One Buddha worth 1,000 yuan

Intravillage Supply of Scripture Chanting

With Buddha paper having become indispensable equipment in the daily life of rural eastern Zhejiang, more and more people are needed for scripture chanting, which is taking longer and longer. Hence Buddha masters (*fotou*), who convene, train, and organize older villagers to recite Buddhist scriptures, have emerged. Buddha masters are part of the “household-based ritual service providers” that Adam Chau (2010) discovered. They are local peasants doing popular religion part-time. They are not members of a religious group, and their role is close to that of mediums, who are in charge of communication between villagers and deities. Since the Buddha paper market arose, Buddha masters have also been in charge of contacting buyers of Buddha paper or scripture chanting, equivalent to managers of scripture-chanting teams. As an organizer, a Buddha master, besides having a certain leadership capacity, needs to live in a village and have wide social networks, in order to know the relevant information about the older villagers who do the scripture chanting, including their age, Chinese zodiac sign, spouse, and even personality. Only with this knowledge can they correctly convene people according to the types of Buddha paper and supervise the process of scripture chanting.⁵

The location of scripture chanting is not fixed. “Small Buddha” chanting, by fewer than ten people, often takes place at the homes of Buddha masters. “Buddha” chanting by more than ten people takes place in village temples. Chanters split the bills for such items as water, electricity, and space rental. There are wide spaces near the statues of divinities in village temples. Chanters can

⁵ “Nine-Star Buddha,” for instance, needs nine days of work by nine people; “Twelve-Zodiac Buddha” needs twelve people with different Zodiac signs. Buddha masters with the strongest leadership are able to organize more than a hundred people to chant for “Nine-Emperor Buddha” and “Golden Dragon Buddha.”

place chairs and tables here and sit in a circle. With the need for Buddha paper growing rapidly and the increase in large-scale Buddha activities customized for big bosses, Buddha masters have to not only make up any deficiency in the number of chanters but also break through the bottleneck of a lack of places for scripture chanting. This explains why some village temples have been erected in the idle fields of villages without the permission of land management authorities and, having been torn down, will be rebuilt soon.

The Obligation of Returning Gifts: The Spreading Chain of Human-Deity Relationships

The Chain of Gifts Tied Up in Conscience

Why do villagers in eastern Zhejiang, especially those who have made a fortune in the wave of the market economy, want to spend considerable money on Buddha paper? If we can call the behavior of consuming the result of the accumulation of labor to satisfy religious needs “faith consumption,” then what is the foundation of faith consumption? It is true that making up for spiritual deficiency, filling a spiritual void, a sense of defeat, and uncertainty are psychological effects that individual followers have when completing ritual behaviors. However, to villagers in eastern Zhejiang, engaging in such actions is something that they “must do” and “have to do.” Fu, the forty-four-year-old boss of a hardware factory, said:

We businessmen especially believe in luck. Factories need Buddha’s protection to do well. A shop needs to burn Buddha paper to have good business. Construction sites also need to burn Buddha paper in order to prevent accidents. In order for Buddha paper to be efficacious, sometimes [we] hire older ladies to come to recite [Buddhist scriptures]. Now it is common to hire someone to recite scriptures, which was promoted by some big bosses. I myself would pray every year no matter what. If the factory is doing well and production reaches a certain level, I will burn Thirty-Three-Day Buddha. Once vows have been made, you have to fulfill them. It is all up to your conscience. If you earn money, you certainly have to fulfill vows to deities, without question. When my dad was alive, he told me that money we earn from business is not all ours. You have to spend some. If you don’t, you can’t make more money.⁶

⁶ Interview, August 9, 2014.

The interview with this middle-age business owner cannot help but remind us of the *hau*,⁷ which Marshall Sahlins (1972, ch. 4) described, Maori people, in addition to what they ate, allotted and dedicated a part of their prey to the god of the forest via priests so that the god would provide more prey the next year, part of which would also be used for sacrifice. The succession goes on like this and never ends. Yet what we want to stress here is not the profit dimension of human-deity exchange but rather the sense of obligation to return gifts in the process of gift exchange: Business is full of uncertainty, with opportunities that are dominated by some mysterious and invisible force. Only certain repayment will guarantee continuing enjoyment of such opportunities. If business does not turn out well, that is because the contribution has not been enough and people have not shown their sincerity. As for how much is enough, there is no set standard, and it fully depends on one's conscience.⁸ To use the Fu villagers' own words, "If the heart is sincere, god will reveal his power."

More important, sending return gifts and sending gifts are one. If wishes are achieved or a pleasant surprise falls on one's head, then one must send return gifts next year, which shows gratitude and is repayment for the blessings of deities after having prayed and made vows the previous time and for expecting continued good luck. So sending return gifts is also sending gifts, which ends the anticipation of the previous interval and automatically carries the obligation of sending return gifts in the next round. This gives historical continuity to the spreading gift exchange: once an ancestor in the family started this process of worship at some time in some place, and now the chain of sending return gifts and sending gifts can hardly be cut off. Even exterior political factors cannot remove it from private life. It is precisely because of this that the gift exchange with deities accumulates family memories of affection. The religious behavior of sending gifts and sending return gifts has evolved into an indispensable routine in family life.

7 A Maori idea that can be very roughly translated as "the spirit of the gift." – Trans.

8 "Conscience" here can be construed as a type of self-consciousness and emotional experience that villagers have about responsibility and obligation, and a psychological mechanism for self-evaluation and self-adjustment based on this. It can give rise to a sense of peace in doing good things, but it can also cause guilt and remorse for having done bad things.

Moral Implications of Sending Return Gifts to Deities

When sending return gifts is associated with conscience and affection, it is permeated with moral implications. Ms. Wang, a middle-aged lady and a Buddha master of a villager team in Fu village, said:

It is a must to burn Buddha [paper] every year. [You] cannot stop [doing it] and hug the leg of a statue [*baofojiao*, a Chinese saying referring to worshiping deities on an ad hoc basis]. Not efficacious! Oh, you only worship Buddha when something comes up and then forget [to repay] once you receive the benefits. It's not like that! It is like exchanging *renqing* [a gift, often in the form of cash, literally "human emotion"]. If you receive money but you are no longer in contact [with whoever sent the money], what kind of person is that? Not only will people think you are stingy and not a nice person, but they will also think that you have gotten into a money hole [*zuanqianyan*, a Chinese saying meaning "to be money grubbing"].⁹

I well remember that when answering the question "Why would you buy Buddha paper to fulfill vows, since your wishes have been fulfilled?," the interviewee's face reddened with indignation and her eyes filled with reproach. She just stood there, suggesting "Why don't you understand this?"¹⁰ In the eyes of many followers of popular religion like her, sending return gifts to deities is just a type of virtue, which is also full of strong affection. It is the same as having to send return gifts in "exchanging *renqing*," which is prior to rational reasoning and interest calculation and is a basic principle of a person being a person. As long as a part of your prayers is fulfilled, sending return gifts is an obligation. It reflects one's level of morality and basic credit as a person. If you received benefits but did not repay, this would be regarded as demeaning and immoral behavior, and your neighbors would look down on you. Here moral obligation follows acquisition of fortune. Success in business is not a result of just personal efforts. It also relies on the blessing of deities. Therefore the return gifts to deities are periodical reciprocal futures. The return circle with the year as the interval unit generates a person's credit and dignity. Without it, if you made a fortune, people would associate you with negative tags such as "the demeaned one being successful" (*xiaoren dezhi*, literally "little man finally grabs his chance"), "only scheming for profit,"

9 Interview, July 28, 2004.

10 To Pierre Bourdieu (2003), this state of taking something as "a matter of course and without question" comes from a conviction growing out of what he termed "the logic of practice."

“not keeping one’s word,” “cheapskate,” and “money grubber.”

On the other hand, deities also have the obligation to send return gifts. If for a long time they could not grant their followers’ prayers, incense offerings (*xianghuo*, literally “incense fire,” a metaphor suggested by the number of visitors to temples) to them would wane, and they would even be discarded and forgotten. Conversely, if deities enshrined in country fields are especially efficacious, people might promote them to temples. This situation does not exist only in rural eastern Zhejiang; it also appears in other regions where Chinese live. In central Shannxi, for instance, a Dragon King who was not efficacious in traditional village rainmaking ceremonies was whipped by the sacrificers. In the early history of the Monga district in Taipei, shrines of some families eventually developed into temples because of the efficacy of their deities.¹¹ So deities whom people believe in must also send return gifts, because deities who do not repay are not “efficacious” and deities who are not “efficacious” are not real gods. Just as Yue Yongyi has said, “Deities or immortals are not nonexistent in Chinese life. They are not without power. They are on high above, but not above everything else. They can be manipulated because ‘efficacy is conferred by humans’” (2008, 117). As a subject of worship, the deity does not exist in a world of immortals that is separated from this world and that overrides ordinary people. It is never separate from the everyday life of people. In the reciprocal relationship of human and deity, the deity is subject to humans.

Sequence of Gifts: The Competition for Intimacy with Deities

The gifts to deities, permeated with conscience, affection, and morality, that prop up villagers who are engaged in popular religious activities have a long history, which has not stopped, even with changes to the political environment. However, the obligation to send return gifts as part of the “collective unconscious” is just a hidden background behind such popular religious activities. The driving force of these activities that is explicit in daily life and that is part of the self-consciousness and self-motivation of villagers is different, and it diverges according to group difference. In our investigation of eastern Zhejiang

villages, villagers repeatedly mentioned one saying: “The bosses buy big Buddha [paper], those who work for others buy small Buddha [paper], [and] those who have no money recite Buddh[ist scriptures] themselves.” Such is an intuitive experience of group difference.

Faith Consumption Stratification in Villages

In villages of eastern Zhejiang, the better a villager’s economic condition, the more advanced Buddha paper they will use, and the higher its cost will be. We call this “faith consumption stratification.” To take Fu village as an example (Table 2):

Table 2: Faith consumption stratification of Fu village households.

Class	Occupation	Percentage of the population	Family annual net income (tens of thousands of yuan)	Per-family average annual Buddha paper expenditure (tens of thousands of yuan)
Upper	Private business owners	8.7	>30	>1
Uppemiddle	Workshop owners, self-employed individuals	22.6	15~30	0.2~1
Middle	Part-time (odd-jobbing; farming)	56.8	4~15	0.05~0.2
Lower	No fixed source of income	11.9	<4	-1~-0.3*

Note: *Lower-class families earn income through scripture chanting.

In Fu village’s economic stratification structure, upper-class families have industry and commerce as the main sources of income. Their number is the least, but they consume large quantities and advanced types of Buddha paper, for instance Golden Dragon Buddha and Thirty-Three-Day Buddha. Upper-middle-class families usually own small hardware workshops or have big agricultural contracts. Their expenditures on faith consumption are relatively lower than those of private enterprise owners. Midlevel Buddha paper like Ten-Person, Six-Hundred-

¹¹ See Wolf 1974.

Year-Old Buddha is a common type they often use. Villagers in the middle class are the majority population in the village and usually work at nearby factories. They buy less and cheaper Buddha paper than the rich families.

The upper and upper-middle classes in the village are the fixed-demand side in faith consumption. Even older members of their families will not sacrifice their free time to recite Buddha scriptures themselves, because it is a tiring and boring thing to do. Some of these families invite older people from other, lower-class families in the village to their houses to recite Buddha scriptures, though the cost is higher than the direct purchase of Buddha paper. Plus, they have to prepare tea and refreshments and take care of utility bills, such as for water and electricity.

Lower-class and some middle-class families in the village correspondingly play the role of supplier. Along with the rapid growth of Buddha paper demand, a scripture-chanting group appeared, mainly composed of middle-age and older villagers, especially older females whose family economic condition was not good. Many scripture chanters receive an allowance from the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee program (*wubaohu*). They start work at 3 AM, finish at 4 PM, and have a two-hour break. The intensity of this labor is relatively high, and they have to be vegetarian. The reason that these women are willing to do such hard work is that older people have few job opportunities and thus no source of income. Moreover, Buddha paper has become a daily supply. If you do not buy it, you have to produce it yourself. Funerals, for instance, need a lot of Buddha paper, so older people often save for their own funerals some of the Buddha paper that they have consecrated. Also, they can earn money from chanting scriptures. In these ways they can decrease the burden on their sons and daughters and therefore relieve intergenerational tension.

Faith Consumption and “Face Competition”

Upper Class: Risk Aversion and Status Expression

Spending money to send gifts or to send return gifts has become a convention of the wealthy families of eastern Zhejiang villages. Their vows and prayers cover everything from running enterprises and family perpetuation to physical functions. The most important thing is to provide willpower support for one’s business decisions when facing various market risks. Rich families in the upper level of society in rural eastern Zhejiang have rid themselves of the status of peasants and been private business owners for some time. Although their income

is the highest among the families in their villages, they face the most uncertainty as well. Rural enterprises are not big, so they are quite vulnerable to economic fluctuations. To lower costs in order to increase profits, they have to stay in policy gray areas in such matters as private financing, security supervision, enterprise taxation, the use of construction land, and workers’ social security. They can encounter sudden changes at any time. This group is especially sensitive to various risks, particularly those in making investments and managing enterprises. These people are not well educated, but they did accumulate a certain amount of wealth through hard work during the wave of economic development in coastal areas when they were young adults. However, they lack the capacity to increase their wealth amid current capitalized commercial competition. Also, they still live in a society of acquaintance. Village culture shapes their ways of satisfying their psychological needs. To them, pulling closer to supernatural force via popular religious activities is a valid channel to lower risks and master their own destinies. The more the capital invested, the higher the risk, the stronger their need to ask “efficacy” from deities, and the higher their expenditures in faith consumption.

However, once the subjective motivation of risk aversion has turned into actions in daily practice, it has an objective affect on the village’s society of acquaintance: people express their wealth and social status through the size of their faith consumption. This is a social competition similar to a potlatch. In our investigation, we noticed that staging swanky scripture-chanting scenes has become a lifestyle of those wealthy people at the top of the village hierarchy. At the end of the year, even if their factories are not running well, they spend tens of thousands of yuan to “burn big Buddha” to “save face” (*bao mianzi*) in order to maintain the trust of their business partners. Those nouveaux riches who have just opened a successful business and who rank among the top level in the village often hold a grand and money-consuming Buddhist activity to “earn face” (*zhen mianzi*) for themselves, to use their own words. It is safe to say that they are also expressing themselves and pursuing their own continued existence when they consume Buddha paper of different types and prices or purchase the labor of scripture chanting.¹²

¹² The anthropologist Mayfair Mei-hui Yang has pointed out that ritual economy has “the logic of [nonproductive] ‘expenditure’” (2000, 492), society’s intentional expenditure of excessive resources. To individual actors, expenditure is purpose itself. It is part of the rights and freedom of self-existence that people pursue.

Upper-Middle Class: Imitation and Following

Upper-class families' extravagant acts of "displaying difference" in faith consumption have caused upper-middle class families to imitate and follow them, because "burning big Buddha" is not just a demonstration of economic capacity but also about earning face before deities. Accordingly, using low-level, simple Buddha paper or even reciting scriptures at home has become something better not mentioned, as it "make one lose face" (*diu-mianzi*). Thus, what villagers consume is not just the Buddha paper's function of worshiping deities as religious objects but more the establishment of a level of intimacy with the deities that it symbolizes. From this perspective, village popular religious activities as types of faith consumption follow the same logic as renqing consumption: renqing consumption is the construction of a social network via gift exchanges, and faith consumption is the expansion of mundane renqing consumption. To give gifts to deities is in fact to maintain relationships with those deities. If the amount of renqing consumption in the human world reflects a sequence in human relations, the amount of faith consumption, geared toward the world of divinities, symbolizes the level of intimacy with deities. In the process of "bribing to maintain" (*dadian*) relationships, which spans the two worlds of yin and yang, the more expensive the Buddha paper and the more advanced its level, the closer the relationship of the sacrificer with the deities – therefore probably earning him or her their favor and protection.

Middle and Lower Classes: Involuntary Involvement

Middle- and lower-class villagers tend to think that Buddha paper is too expensive to afford. However, when confronted with a series of life events that are hard to explain or unpredictable opportunities, they do not want to be discarded by deities. Therefore, even though some villagers do not want to make large expenditures on Buddha paper, they are concerned that once the annual cycle of burning Buddha paper is broken, balance in their life will be broken as well. They would then ascribe bad luck to their voluntary estrangement from the deities. Moreover, the well-to-do families are all burning Buddha paper, and the more they burn, the better their luck for gaining wealth becomes. If you do not burn Buddha paper just for the sake of burning money, it is the same as acknowledging that you have no ambition, which will unavoidably be met by the mockery and disdain of other people. This damage to face is

very embarrassing. More important, the face competition in faith consumption is far from just an issue of one's own face. It is more about asking for face from deities for one's family and even offspring. Thus, one cannot unilaterally discontinue the spreading chain of exchanging gifts with deities. It is precisely because of this that even those who are on the lowest economic level will not withdraw from this competition. They rather live frugally in daily consumption to guarantee that they will be able to offer Buddha paper at important festivals.

For middle- and lower-class villagers, faith consumption with the feature of gift exchange is the same as renqing consumption. Both are cycles that are hard to withdraw from. It is unlike competition over houses, cars, and other luxuries, which one can disregard totally. If they did not participate in this competition of faith consumption, they would be afraid of being shut out by deities, which as powerful forces in the unseen world determine one's future. Émile Durkheim (2006) pointed out that what is behind religion is actually an entire community. Religious taboos and deities are symbols of the community. Those villagers in disadvantaged positions who worried about being alienated from deities in fact worried about being excluded from village society. Therefore they were forced to compete for face in faith consumption. It can thus be said that the faith consumption of middle- and lower-class villagers to a large extent is passive and not self-motivated. Their popular religious acts have been provoked by the fear of being socially excluded in a time of rapid economic stratification.

Gift Supply and Integration of Village Society

The Production of Gifts: Wealth Redistribution among Classes and Status Confirmation

Social competition among different classes for intimacy with deities is a notable dimension of this human-deity gift exchange. On the other hand, this activity also redistributes wealth among different social classes through the production of gifts and the confirmation of social status.

As mentioned earlier, the production of gifts – that is, the scripture-chanting ritual to "confer efficacy" (*fuling*) on Buddha paper – is done by older people convened by Buddha masters, household specialists living in villages. These people are from the middle and lower classes of

the villages. Each of the four areas in Fu village that we investigated has a dozen Buddha masters. They are similar to feng shui masters and fortune-tellers. With their units, they all provide spiritual medium services and receive corresponding rewards. Because local faith consumption has expanded so rapidly, household religious specialists are no longer able to provide on-the-spot ritual services. Driven by huge demand, they have convened older villagers to form scripture-chanting groups. Villagers can not only hire people to come to their homes and chant scriptures but also buy Buddha paper that has already been “conferred efficacy”: Buddha paper has thus become the equivalent of a religious service – scripture chanting. The labor of chanters “accumulates” in Buddha paper but is separated from the ritual spot temporally and physically.

Why are workers in gift production – that is, recipients of income from scripture chanting – older people from middle- and lower-class families in the villages? Several things account for this. First, income from scripture chanting does not accord with the intensity of this labor. A full-time chanter works 8–9 hours per day and has an average monthly income of two thousand yuan, which is a good amount of money for those who are free at home. This work has no attraction for young or middle-age adults, however. Chanting scriptures is exceptionally hard work. One must not only be loud and clear but also strictly follow the rules. During the work, one cannot chat or make jokes or violate various taboos.¹³ Otherwise, the efficacy of the Buddha paper will be affected. For this reason, even if older people from wealthy families are willing to do it, their sons and daughters do not want them to join the ranks of scripture chanters. After all, that would mean that acquaintances in their village would supervise their aged parents or even scold them for

¹³ More and more taboos of scripture-chanting activities have arisen against the background of competition among many scripture-chanting groups. For instance, the chanters must be grim; they can eat no meat on days of scripture chanting; those who have ill family members, are arranging a funeral, or have just been to a funeral hall should not participate in scripture chanting; those who have just been to a delivery room should not participate; menstruating women should not participate; those who are divorced or widowed should not participate in scripture chanting related to wedding events. The requests for Buddha paper of different types and levels have also become more and more detailed. The total age of the chanters for Ten-Person, Six-Hundred-Year-Old Buddha, for instance, should not exceed 606 years. Chanters of Four-Person, Eight-Surname Buddha cannot be remarried, and they and their spouses must have eight distinct surnames in total.

violating the rules. Not only is this not necessary for those who have gotten rich, but they also ought not to do it.

Second, there are status differences in the work of scripture chanting. From the perspectives of ordinary villagers and chanters, the subject of deities’ protection is not those who chant scriptures. The older people who recite “*Namo Amitābha*” are praying for other people and working for money. Only those who buy gifts and burn them before statues of divinities are really worshiping deities. The older lady Ms. Li, who had been chanting scriptures in the group Nine-Person, Eighteen-Surname Buddha for ten years when we met her, said, “We have a saying: ‘Reciting scriptures does not mean believing in deities. Those who buy Buddha [paper] believe in deities.’ No one would give jobs to old ladies. They came to chant scriptures just to earn a little money. Plus, it is also convenient for them to take care of [the] kids [of their sons and daughters who work elsewhere]. Only those who spend money buying Buddha [paper] truly believe in deities. The more businesses and factories they have, the more they believe. If they no longer believe, to whom will we sell those Buddha papers?”¹⁴

The person whom deities protect and bless is the sender, but not the producer, of a gift. This conception legitimizes the wealthy class’s purchase of more Buddha paper and the poor’s labor to earn income through scripture chanting. Scripture chanting is therefore considered part of Buddha paper production. In the process of its manufacture, workers are separated from the product. To consume Buddha paper is to buy the labor of chanters. Scripture-chanting groups serve not deities but rather those bosses who spent money on faith consumption. Older people who have gone to chant scriptures in the homes of bosses could not have gotten closer to deities even if they had chanted themselves hoarse. They sell their labor to rich people in their village to make a living. This relationship contains a strong contrast. The experience of older chanters is just like that of servants hired by landlords before 1949. Because their source of income is extremely limited, they have to rely on these bosses to some extent. When they happily receive wages from bosses, they also accept a status difference between their families and the wealthy families in the village.

Finally, there is an affectional concern when Buddha masters invite people to chant Buddhist scriptures, which reflects the binding force of society itself. The vigorous growth in demand for Buddha paper has generated a

¹⁴ Interview, July 17, 2014.

local market for ritual services. In this business of gifts, Buddha masters, as mediums between the supply and demand sides, are also points of conjunction between the rich and the poor in the village social network. The relationships of Buddha masters and the members of their scripture-chanting groups are not fixed. The masters decide the number and the people selected, according to the requirements of the Buddha paper. The most important element of these decisions is the family economic condition of the older people in the group, in addition to their health and temperament. Giving an opportunity of income to those familiar disadvantaged older people whom they see on a daily basis is an affection instinct of Buddha masters, who live in the same village. This is entirely different from charity. Rather, it allows older people in the village's lower class to earn income with dignity.¹⁵ Those bosses who ask Buddha masters to convene people for Buddhist activities at their homes urge them to follow the convention of "helping for as long as possible."¹⁶ As repayment, those who do good deeds (the bosses) receive acknowledgement of their dominant status from other villagers. This acknowledgement can even earn them large numbers of ballots in village elections.

Affectional Circulation of Gifts

The circulation of gifts is another important part of the supply of gifts for worshipping deities. In rural eastern Zhejiang, Buddha paper mainly circulates via networks of acquaintance within villages, the reason for which is to deal with the falsification of Buddha paper, by relying on trust among acquaintances. To villagers, the marks on Buddha paper are evidence of whether a bundle of raw yellow paper has gone through the "efficacy conferring" of scripture-chanting ceremonies. But if someone does not care about morality and conscience and prints those marks on Buddha paper without having it go through the scripture-chanting ceremonies, villagers will have no way to tell. The usual way to

deal with such immoral behavior is to buy from familiar Buddha masters or older people who do scripture chanting. Of course, a better way is to invite people to recite scriptures at one's own home, but in that case the expenditure is much higher, and no ordinary people can afford it.

In a network of friends and relatives where people are highly familiar with one another's characters and temperaments, once a cheating provider was seen through, he would suffer a huge loss of affection. Not only would a channel of profit close to him, but he would also be blamed by public opinion and excluded from other contacts for a long time. For this reason, local Buddha paper trades tend to occur within village communities. Only very few villagers buy mass-produced and commercialized Buddha paper from temples. Meanwhile, villagers are willing to pay more to familiar older people for Buddha paper because buying it is not purely a commodity exchange. This activity contains elements of familial love and friendship and hidden shades of help and relief. It is a decent way to take care of older people.

The producers of Buddha paper are mainly disadvantaged older villagers. In contrast, the consumers are mainly rich and young people in the village. They buy Buddha paper only from older people in their own family or of their village, as gifts in the worship of deities, out of trust and affection. So the circulation of gifts in the worship of deities involves, on the one hand, villagers using their free time to produce and sell Buddha paper. On the other hand, in this process wealth flows to the disadvantaged and old-age groups in the village through networks of acquaintance, and excessive resources of rich families are redistributed among classes and families in the village. Through such resource-redistribution "destratification" (Gao Wanqin 2015), village society achieves internal integration to some extent, countering the trend of social differentiation.

Conclusion

Intimacy Competition in Human-Deity Gift Exchange: The Dynamics of Popular Religious Activities' Expansion

In popular religion in rural China, people send gifts to deities to establish personalized, concrete human-deity relationships. They "pray to whoever is efficacious," sending gifts to many deities, "fulfill whatever promises

¹⁵ Some older ladies whose families are not in a good economic condition cannot join scripture-chanting groups, for reasons of age or health. They can only chant scriptures at home. In addition to producing Buddha paper for their own needs, they sell the surplus, but apparently for low prices: a bundle of Buddha paper can sell for only forty to fifty yuan.

¹⁶ One scene that we saw in Fu village was members of Minimum Livelihood Guarantee Households chanting scriptures collectively in small temples for as long as their health allowed.

they have made” (Lin 2007, 7) to deities, and take the realization of their prayers as “manifestations of efficacy” of deities. For such protection and bestowals of deities, they must fulfill vows to thank these deities, called “gifts in turn.” In routinized local religion, sending gifts and sending return gifts have become one, flawlessly and with no way to separate them. Annual intervals link religious activities in different generations and different circumstances, forming an uninterrupted chain of sending gifts and sending return gifts and making vows and fulfilling prayers. Sending return gifts reflects one’s credit and integrity. Receiving the blessing of deities also means owing a debt to those deities. Intervals, anticipation, conscience, and affection in the reciprocity between humans and deities create the moral ground of local popular religion.

However, religious continuity created by the obligation to send return gifts is not enough to explain the flourishing of rural popular religion.

From the cases examined in this article, it appears that economic growth, social stratification, and at least the remains of an acquaintance society are also necessary conditions of this popular religion. Village society in eastern Zhejiang is experiencing drastic economic stratification and urbanization. Villagers of different classes are also seeking confirmation of their social status while trying to avoid risks and gain opportunities. Top-level families of these villages, who are the most sensitive to risk, have devoted a lot of resources to the faith consumption of popular religion in this social transition period, which has turned into a potlatch-style performance of economic power and a ritual of confirmation of economic stratification in front of deities. Through such displays, villagers are divided into different groups, of “having face” (*you mianzi*) or “having no face” (*mei mianzi*) and “having big face” (*mianzi da*) or “having small face” (*mianzi xiao*). Because of their different levels of devotion to deities, the people in these villages have different levels of intimacy with deities and hence different levels of power and blessings bestowed by deities. What is hiding behind faith consumption is a complicated symbolic mechanism. Social classes, with popular religion as the medium, have forged new power relations in the mundane world through face competition before deities. It is precisely intense competition over the construction of intimacy with deities that has become the essential driving force of the expansion of this popular religion. Such force is constantly produced in the stratification of the rural social structure and reproduced in the competition for and alternation of power.

The Circle of “Efficacy” and Readjustment of Human Relations: Discovery of a Holistic View

In holistically examining human-deity gift exchange in rural eastern Zhejiang, it is not difficult to see two endless successions in the process: first, “efficacious power”¹⁷ is able to circulate in this world and the divine world through the circle of efficacy conferred by mediums – who are manifestations of efficacy – conferring efficacy again...; second, excessive wealth circulates between the rich and the poor in village through the circle of rich people buying Buddha paper, poor people chanting Buddhist scriptures, rich people continuing to buy Buddha paper... The efficacious power of gifts reaches deities in the wreathing smoke of burning paper money and returns to villages in the loud sound of reading in daily religious activities. Many villagers pray to deities to ask for wealth. Deities’ “manifestation of efficacy” means the concentration of wealth in the hands of a small number of people, making them rich. In contrast to “conferring efficacy,” rich people, when buying the “efficacious power” of gifts, redistribute excessive wealth to disadvantaged groups in the village through the network of acquaintance, which is permeated with affection and trust. In this circle, villagers initiate personal actions because of practical appeals to pray for blessings and the fending off of misfortune. However, with gifts to worship deities as media, society has realized wealth redistribution and resource flow between the rich and the poor. The results of the entire circle are that middle- and lower-class families have gained income to improve their livelihoods and that the dominant position of upper-class families is acknowledged because of their generous devotion.

Here the advantage of the gift paradigm’s holistic view emerges. In the cases in this article, if we were to start with the composition of the groups that practice popular religious activities and the organization of rituals, following traditional approaches of the sociology of religion, the

¹⁷ “Efficacious power” (*lingli*) in this article is a local concept coming from the language of the peasants, referring to the “efficacy” levels of deities and the making “efficacious” of gifts. It is not the same as *hau* in Marcel Mauss’s “Essay on the Gift” (in Mauss 2003). It is instead a personified supernatural force that must return to the land where it belongs and is capable of punishing those who do not give return gifts. It has the capacity to immediately establish connections in the triangle structure of pilgrims, medium, and deities. Once such connections are established, people can approach divine spirits and therefore gain priority in getting opportunities distributed by deities. However, what is behind “efficacious power” is the collective affection of society. This is the reason that gift exchange is able to continue.

provider of ritual services would be the focus of attention and we would assume that the villagers were reinforcing the organization of popular religion. As a matter of fact, however, these groups are not Christian fellowships or sects. They are more like collective collaborative enterprises, coordinated by an interest mechanism. Their meetings are not held so that members can experience doctrines or holy sentiments. Various scripture-chanting groups have no systematic connections. Rather than saying that they are religious organizations, it is better to say that they are economic organizations. Only their production and selling process are special, both of which are based on the popular beliefs, moral system, and ethical concepts of certain regions. If the perspective of the function of religion or the psychological motives and spiritual activities in religious behaviors were to guide our approach, then the focus of our research would be those who demand popular religion and we would therefore notice the actuality, utility, and privatization of popular religion. Also, the centrifugal tendency of the community is increasing and the public nature of popular religion is declining (He Qianqian and Gui 2015). However, in the holistic view of the gift paradigm, we see a coordination mechanism behind the circle of “efficacy.” Individualized and privatized behaviors of worshipping deities maintain the cohesion of the village via this subtle mechanism. The coordination among them not only is embodied in wealth redistribution but also reinforces the concepts, morality, and affection that villagers share.

Gift Exchange and Chinese Popular Religion – Society Paradigm or Power Paradigm?

In their writings, Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu have entirely different approaches to the reading of gift exchange. The former is concerned with how society continues and the construction of solidarity ties. The latter is interested in the symbolic operation of power – that is, how capital is turned into symbolic capital and “legitimized” in gift exchange. For this reason, Bourdieu is especially concerned about the “strategy of action” in intervals of gift exchange (2003, 152). Liu Yonghua (2010) calls these two [men’s approaches] the “society paradigm” and the “power paradigm.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Mauss stressed that “gifts are very important” in his studies (e. g., 2003, 125–31). The gift exchanges that he and Bourdieu investigated occurred mainly between humans and between tribes.

The interesting thing about the human-deity gift exchange in rural eastern Zhejiang that this article presents is that it has both competition of symbolic capital over intimacy with deities, through faith consumption, and social integration achieved by wealth redistribution among classes, via the production and circulation of gifts and via status confirmation. Power competition and social solidarity – these two mechanisms work together in the daily practice of Chinese popular religion and shape an arena of difference sequences¹⁹ of village power and status that centers on deities. Villagers understand and accept their positions in the relational sequence of this symbolic order²⁰ and strive to keep the sequence balanced. If we do not understand the relationship of gift exchange and power, it is very difficult to interpret the internal mechanism responsible for the flourishing of popular religious activities in rural eastern Zhejiang. Human-deity exchange contains a power order and reproduces village social relations. What is behind gift competition is the creation of symbolic capital and status identity. The limitation of power analysis, however, is that its focus on competition strategy overshadows moral concepts and the affectional experiences of the actors in the process of exchange, which are precisely what separate gift exchange from material exchange. Also because of these factors, gift competition in these villages has led only to differences in the degree of intimacy in village circles, not to the breakdown of modern society. Power is acknowledged not just because of concern or interest but rather because of the conscience and morality that hide behind benefit exchange. In other words, morality justifies power. However, strategy alone cannot explain the operations of power and solidarity in villages.

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¹⁹ *Chaxu geju*, a term coined by the sociologist Xiaotong Fei in his *Xiang Tu Zhongguo* (Shanghai: Guan cha she, 1948), translated by Gary G. Hamilton and Wang Zheng as *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). – Trans. ²⁰ In first the author’s study of rich people who govern villages, the actions of giving generously to poor and disadvantaged groups and using personal money for public affairs are important reasons why those able people who got rich first gained authority – these actions are more convincing than bribing to earn votes and fit better with moral principles regarding power and justice in the minds of villagers. See *Furen Zhicun—Chengzhenhua Jincheng Zhong De Cunzhuang Quanli Jiegou Bianqian* [The governing of villages by the rich—village power structural transformation during urbanization] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2015).

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学术论文

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礼物的竞争：民间宗教复兴的社会机制¹——以浙东福村为田野

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摘要：本文试图在“礼物模式”下理解发达地区农村民间宗教复兴的社会机制。在浙东农村，农民许愿/还愿时点烧“佛纸”作为敬献神佛的礼物，而心愿的实现被视为神佛的回馈。人-神的互惠以家户为单位、以“年”为间隔，形成渗透着情感与道德的回礼之链。近年来，浙东乡村经济的增长与社会分化相同步，对风险最为敏感的村庄上层成为大量购买佛纸乃至雇人念佛的信仰消费主体，他们“夸富宴”式的礼物呈现引来其他阶层的模仿与跟从，不同阶层围绕着人-神关系的亲疏远近展开激烈的社会竞争，这种象征资本的争夺成为民间宗教活动持续扩张的动力。佛纸消费量的剧增使得此前提供仪式服务的家户型专家无法满足需求，他们召集老人形成念佛团体以扩大供给。在念佛活动中，经由熟人关系网络，村庄过剩的财富被调剂到中、下阶层。浙东乡民的日常实践表明，民间宗教活动在村庄熟人社会中有其自成一体逻辑，它在人-神关系的竞争中实现扩张，而社会则在人-神之间的礼物交换循环中实现整合。文章最后指出，“礼物范式”的总体性视角是解开民间宗教复兴的钥匙，而要理解“关系本质”的本土民间宗教，礼物交换的“权力范式”与“社会范式”都不可或缺。

关键词：宗教复兴，社会机制，礼物交换，阶层分化

一 问题与文献

对于宗教的存续与壮大，传统宗教社会学预测“现代化过程将引起宗教衰亡”的世俗化理论已经无法给予解释（Berger, 1997:974）。经历了范式转型的新世俗论主要从宗教本身的世俗化与内部革新予以解释，强调宗教的教义和组织系统脱离此前强硬的外在结构，将信仰和宗教活动变成个人内心的私人事务，而各种教派的改革和创新则不断迎合信众的信仰需求，宗教的多元性带来了宗教总体的兴盛（范丽珠, 2005；胡安宁, 2013）。但是，从二战以来的西方经验尤其是美国基督教社会中抽象出来的新世俗论在应用于华人社会时却遭遇适用性的困境

¹ 本文系 2013 年度教育部人文社会科学青年基金项目“城镇化进程中的富人治村现象研究（13YJC840046）”和浙江师范大学校级科研项目（SKZD201202）的阶段性成果。

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（卢云峰, 2008）：中国社会的民间宗教并非西方文化语境中救赎性的排他宗教，它本来就是世俗的，多元的，渗透于老百姓的日常生活。

杨庆堃（2007:270-274）曾在关于中国宗教的经典研究中将中国传统社会中的民间宗教称之为“分散性宗教”（diffused religion），它弥散在家庭、宗族、社区及行业团体之中，通过信仰仪式来整合世俗制度，并依靠世俗制度的有效功能来获得生存空间。正因如此，他认为，当民间宗教依附的世俗制度出现衰颓时，社会制度的宗教面向将很快成为历史，鲜有复兴的可能。不过，现实的发展并未如其所料。在当代中国农村的巨变中，随着流动的打工经济兴起，祖先崇拜与传统的村落共同体正在面临衰落的命运，“丧事上跳脱衣舞”的现象已屡见不鲜；但另一方面，官方统计数据与研究者的调查都显示，各类民间庙宇与涌入这些香烟缭绕的庙宇之中烧香拜佛的民众却正在不断增加（陈彬、刘文钊, 2012；孟令国、高飞、朱鲲鹏, 2010；叶涛, 2009）。

对于“意料之外”的农村宗教发展，学界主要有三种解释路径，可以称之为市场竞争论、社会需求论和政策空间论。市场竞争论是西方宗教市场论在中国的应用与扩展，它将农村宗教场域类比为市场，各类宗教相互竞争，努力提供更好的信仰产品、更便捷的传播形式及更有效的组织形式，这种竞争带来了组织性相对完善的宗教的发展和组织性较差的宗教的相对衰落（Lu, Johnson & Stark, 2008；阮荣平、郑风田、刘力 2013）。杨凤岗（2006）以“三色宗教市场理论”进行拓展，他认为，加强宗教管制将导致宗教市场的复杂化，使宗教活动从合法的红市转入了半地下的灰市甚至非法的黑市。

社会需求论效仿新世俗论的研究路径，侧重于对转型期农民内心世界的理解，论者从“中国农村社会个体化”（阎云翔, 2012）的基本命题出发，强调农村互助网络的消解、公共生活的衰落与公共文化的荒漠化才是宗教发展的主因（吴理财, 2014；杨倩倩、陈岱云, 2011；阮荣平、郑风田、刘力 2010）。随着村庄共同体的衰落，乡村的弱势者在面临各类生存风险和人生变故之时以信教的方式寻求精神支持，形成新的意义归属、情感认同与自我尊严的建构，以此排解巨大的心理压力（桂华, 2013；陈柏峰, 2012；陈彬、刘文钊, 2012）。

政策空间论延伸自“多元宗教现代性研究”，内含“国家-社会”框架，其基本观点是，改革开放以后国家宗教管理政策的调整及农村基层组织的运作模式给宗教发展提供了足够的空间（闭伟宁, 2001；何兰萍、陈通,

2005)。一些场合下，基层政权成为宗教发展的推动因素。在联系侨胞、招商引资、旅游开发、文化申遗等机遇中，国家试图运用宗教的文化符号达成特定的政治或经济目的，而地方精英亦借用国家符号实现了对民间宗教的再造（Chau, 2006；高丙中，2006；景军，2013）。

然而，上述解释仍有一些不足。首先，脱胎于基督教社会学的宗教市场论在华人社会的非排他性宗教中会遭遇适用性的困境（卢云峰，2008），尽管它能够较好地解释农村基督教的迅速传播，但对于没有系统教义和神职人员，组织化程度较低的本土宗教的复兴却缺乏解释力。而且，中国宗教的实践性和历史性也决定了其宗教行为并非基于工具理性（范丽珠，2008）。其次，社会需求论试图通过理解变迁乡村中的主体来阐释农村宗教发展，但却在具体研究中置换了分析单位，成为对农民宗教参与动机的心理学式的个体还原。然而，比理解信徒的心理动机更为重要的是，个体村民的心理需求何以在村庄中发展为群体层面持续性的宗教行动？这才是解读宗教复兴时无法回避的社会机制问题。再次，政策空间应视作宗教变迁的背景，本身并不能给宗教的发展提供一种动力学的说明。它无法解释在背景相同的情况下，为何农村居民信仰结构的变化大于城市居民，也无法解释发达地区农村的“宗教热”为何更加明显。而且，“国家-社会”的二元结构容易将宗教变迁简化为政治权力与宗教团体的互动，遮蔽掉实践中复杂的社会过程。

要深入理解在农民的生活世界中“自成一统”的乡村宗教，我们就不能把宗教简化为“经济”或是“政治”，“研究宗教，必须回到社会，回到宗教本身”（梁永佳，2015：179）。在方法论上，上述研究之所以把宗教还原为商品或权力，缘于社会科学的两大基础范式——个体主义与整体主义的前提假设，前者假定个体的理性先于社会而存在，后者则假定结构先于个体。要打破二者之间的分立，重返宗教本身，那么，从社会纽带的构成原理出发、被称为“第三范式”的礼物范式将是一套富有启发性的方案。

礼物范式对于揭示宗教在社会中的不可还原性有着重要的意义。“仅凭功利的交换或强制的分配无法建立起社会秩序所需的团结，社会团结离不开情感和道义，而宗教总是与道德紧密相联”（汲喆，2009：10）。回到礼物范式，意味着回到宗教社会学的理论原点——人神关系的建构与表达中重新思考宗教变迁，在人们自愿形成的义务之网中探寻变迁社会的整合机理（李向平，2010；杨美惠，2009）。如果把“礼物”抽象地理解为人神之间实现“来”与“往”、“报”与“偿”的中介，则不难发现，农民的生活世界充满了人神之间的互往（reciprocity）与期待，村民对神灵的送礼/回礼与神灵对村民的庇佑形成绵延的礼物之流，许愿/还愿与在时间间隔中对“显灵”的期待构成了农民宗教生活的基本模式。在礼物范式下，农民的宗教生活能够以行动的、过程的方式呈现出来，这将超越对于中国宗教的静态的、类型学的描述和比较，进入对农村宗教变迁的社会机制进行抽象的层次。

本文尝试以礼物范式为理论观照，从理解宗教变迁的社会基础出发对中国农村的宗教复兴进行再解释。2014

年的7月到9月，我们在浙江省慈溪市的福村²开展驻村调查，发现近年来在浙东农村念佛活动急剧增多，并且在此过程中出现了“佛纸”买卖的现象，这促使我们思考，是否可以在“佛纸”——这种村民烧给神佛的礼物中寻找到民间宗教活动扩张的隐秘机制？

二 礼物交换：人-神之间的互惠

（一）“佛纸”：烧给神佛的礼物

浙东农村距佛教圣地普陀山较近，其民间宗教受到正统佛教的影响。村中各种小庙供奉的诸多神像以菩萨为主，但也包括太上老君、财神、地方神“胜山娘娘”、包公，甚至毛主席像。村民一年四节祭拜祖先与平日里烧香拜佛之时都要点烧“佛纸”——一叠带有佛教象征图案的黄色纸钱³。如 Fred Blake 所言，纸钱在中国民间宗教的仪式中扮演着重要角色，借助它，具体化的存在和非具体化的存在得以沟通。祭祀过程从燃烛开始，点香象征着阴阳两界建立联系，供奉食物实施联系，然后以纸钱作礼物标志分离，最后是燃鞭宣布结束。仪式中，纸钱和供品准备得越精心，表明供奉者与想象的客体间的关系越稔熟。⁴

在浙东农村的民俗观念中，“佛纸”必须通过“念佛”来赋予“灵力”⁵：只有经过口对佛纸诵念经文的过程之后，再烧给神佛或祖先才能获得庇佑，否则就与燃烧普通纸张无异。因此之故，念佛活动也被称之为“赋灵”。佛纸在神像前燃烧的过程中，村民可以完成许愿与还愿。许愿时点烧的佛纸即是在给神灵送礼。一年当中，心愿的实现（这被称之为“显灵”）是神灵给信徒做出的回馈。来

2 福村邻近杭州湾新区，地理区位优势，小五金行业较为发达。村庄区域面积 5.1 平方公里，辖区内有 46 个村民组，农户 2232 户，总人口 5401 人，在册外来人口 4653 人。2011 年全村经济总收入 5.13 亿元，村民人均年收入 13471 元。按照学术规范，文中所涉地名人名已做技术处理。

3 纸钱伴随古代祭祀之礼而产生，与人类的祖先崇拜和鬼神信仰密切相关。唐代时焚化纸钱开始流行，这要归结于当时佛教思想的宣扬，如寺院每年举行盂兰盆会时，将纸钱与纸人、纸马串起待法会结束至于香炉内焚烧，以送死者受用。至宋代时，纸钱已纳入皇家的祭祀制度中。民间还逐渐衍生出“寄库”的风俗，即于生前预先焚化纸钱，或作佛事，寄托冥官，以冀死后取用。清朝以后，焚化纸钱已在民间普及，人们在纸钱上印制《往生咒》，拿到寺院焚化。参见《纸钱源流考》，《史林》2013 年第 1 期。

4 参见 [美] C. Fred Blake: 《纸钱的符号学研究》，《广西民族大学学报》（哲学社会科学版），2005 年第 5 期。

5 “灵”在中国民间宗教中是一个非常值得研究的本土概念。赵旭东认为，“灵性”、“灵验”、“显灵”中的“灵”是“香客的自我、作为他的灵媒以及超越性存在且不可显见的神灵这个三角结构中瞬间建立起来的一种切实的联系”，不同于西方理性主义的知识论传统，“灵”是人们对超自然神灵强力的一种即时性的顿悟。参见赵旭东：《“灵”、顿悟与理性：知识创造的两种途径》，《思想战线》2013 年第 1 期。

年的还愿与再次许愿交织在一起，既是对神佛之馈赠的回礼，也是为神佛再次送出礼物。这样，以年为时间间隔，村民对神佛的送礼/回礼与神佛对村民的庇佑一起构成了一个绵延不断的礼物之流，而许愿/还愿与在时间间隔中对“显灵”的期待，构成了村民宗教生活的基本模式。

(二) “佛纸”的流通

对于求取神佛庇护的村民而言，制作及获取具有“灵性”的礼物成为其日常宗教活动的核心。据福村一些老人讲述，大集体时代佛纸的制作比较简单，给佛纸“赋灵”的念佛活动在家庭内部进行，家中老人空闲时一边敲木鱼一边反复诵念“阿弥陀佛”即可完成，“念”好的佛纸也只是自家使用。熟人朋友之间将佛纸作为礼物相互赠送的现象大量存在，但没有出现货币交易。节日里亲朋好友间借佛纸应急较为正常，但因此而收钱则是一件丢脸的事情。

上世纪八十年代初，浙东民间宗教重新开展，念佛活动渐渐从家庭内部走出。九十年代中期，点烧佛纸的场合、频率和数量逐渐增加，雇人念佛的现象开始出现并扩展开来。2000年以后，念好的“佛纸”被拿来在村里出售。除去传统节气与红白喜事，连办厂、开店、买车等一系列活动人们都要点烧佛纸。⁶佛纸的种类及价格随着念佛活动的复杂而增加，参与人数越多、耗时越长、念的经越难，佛纸就越灵验，价格越高。所谓佛纸的种类，即是按照念佛者的人数、年龄、姓氏、生肖和劳动时间等因素来对佛纸的品位进行等级区分，不同类型的佛纸印以不同的记号。

表 1: 佛纸的常见类型。

类型	含义	价格
4人8姓佛	4个不同姓氏的人（再加上配偶的姓氏有8个姓）念佛四天	每人可得2叠念成的佛纸，每叠称为一个“佛”，每个售价120元
10人500岁佛	10人的年龄加起来在500~505岁之间，一起念10天	每人可得2个“佛”，每个价值240元
33天佛	33个人一起念33天	每人得3个“佛”，每个价值800元
十二生肖佛	12个不同生肖的人一起念佛，这是专门供建房用的佛纸	房东专门请人念佛一天，每人108元
金龙佛	一百多人一起念，周期为一月	每人得1个“佛”，每个价值1000元

⁶ 佛纸的高级形式被称为“佛经”，纸质和包装更为讲究，由于念佛过程中诵念经文比直接念“阿弥陀佛”更加复杂，价格也更贵，主要有生意经、健康经、出门经、买车经等等。一些大型建筑工程开工时也要烧佛纸或佛经，祈求工程顺利运行。村民说，杭州湾大桥在动工时专门请了33个念佛资格老、口碑好的老太太去施工地点念佛。

(三) 念佛活动的村内供给

随着佛纸成为浙东农村日常生活的必备品，念佛活动需要的人数越来越多，时间越来越长，召集、培训和组织村中老人念佛的“佛头”也应运而生。“佛头”原本是学者周越（2010）所描述的“农户型宗教服务供给者”，他们是兼职于民间宗教的本地农民，而非宗教机构的组织成员，其角色接近于人类学中的“灵媒”，在村民与神佛之间起沟通作用。佛纸市场兴起之后，“佛头”还负责与佛纸或念佛活动的购买者接洽，相当于念佛团队的经理人。作为组织者，“佛头”除了具备一定的领导能力，还须常年在村落中生活，具有广泛的社会关系网络，因为她们要掌握整个村庄念佛老人的信息，包括年龄、属相、配偶状况乃至性格等等，这样才能根据佛纸种类召集不同的念佛者，并监督她们的念佛过程。⁷

念佛活动的地点并不固定，十人以下的“小佛”多在“佛头”家中进行，十人以上的在村中小庙进行，念佛者分摊水电、场地租金等费用。这些小庙在佛像旁边设有空间较大的场地，可供念佛者摆放桌椅合围而坐。当佛纸需求量急剧增大、老板们“订制”的大型佛事活动的增多，“佛头”们不仅要设法补足念佛人数的缺口，更要设法突破念佛地点不足的瓶颈。在这种背景下，一些没有经过土地管理部门审批的小庙在各村的空地上搭建起来，而且即使被拆除也会迅速修复。

三 “回礼”的义务: 绵延的人-神关系链条

(一) 良心所系的礼物之链

为什么浙东农村的村民尤其是那些在市场经济大潮中致富的村民会花费相当数量的钱财用于购买“佛纸”？如果把人们消耗劳动积累以满足宗教需求的行为称之为信仰消费，那么这种信仰消费的根基是什么？诚然，弥补精神匮乏，减弱生命中的危机感、挫折感和不确定性，这是信徒个体在完成仪式行为之后的心理体会，但是，对于浙东村落的村民而言，从事这一行为本身却是一件“非做不可”、“不得不做”的事情。44岁的五金厂老板付某说：

“我们做生意的人特别相信运气，工厂搞得要好要菩萨保佑，开店要烧佛才会生意兴隆，工地也要烧佛，防止出事故。为了佛纸灵验，有时专门找老太太到家里来念，现在请人念佛已经成了风气，这是一些大老板带起来的。我自己反正每年都要许愿，工厂发展好了，年产值达到多少，就来烧33天佛。愿许了就要做到，烧多少全凭良心。

⁷ 如“九星佛”需找9个人念9天，十二生肖佛要找12个不同属相的人。领导能力最强的“佛头”能够组织上百人念“九皇佛”和“金龙佛”。

钱赚来了肯定给菩萨还愿，这是不需要问的。我父亲生前跟我说过，做生意赚来的钱，不全是自己的，有些钱必须花出去，不花出去，更多的钱就回不来。”⁸

对这位中年企业主的访谈，让人不禁想起萨林斯(1972)讲述的“礼物之灵(hau)”。毛利人的猎物除了自己食用还要分出一部分来通过祭司献给森林之神，以便后者在来年提供更多的猎物，而来年的猎物又有一部分作为祭品，如此循环，生生不息。但我在这里要强调的不是人-神交换中的利润(profit)的维度，而是礼物交换过程中给神灵“回礼”的义务感：“生意”的背后充满着不确定性，其中的机遇被一种神秘的不可见的力量所主宰，只有适量的回馈才能保证自己继续享有这种机会。如果生意受挫，那是因为敬献不足，没有表达出自己的诚意。至于究竟多少才算足够，没有明确标准，全凭自己的“良心”⁹，换成老百姓的话语，就是“心诚则灵”。

更为重要的是，回礼与送礼是融成一体的，如果心愿实现甚至是意外之喜降临到自己头上，就意味着来年必须去回礼：这既是对上次许愿之后神佛之赐福的感恩与回报，也是再次送出礼物，并期待着运气的继续降临。所以，回礼本身也是送礼，它结束了上一个时间间隔的期待，同时也自动背负了下一轮的回礼义务。这使得绵延不断的礼物交换过程有了历史延展性：倘若一个家庭从祖辈开始，在某时某刻开启了点烧佛纸的敬神仪式，那么，此后送礼/回礼的礼物之链就难以斩断了。即使是外部的政治因素，也难以将其从私人生活中去除。也正因如此，与神佛的礼物交换过程同时凝聚了家族的情感记忆，给神送礼/回礼的宗教行为扩展为家庭生活中必不可少的、日常化的生命仪式。

(二) 给神佛回礼的道德意涵

当对神佛的回礼与良心、情感联系在一起，道德意涵就会充盈其间。福村一个村民小组的“佛头”，中年妇女王某说：

“每年烧佛是必须的，不能断掉，临时抱佛脚，不灵的！哦，有事的时候拜一下，得了好处就忘了，没有这样的道理！好比我们走人情，收了钱就再不往来，那是什人啊？这样的人别人不光要讲你小气，做人没意思，还要说你钻到钱眼里去了！”¹⁰

我清楚地记得，在回答“愿望都实现了为什么还要买佛纸还愿”的提问时，访谈对象涨红着脸、眼神中含着怒气与责怪的表情。她愣在那里，意思是，“你怎么居然连

这都不懂？”¹¹在许多个像她那样的民间宗教信仰徒眼中，给神佛回礼，本身就是一种道德，渗透着强烈的情感。这和走人情必须回礼一样，是前置于理性思考和利益算计的、人之为人的基本准则。只要自己在神佛面前许下的心愿得到了部分的实现，那么回礼便成为一种义务，这反映了一个人的道德水平，做人的基本信用。如果得了好处却不知回报，那是被村邻瞧不起的、有损人格的败德行为。此处，财富的获取背后隐藏着伦理意涵，生意成功不仅仅是个人努力的结果，还有神佛的赐福，因此给神佛的回礼就成了一种定期互惠的“期货”，以年为时间间隔的回报期限衍生出人的信用与高贵。否则，即使发财致富，也会与“小人得志”、“唯利是图”、“不守信用”、“吝啬鬼”、“守财奴”等负面标签直接相连。

而另一方面，神佛也同样有回礼的义务。如果长期不能兑现献礼的信徒许下的愿景，就有可能因为“不灵”而香火渐衰，直至被人遗忘和抛弃。反过来，如果一位乡间小神特别“灵验”，则有可能从村野晋升到庙宇之中。这种情形不仅是在浙东农村，在华人生活的其他地区同样存在。比如在关中农村传统的求雨仪式中，遇到干旱也不显灵的“龙王”有可能遭到献祭者的鞭打；而在台北艋舺早期的历史中，个别家户的神龛因为神的灵验而最终发展成为庙宇。¹²所以，被人信奉的神佛一定是会回礼的，因为不知回报的神是不“灵”的，而不“灵”的神不是真神。诚如岳永逸(2008:117)所言，“神或仙在中国民众的生活中不是不存在，不是没有力量，它高高在上，但绝不是至高无上的，是可以被人左右的，是‘灵为人附’。”作为信仰对象的“神”并非存在于一个与凡间分立的、凌驾于凡人之上的“圣”的世界里，它并未与老百姓的日常生活脱离。在“人凭神，神依人”的神人互惠关系中，神从属于人。

四 礼物的差等：人神关系的远近之争

给神佛的回礼中渗透的良心、情感与道德，支撑着村民在绵延历史中持续进行着民间宗教活动，即使政治环境变化也未曾中断。不过，回礼的义务作为一种“集体无意识”还只是承托民间宗教活动的潜藏底蕴。日常生活中显在的、村民们自身意识到的、主动为之的动力则与此有别，并因人群的差异而分殊。在浙东农村调查时，村民反复提及的一句俗语，“老板买大佛，打工买小佛，没钱去念佛”，是对这种群体差异的直观体验。

⁸ 2014年8月9日访谈记录。

⁹ 此处的“良心”，可以理解成村民对自身责任和义务的一种自觉意识和情感体验，以及以此为基础而形成的对于自我进行评价与调控的心理机制。它能引起“做好事”的平和感，也能引起“做坏事”时的内疚和悔恨。

¹⁰ 2014年7月28日访谈记录。

¹¹ 在布迪厄那里，这种“理所当然、毋庸置疑”的状态被他称为由实践感而体现出的信念。参见(布迪厄 2009:93)

¹² 参见 Wolf 1974 第 131-182 页。

(一) 村庄的信仰消费分层

在浙东农村，村民的经济条件越好，使用的佛纸等级越高，消费开支越大。我们可以将这种现象称之为信仰消费分层，。以福村为例：

表 2: 福村家户的信仰消费分层。

阶层	职业	户数比例	家庭年纯收入 (万元)	信仰消费年平均开支 (万元)
上层	私营企业主	8.7%	>30	>1
中上层	作坊主、个体户	22.6%	15~30	0.2~1
中层	兼业 (打工、务农)	56.8%	4~15	0.05~0.2
下层	无固定收入来源	11.9%	<4	-1~-0.3*

注：*负号表示下层家庭通过参加念佛活动获取收入。

在福村的经济分层结构中，上层家庭以工商业为主要收入来源，他们人数最少，但消费的佛纸等级高、数量多。如金龙佛、33天佛等。中上层家庭一般有生产五金配件的小作坊，或是农业承包大户，他们在信仰消费方面的开支稍低于私营企业主，类似于10人600岁佛的中等佛纸是经常使用的类型。村庄中层的普通村民占人口的多数，一般在附近工厂务工，他们购买佛纸的数量和等级比富裕阶层明显要低。

村庄的上层和中上层在购买佛纸或请人念佛的信仰消费中是固定的需求方，即使是家中的老人，也不会牺牲闲暇时间去亲自念佛，因为这是一件劳累而枯燥的事情。一些家庭会请村里的老人到自己家中念佛，尽管这比直接购买佛纸的成本更高，需要准备茶水点心，负责伙食水电费用等。

与此相对，村庄的下层及部分中层家庭主要扮演供给者的角色。随着佛纸需求量的激增，村落中出现了主要由中老年人组成的念佛群体，其成员以老年女性居多，且家庭经济状况不佳，许多念佛人都是低保户。她们早上3点就要开始工作，一直到下午4点结束，中间休息两个小时，劳动负荷较大，而且还必须吃素。这些老太太甘愿如此辛苦的原因首先是老人工作机会少，无收入来源；其次，佛纸已成为生活必需品，自己不念佛就要购买，例如老人去世办丧事要用很多佛纸，为减轻子女负担，老人在世时就会储存念好的佛纸，以备不时之需；再次，念佛可以赚钱，如此便可减轻子女的负担，从而缓解代际关系的紧张。

(二) 信仰消费与“面子竞争”

1 上层：风险规避与地位表达

消耗钱财给神佛送礼/回礼，这已经成为浙东农村富裕阶层的一种惯习，他们许愿时的诉求涵盖企业生产、家庭

延续、身体机能等各个方面，但最为核心的，是在面对各种市场风险时给自己的经营决策提供意志支撑。浙东农村社会上层的富人早已脱离了农民的职业身份，成为私营企业主。这个阶层的收入虽然在村庄中最高，但面临的不确定性也最高。乡村企业的规模不大，在经济波动中抵御风险的能力较弱，为了降低成本获取利润不得不游走在民间融资、安全监管、企业纳税、建设用地使用、职工社会保障等诸多领域的政策灰色地带，随时可能遭受突如其来的变故。这个阶层对生活中的各类风险尤其是企业投资与经营过程中的风险异常敏感，他们的文化水平不高，年轻时通过辛勤劳作在沿海经济发展的浪潮中积累了一定财富，但在当下资本化的商业竞争中对于继续扩大财富心有余而力不足。并且，他们仍然生活在熟人社会中，其满足心理需求的方式被村落文化所形塑。对于他们而言，藉由民间宗教活动拉近与超自然力量的关系，这是降低风险、掌控自身命运的有效途径之一。资金规模越大、风险越高，向神佛求取即时“灵验”的需求也越强烈，信仰消费的支出也越庞大。

但是，规避风险的主观动机一旦转化为日常实践中的行动，就会在村庄熟人社会中呈现出另一种客观效果：人们在信仰消费的规模等级中完成了自身财富、地位的表达，这是一种类似于“夸富宴”的社会竞争机制。我们在调查中注意到，排场巨大的念佛活动对于那些久居村庄上层的富人而言已经成为一种生活方式，到了年终还愿的时刻，即使厂里经营的状况不好，也要花费数万元“烧大佛”来“保住面子”，维持商业伙伴的信任。而那些创业成功刚刚跻身于村庄上层的“新富”往往会举行一场盛大、公开、耗费巨大且用时颇长的佛事，用他们的话来说，这是要为自己“挣面子”。可以说，他们在消费不同等级、不同价位的佛纸或念佛劳动的同时，也是在藉此表达自我，追求“自主存在”。¹³

2 中上层：模仿与跟从

村庄上层家庭在信仰消费中铺张的“示异”举动引来中上层家庭的模仿与跟从，因为“烧大佛”不仅仅是经济实力的一种证明，更是在神佛那里争取脸面。相应地，使用低等级的简单佛纸甚至自己在家中念佛就成为一件不宜提及的“丢面子”的事情。所以，村民们消费的既是佛纸这种宗教器物作为敬神礼物的功能，也是不同类型佛纸的品位与等级，更是其所象征的与神佛的关系之远近。

从这个意义上讲，村落中的民间宗教活动作为一种信仰消费与人情消费遵循着共通的逻辑：人情消费是人们

¹³ 人类学者杨美惠指出，礼仪经济存在“耗费的逻辑”，它是社会对过剩资源的刻意消耗，对于个体行动者而言，消耗本身即是目的，是人们追求“自主存在”的自由和权利。参见 Mayfair Mei-hui Yang. *Putting Global Capitalism in its Place: Economic Hybridity, Bataille, and Ritual Expenditure*. *Current Anthropology*. 2000, 4:447-508.

相互之间赠送礼物的社会网络建构，而信仰消费则是俗世人情消费的扩展，向神佛赠送礼物的行为实际上是在以经营人与神佛之间的关系。如果说凡间礼物交换中的人情消费额度表征着人际关系的差序，那么与面向神界的信仰消费额度则代表了与神佛的亲疏。在跨越阴阳两界的关系“打点”过程中，使用的佛纸价格越贵、等级越高，意味着与神佛的关系越近，因而也更能获得神佛的亲睐和庇佑。

3 中、下层：被动卷入

村民可以在逐渐个体化的社会中共存，但在面对一系列难以解释的人生际遇，难以预知的生命机会时，却不能接受自己被神佛所抛弃。尽管一些处于中、下层的村民觉得购买佛纸的开支较大而不愿承受，但他们担心年复一年敬献佛纸的循环一旦中止，自己生活中的平衡就会被打破，从此以后出现的噩运就会被归咎于自己对神佛的主动疏远。况且，村里日子过得好的人都在烧佛纸，而且越烧财气越旺，自己为了省钱而不烧就等于承认自己没有志气，这难免遭到他人的嘲笑和不屑，这种“面子”上的折损将使人非常难堪。更为重要的是，信仰消费的面子竞争绝不仅仅是个人的面子问题而已，它更是自己的家人乃至子孙后代要在神佛那里求取脸面，与神佛进行礼物交换的绵长链条是不能在自己身上中断的。正因为如此，即使是经济地位处于下层的村民，都不会退出这种竞争，他们宁可在平日的物质消费上节衣缩食也要保证自己在重要的节日里能够敬献佛纸。

所以，对于中、下阶层的村民而言，具有礼物交换性质的信仰消费与人情消费一样，都是难以退出的，它不像住房、轿车或奢侈品等私人消费方面的竞争，可以置之不理。倘若不参与信仰消费的角逐，他们害怕自己会被神佛所排斥，而这种冥冥之中存在的强大力量也许会决定自己今后的命运。涂尔干（2006）曾指出，宗教的背后其实是整体性的社群，宗教图腾/神祇乃是共同体的象征符号。那些经济上居于弱勢的村民担心自己被神佛所疏远，实际上，这是个体在担心自己被村落社会所排斥，他们因此而被迫卷入到信仰消费的面子竞争之中。可以说，占人口多数的中、下层村民的信仰消费需求在很大程度上是被动的、次生的，他们的民间宗教行动在经济急剧分化的情境中被社会排斥的压力激发出来。

五 礼物供给与村落社会的整合

（一）礼物制作：阶层间的财富调剂与地位确认

不同阶层围绕着人神关系远近展开的社会竞争是人-神礼物交换的一个显在的方面，但是，它还同时具有另一

面，那就是礼物生产过程中阶层之间的财富调剂与社会地位的确认。

前文已述，礼物的制作，也即是给佛纸“赋灵”的念佛仪式由生活在村落中的家户型专家——“佛头”召集一些老年人完成，这些从事念佛活动的老人来自村庄的中、下阶层。我们定点调查的福村有四个片区，每个片区有十几名“佛头”，他们原来与风水师、算命先生类似，以个人为单位提供灵媒服务并收取相应酬劳。由于当地信仰消费的急剧扩张，这些家户型宗教人士已无力给所有需求者提供“在场”的仪式服务。在巨大需求量的驱动下，他们召集村中老人组成念佛团队。村民不仅可以雇请其来家中念佛，还可以直接购买被念佛团队“赋灵”过的佛纸：佛纸成为念佛活动——宗教服务的一般等价物，念佛者的劳动“凝结”于佛纸之中，在时间和空间上与仪式现场发生了分离。

为什么礼物制作流程中的劳动者也即念佛活动中获取收入的受益者是村庄中下层家庭的老人？原因有以下几个方面。首先是念佛的经济收入与劳动强度的对比。一个专职念佛者每年工作8-9个小时，月收入在2000元左右，这对于赋闲在家的老人而言较为可观，而对于中青年劳动力则毫无吸引力。念佛劳动异常清苦，不仅声音要洪亮清晰，而且劳动过程中须恪守规矩，不能闲聊说笑，不得违犯各种禁忌，否则会影响佛纸的灵验程度。¹⁴因为这些缘故，富裕阶层的老人即使自己愿意，其子女也不肯让他们加入到念佛队伍之中，毕竟，这意味着自己年迈的父母被同村的熟人监督甚至有可能因违反规矩而遭到数落，而这对于已经致富的他们而言，不仅没有必要，而且也不应该。

第二，是念佛活动的劳动关系中内含的地位差别。无论在普通村民还是念佛者自身看来，菩萨的庇护对象都不是念佛动作的发出者，口中叨念“南无阿弥陀佛”的念佛老人是在为他人祈福，是在挣钱逐利，那些花钱买下礼物并在神像前点烧的人才是真正在供奉神佛。老年妇女李某，在一个“9人18姓佛”的群体中念佛近10年，她说：

“我们这里有个说法，叫‘念佛不信佛，买佛才信佛’。老太太年纪大了打工没人要，来念佛就是为了赚点钱，又方便照顾小孩。只有花钱买佛的才是真信佛，越是做生意办厂的越信，他们都不信了，我们念那么多佛卖给谁？”¹⁵

¹⁴ 在诸多念佛团队的竞争之下，念佛活动的禁忌变得越来越多。例如，念佛时须表情严肃；念佛当天必须荤腥不沾；家中有人生病住院、办丧事或去过灵堂的人不能念佛；进过产房的人不能念佛、女性月经期间不能念佛、离婚或丧偶者不能在与婚庆活动的佛事中念佛等等。此外，各种不同种类与等级的佛纸对制作方式的要求也越来越细致。如“10人600岁佛”念佛者的年龄不能超过606岁；“4人8姓佛”要求念佛人当中不能有改嫁过的，夫妻双方须有八个姓，且姓氏不能重复等等。

¹⁵ 2014年7月17日访谈记录。

神佛庇佑的是礼物的送出者，而不是礼物的生产者。这种集体观念为富裕阶层购买更多的佛纸提供了合法性支撑，也为贫弱阶层通过念佛劳动获取收入提供了话语支持，念佛活动因而被视为佛纸生产流程中的一个环节，在生产过程中，劳动者与劳动产品相互分离，佛纸消费者是在花钱购买念佛人的劳动，念佛群体服务的对象不是神佛而是花钱进行信仰消费的老板。那些去老板家中念佛的贫困老人辛苦念佛以至于喉咙嘶哑却不能跟神佛走得更近，她们是为了谋生而向同村的富人售卖自己的劳动，这种性质的关系中蕴含着地位的反差，念佛老人的体验就像当年被地主雇请的佣人。由于收入来源极为有限，她们在生活中对老板们有一定程度的依附性，在欣喜地接过老板给出的酬劳时，她们也接受了自己的家庭与村内富裕家庭之间的地位差别。

最后，是“佛头”邀请念佛成员时的感性考量，这体现了社会本身的粘合力。佛纸需求的旺盛催生出一个提供仪式服务的本地市场，在这门关于“礼物”的生意中，作为供需双方中间人的“佛头”同时也是整个村庄社会网络中衔接富人与穷人的纽带。“佛头”与念佛团队成员间的关系并非固定不变，她们根据佛纸“订单”的种类来确定人数和实际人选。而在考虑邀请谁时，除了老人的身体状况是否健康、脾气性格是否柔顺之外，最为主要的因素还是老人的家庭经济状况。作为低头不见抬头见的村邻，给相熟的弱势老人一份增加收入的机会，这是生活在村内的“佛头”的一种情感本能。而且，这完全不同于施舍，而是让处于村庄下层的老人有尊严地获得收入。¹⁶一些在家中举办佛事活动的老板在托付“佛头”召集人手时，也会叮嘱他们遵循“能帮就帮”的原则。¹⁷作为回报，这些“做善事”的富人也获得了村民对其优势地位的认可，这种认可甚至能够在参加村庄选举时为富人赢得大量的选票。

(二) “感性”的礼物流通

敬神礼物的供给中的另一个重要环节，是礼物的流通。在浙东农村，佛纸主要通过村落内部的熟人关系网络实现流通。其中的原因，是依靠熟人之间的信任来应对佛纸的“造假”。对于村民来说，一叠黄色的粗纸是否经历过念佛仪式的“赋灵”，其判断依据是盖在佛纸上的印记。如果有人为了获取暴利不讲道义良心，未记念佛仪式而将印章直接盖在佛纸上，村民是无从甄别的。唯一的应对这种败德行径的方法，是从熟悉的佛头或者念佛老人那里购买，当然，更好的办法是请人至家中现场念佛，但那样耗费的成本要高得多，非普通人所能承受。

¹⁶ 村里一些经济条件不好的老太太因年龄或身体健康原因不能加入念佛群体，她们只能在家里念佛，除去自给自足，多余的也会卖出，但价格明显偏低，每叠佛纸的售价只在 40-50 元之间。

¹⁷ 我们在福村调查时看到这样一幅景象，那些被列为低保户的老人，只要身体还算健康，都在小庙里参加群体念佛。

在因长期交往而对对方人品、性情高度熟悉的亲缘与血缘关系网络中，造假行骗的佛纸供给者一旦被识破，他将会遭到巨大的情感损伤，不仅获利渠道从此中断，还将遭到村落社会长期的舆论谴责与关系排斥。由于这个原因，当地的佛纸交易只局限在村落社区内部，只有极个别村民去寺庙中购买成批印制的商品化的佛纸。同时，也正是由于这个原因，村民们在向熟悉的老年人购买佛纸时愿意付出更多的钱财，因为这种购买行为并不纯粹是一种商品交易，而是包含着亲情与友情的成分，隐藏着扶助与救济的色彩，是以一种体面的方式对老人给予照顾。

佛纸的生产制作者主要是村里的弱势老人，与此相对，其消费者则是村庄中的富人与年轻人，他们基于信任与情感的因素只会向家族及本村的老人购买佛纸作为敬神的礼物。所以，敬神的礼物的流通看起来是村民用闲暇时间生产和售卖佛纸，但其另一方面，则是财富通过熟人关系网络流向了村庄的弱势阶层与老年群体，富裕家庭过剩的资源在阶层之间、家族之内、村落之中实现了财富调剂。通过这种资源再分配的“去分化机制”（高万芹，2015），村落社会在一定程度上完成了与社会分离趋势相抗衡的内部整合。

六 结论

(一) 人-神礼物交换中的关系竞争：民间宗教活动扩张的动力学

在中国农村的本土民间宗教中，人通过给神佛“送礼”来建立个人化的、具体的人-神关系，他们“有灵必求”，同时给诸多神仙送礼，同时，他们还“有应必酬”（林国平，2007），把自己在神佛面前许下的愿景之实现视作神仙的“显灵”，而对于这种保佑和恩赐，则是必须通过还愿来酬谢的，这被称之为“回礼”。在日常生活化的本土宗教中，“送礼”与“回礼”在时间之流中浑然一体、无从割裂，以年为单位的时间间隔将不同世代、不同境遇中的宗教活动衔接起来，形成难以中断的送礼/回礼、许愿/还愿的绵延链条。回礼的义务中体现着一个人的信用、操守，获得神佛的赐福也同时意味着形成了对神佛的负债。人神互往（reciprocity）中的间隔与期待、良心与情感，构成了本土民间宗教的道德基础。

不过，在回礼的道德义务中形成的宗教延续性并不足以解释农村民间宗教的兴盛。从本文考察的个案来看，经济增长、社会分层与熟人社会的存留也是民间宗教发展的必要条件。在城镇化进程中，浙东村落社会正经历着剧烈的经济分化，不同阶层的村民在规避风险、寻求机遇的同时也在寻求着社会地位的自我认同。在变迁过程中对风险因素最为敏感的村庄上层投入大量资源进行民间宗教的信仰消费，这在熟人社会中也转化为“夸富宴”式的自身经济实力的展演，成为在神佛面前举行的

经济分层的社会确认仪式。经由这场展示，村民被区分为有面子/没面子、面子大/小的不同人群。因为佛纸敬献程度的不同，人们形成了与神佛远近不同的关系，从而也分享了不同等级的神佛的权力与赐福。信仰消费背后隐含着复杂的符号象征机制，社会阶层以民间宗教为媒介，通过神像前的面子竞争在俗世中建构出新的权力关系。正是不同阶层围绕着人-神关系之亲疏远近的建构所展开的激烈竞争成为民间宗教活动扩张的基本动力，这种动力在农村社会结构的分化过程中被不断地生产出来，又在权力-地位的竞争与继替中完成再生产。

(二) “灵”的循环与人-人关系的调和: 总体性视角的发现

整体审视浙东农村的人-神礼物交换，不难发现这个绵延的过程之中存在两个生生不息的循环：其一，是通过灵媒赋灵——神佛显灵——再次赋灵……，“灵力”得以在神界与凡间循环；其二，是通过富人买佛——穷人念佛——继续买佛……，剩余的财富在村落中的富人与穷人之间循环。礼物的“灵力”¹⁸在纸钱点烧的缭绕轻烟中到达神佛，又在日常宗教活动的朗朗之音中回到村庄。村民们多因“求财”而拜佛许愿，神佛“显灵”意味着财富在一小部分人那里集中，使之成为富人；而“赋灵”的过程与之相对，是富人在购买礼物中的“灵力”时将过剩的财富通过渗透着情感与信任的熟人网络向村里的弱势阶层疏散。在这个循环中，村民因祈福禳灾的现实诉求开启个体行动，但以敬神的礼物为媒介，社会实现了贫富之间的资源流动与财富调剂。整个循环的结果是，村庄的中、下层家庭获得改善生计的收入，而上层家庭的地位优势在慷慨付出中得到认可。

这里，礼物范式下总体性视角的优势就彰显了出来。在本文的案例中，如果依循传统的宗教社会学研究方法从民间宗教信仰的群体构成和仪式组织过程进行考察，视野的重心就会落到仪式服务的供给者身上，并认为民间宗教的组织性正在强化。但事实上，这些由农户型供给者组成的念佛团体并非共享精神价值的宗教组织，它们不是“团契”或教派，而更像是从事宗教物品生产的集体合作企业，其以利益机制而统合，成员的会聚不是为了共同体验宗教教义与神圣情感，各个分散的念佛团队背后也没有系统性的联系。这些念佛团队与其说是宗教团体，不如说是经济组织，只是其生产制作和销售过程较

为特殊，建立在特定区域的民间信仰、道德设置、及伦理观念的基础之上。如果从宗教的功能或者说信徒在宗教行为中的心理动机与精神活动来进行考察，那么研究的重心就会落到民间宗教的需求者那里，并注意到民间宗教的现实性、功利性与私人化倾向，社区共同体的离散性增强，民间宗教的公共性正在衰落（何倩倩、桂华，2015）。然而，在礼物范式的总体性视野中，我们可以看到“灵”的循环背后存在一种整合机制，个体化、私人化的求神拜佛的宗教行动却通过这种微妙的机制在整体上维持着村庄的基本内聚力，这种整合不仅体现在财富调剂方面，它还借以强化了村民共享的那些观念、道德与情感。

(三) 礼物交换与中国民间宗教——社会范式还是权力范式？

在学术史上，对礼物交换的解读，莫斯与布迪厄有着两种完全不同的路径，前者对礼物的关注是围绕社会何以存续及团结纽带的建构而展开的，而后者在礼物交换研究中的旨趣是权力的象征性运作，也即是资本如何在礼物交换中转化为象征资本并实现“正当化”，正因如此，布迪厄特别关注礼物交换的时间间隔中的“行动策略”（布迪厄 2009:152）。刘拥华（2010）将二者分别称之为“社会范式”与“权力范式”。¹⁹

本文所呈现的浙东农村的人-神礼物交换的奇妙之处在于，它既有人们在信仰消费上围绕人-神关系的远近所展开的象征资本的竞争，也有通过阶层之间在礼物生产流通中的财富调剂与地位确认所实现的社会整合。权力竞争与社会团结，两种机制在中国民间宗教的日常实践中共同发生作用，形塑出一个以神佛为中心的村落权力地位的差序场，身处其中的村民明白和接受自己在这个象征秩序的关系格局中所处的位置²⁰，努力维持着前后的平衡。如果不理解礼物交换与权力的关系，那么浙东农村民间宗教活动兴盛的内在机制很难得到阐释，人-神礼物交换中包含着权力秩序及村庄社会关系的再生产，礼物竞争的背后正是象征资本的产生与地位认同的形成。但权力分析的局限性在于，其对竞争策略的关注会掩盖交换过程中行动者的道义观念和情感体验，而恰恰是这一点使得礼物交换与物质交换区分开来。也正因为此，村庄场域的礼物竞争只是导致村民交往圈的亲疏，而并没有发生现代社会的“区隔”。村民对于权力的认可并非仅仅基于利益本身的考量，而是

18 本文中的“灵力”是一个本土概念，它来自于农民的语言，含有“灵验”的程度、使礼物具有“灵性”等意义，这与莫斯《礼物》一文中的“礼物之灵（*hau*）”不可等同，它不是那种人格化的、自身具有灵魂，必须回到归属之地、能够对不回礼者主动实施惩罚的神秘力量，而是一种在“香客-灵媒-神灵”这个三角结构中建立瞬时联系的可能性，有了这种联系，人们就可以接近神灵从而优先获得神灵对机遇的分配。但是，这两种“灵力”的背后，都是社会对于回礼的集体期待，这种集体情感是礼物交换得以持续的原因。

19 尽管莫斯在他的研究中曾强调“送给诸神的礼物非常重要”（莫斯，2003：125-131），但他和布迪厄所考察的礼物交换主要发生人与人或部落与部落之间。

20 笔者在研究富人治村现象时发现，先富能人在日常生活中对贫弱阶层的慷慨给予及“以私贴公”的行为是他们获得权威的重要原因，这比选举时通过贿选获得选票更能服众，更符合村民心中关于权力与公正的道义原则。可参见拙作《富人治村——城镇化进程中的村庄权力结构变迁》，中国社会科学出版社 2015 年版。

利益交换背后隐藏着的良心与道德。换句话说，正是道德使权力得以正当化，而仅有策略，是无法理解权力运作与村庄团结的。

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