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# AN OLD STATE IN NEW SETTINGS

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IN MEMORY OF MAURICE FREEDMAN

Edited by

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## SOME SYNCRETIC ASPECTS OF SWATOW BAPTIST RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

### *Introduction*

THE material on which this paper is based was gathered during the course of a wider study of the development of the Swatow Baptist Church (Chao-yu Jin-xin-hui 潮語浸信會) in Hong Kong (Soo 1980) and is mainly derived from fieldwork conducted among three Swatow Baptist local churches during the years 1975-6.<sup>1</sup> My research, in general, represents an attempt to fill a serious gap in the sociological literature on religion, namely, the virtual absence of sociological and anthropological accounts of Christianity in a Chinese socio-cultural milieu.<sup>2</sup>

The Swatow Baptists are the largest of Hong Kong's Chaozhou-speaking Christian collectivities and constitute an important section of the

1. Fieldwork was carried out between the summer of 1975 and the autumn of 1976 while serving as a demonstrator in the Department of Sociology at the University of Hong Kong. A brief account of some the conditions under which I conducted this research is contained in Soo 1980: 32-5, 42.

2. To date, sociologists and anthropologists interested in China have dealt with Christianity only in passing, and little is known about Christian institutions in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan or the overseas Chinese communities of Southeast Asia. Morris Fred's work (1977) on the socialization process of the Little Flock movement (Xiao-qun 小群), which is Taiwan's largest indigenous Christian group, is a step in the right direction. However, it represents only a limited contribution in view of the obvious significance of Christian institutions for the study of religious change in China from the late Imperial period onwards.

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territory's Baptist denomination, which also includes Cantonese-, Mandarin- and English-speaking churches. The first of their eight local churches and nine chapels was established in a squatter area of Kowloon in the late 1930s, when many refugees from the Chaozhou region of north-eastern Guangdong fled to the colony as a result of the Japanese invasion of China.<sup>3</sup> This church, which is now situated in a wealthy Kowloon suburb, is one of the three most important local churches that provides evidence for the present essay. The second church under consideration here was initially set up in 1944 in the long-established Chinese residential and business area of Hong Kong island known as Western District, while the third was founded in 1955 in Kwun Tong, a densely populated industrial centre and new town in the New Territories. In the period since the Japanese occupation of the territory (1941–5), the Swatow Baptists have expanded considerably, so that at present their membership totals over six thousand persons. They continue to maintain links with—but are independent of—the American Baptist Mission, which first introduced Baptist Christianity into the Chaozhou region in the 1860s, following the Treaty of Tientsin (1858).

Like most other sinological anthropologists writing on religion in China, Maurice Freedman was primarily interested in the norms, values and institutions of traditional religion. Although he looked to the extensive literature produced by Christian missionaries working in China for much of his data on southern Chinese rural social organization in late Imperial times, he nevertheless considered only that material which relates to Chinese religion, kinship and so on, as unaffected by missionary teachings and secular work.<sup>4</sup> In discussing religious developments in the

3. According to the 1971 Hong Kong census, more than 400,000 people claim to be of Chaozhou origin. This figure represents 9–10 per cent of the territory's population. Prior to the 1930s, the Chaozhou population of Hong Kong was relatively small and composed mainly of migrant male workers unaccompanied by their families. In the post-war period, however, many refugees have brought their families with them. Within the territory the Chaozhou, who speak a dialect which is mutually unintelligible with Cantonese (the lingua franca of Hong Kong), have tended to dwell in particular areas, which as a result have built up significant concentrations of Chaozhou residents. This pattern of settlement in large part reflects the migrants' initial reliance on friends, close kin, fellow-villagers, and other members of the Chaozhou speech-group for assistance in finding accommodation, employment, and so on. In order to establish themselves in Hong Kong, most Chaozhou refugees had to begin employment in low-status jobs, and even today, in the large industrial centres such as Kwun Tong, many young men and women from Chaozhou families continue to be employed as low-paid and unskilled industrial labour. Increasingly, however, the Chaozhou have become strongly represented in other fields, including trade, commerce and finance, textile and plastic manufacturing, and the retailing of such items as medicines and rice (*Chao-qiao Nian-jian* 1978: 119–202).

4. See his review (1975) of *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (ed. J.K. Fairbank), in the concluding paragraph of which he places great emphasis on the importance of the contributions of J. Doolittle, A.H. Smith and other missionaries for the study of traditional Chinese society.

predominantly Chinese communities of Hong Kong and Singapore, Freedman gave little attention to Christian institutions. Not surprisingly, therefore, when he did have occasion to comment on Christianity in his studies of Chinese society, he was only concerned with it in syncretic contexts—that is, in situations which involved the mixing of Chinese and Christian religious traditions.<sup>5</sup> A case in point is his observation that a Chinese individual's faith in geomancy (*feng-shui*) commonly survives conversion to Christianity (1966: 124). So, in offering an essay based on my own fieldwork among Chinese Christians in Hong Kong as a tribute to a man whose excellent scholarship we commemorate in this volume, I take my cue from his brief remarks on Christianity and syncretism and explore those features of Swatow Baptist religious life in which the Church has found Chinese traditional beliefs and practices especially recalcitrant.

Of course, students of Chinese society familiar with the Taiping Rebellion and the numerous cults of the Five Worthies, which have incorporated elements from Christianity on a fairly substantial scale, may find that the present paper provides only a relatively limited example of syncretism.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, sociologists of religion interested in the syncretism of non-Western and Christian belief and practice in other parts of the world will doubtless be able to point to cases of syncretism far more profound than that presented here. There are, for example, many native religious movements which have drawn heavily on mission teachings and church organization. In other instances, an externally introduced Christian mission or Church has encountered a marked persistence of indigenous, non-Western religious dispositions. Certainly, when compared to some of the already documented instances of syncretism, the Swatow Baptists demonstrate only a limited assimilation of elements drawn from traditional religion.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, given the lack of sociological accounts of Christianity in China, it still seems useful as a contribution to both the sociology of religion and the study of Chinese society to investigate, in a Chinese cultural context, a limiting case of syncretism in which the members of a

5. The term syncretism is used in this paper only in a general way, to describe Chinese Christians' incorporation of traditional Chinese religious ideas and practice into their own religious observance and ideas.

6. See Boardman (1952: 52-105) for an analysis of Christian elements in the Taiping Rebellion. A brief discussion of the cults of the Five and Six Worthies is provided at the end of this article.

7. See, for example, the discussion of the Umbanda movement contained in Leacock 1964, Messenger's analysis (1960) of syncretism in a Nigerian nativist church, the study of the syncretic basis of the cult of the patron saint in Tlaxcala, Mexico, provided by Nutini (1976), and Wilson's comments (1973) on Brazilian Kardecism. These accounts, among many others, point to religious movements combining elements of Christianity and indigenous religious belief and practice on a scale far more prolific than that presented in the present study.

fundamentalist Christian group that in principle maintains a rigid anti-syncretic stance have nevertheless managed to incorporate some important traditional Chinese religious customs into their Christian observance.

The essay is in four parts. The first provides a general explanation of the antipathy of Christians towards an explicitly Confucian-Christian synthesis. The second and third parts discuss syncretic religious practices among members of the Swatow Baptist Church in Hong Kong. The final part suggests some factors which seem especially relevant in explaining the syncretism of the Swatow Baptists, and briefly relates the findings to the religious preoccupations of other Chinese religious groups.

### *Proposals for a Confucian-Christian Synthesis*

The most appropriate point to begin the discussion is the status of the Swatow Baptists in Chinese Protestant circles. In brief, the Swatow Baptist Church both sees itself and is defined by other Chinese Protestants as an indigenous church (*ben-se jiao-hui* 本色教會) which fulfils the 'Three Self Principles': self-administration (*zi-li* 自理), self-finance (*zi-yang* 自養) and self-evangelization (*zi-chuan* 自傳).<sup>8</sup> Thus, the religious lives of the colony's Swatow Baptists are not under the supervision of Western missionaries, even though the Swatow Baptists continue to this day to maintain close links with the American Baptists from whom they gained their independence in the 1920s, when Chinese nationalist antagonism was directed at missionary-dominated churches. It was during this period of intense anti-Christian campaigns that Chinese Protestants first made organized and sustained efforts to rid their religion of its foreign identity and to terminate missionary control. Among some of the more prominent proposals was the idea that a successful transplanting of the Christian message on to Chinese soil necessitated a synthesis of Christian and Chinese religious and cultural traditions. In particular, the idea of an

8. The ideal of an 'indigenous Chinese Church' was formally advocated by members of the National Christian Council, a body founded in Shanghai in 1922 in response to the Anti-Christian Movement (*Fei Jidu-jiao Yun-dong* 非基督教運動) of that year. As a precise definition of the term 'indigenous' was lacking, it was generally accepted that the 'Three Self Principles' were to provide the guidelines as to what constituted an indigenous church. It might be noted, however, that these criteria were derived from the West. In particular, their origins lie in the work of Revd Rufus Anderson who, as corresponding secretary, dominated the activities of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions between 1832 and 1866. On the basis of the principle that the function of missionaries was to plant the mustard seed, or to start the leaven working, Anderson emphasised the importance of 'the speedy establishment of self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating churches' (Field 1974: 42).

explicit synthesis of Christian theology and Confucian precepts was and continues to be an important aspect of some Chinese Protestant notions of an indigenous church, and for this reason it is necessary to consider it in some detail.

Zhao Zichen, one of the foremost advocates of the need to develop a truly Chinese theology, expressed the syncretists' basic ideal in the following terms:

The indigenous church is one which conserves and unifies all truths contained in the Chinese religion and in China's ancient civilization and which thus manifests and expresses the religious life and experiences of the Chinese Christians in a fashion that is native and natural to them. (Chao 1925: 497)

From the 1920s onwards, many leading Chinese Christian thinkers have concerned themselves with the role that syncretism might play in the development of an indigenous church and have written earnest tracts on the compatibility of Christian and Confucian traditions. It was, for example, the argument of Wu Lei-chuan—perhaps the best known of these writers and at one time the Chancellor of Yenching University—that important Christian beliefs have direct Confucian counterparts. He emphasised, in particular, similarities between God and the traditional Chinese concepts of Heaven (*tian* 天) and the Supreme Being (*shang-di* 上帝), between Jesus and Confucius as social teachers, and between the Christian concept of 'love' and the Confucian idea of *ren* 仁 ('perfect virtue free from selfishness' or 'the inner love which prompts just deeds').

More recently, in present-day Hong Kong, a number of firm proposals have been made for a fusing together of Christian and traditional Chinese religious norms and values.<sup>9</sup> In particular, a Chinese version of the Holy Bible is advocated. According to the most prominent of such schemes, the New Chinese Bible is to be composed of four sections, namely, the New Testament, selections from the Old Testament, the Confucian classics, and sections from Buddhist and Taoist classics (Xie 1971: 2). This need to compile a new Bible specifically tailored to the needs of Chinese Christians is justified on several grounds. First, on the basis of Matthew 5: 16–17, 'Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them', it is argued that Chinese religious traditions should not be replaced by Christian doctrines but, rather, are truly fulfilled through the addition of the Christian message. Secondly, a Bible which is used by Chinese must contain the Confucian classics, because these are considered to have been sanctioned by God and to provide a necessary foundation for the transplanting of the Christian Gospel on to Chinese soil (Hu 1971b: 5). Thirdly, there is a need for a

9. Although most of these proposals were made during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a limited number are still being put forward.

version of the Bible which has been specifically compiled by Chinese. Revisions of the Bible must not be the monopoly of Christians in the West: 'Why should the Children of God in the East not compile a Bible of their own based on their own perspective and prayers?' (Xie 1971: 2). A number of syncretists have pushed this point further by asserting that the Chinese are, like the Israelites, an elected people of God. According to Hu Zanyun,

the Chinese race have existed for several thousand years during which many sages have emerged.... Our long cultural heritage is compatible with that of the Israelites.... It is, therefore, inconceivable that China has not also formed her own contract (*li-yue* 立約) with God. (Hu 1971a: 4)

Hu further proclaims (*ibid.*) that the Chinese Christians have their own God, who 'is at least as important as the Jehovah of the Israelites'.

The most outstanding features of the scheme for a new Chinese Bible are its suggested demotion of the Old Testament on the one hand and, on the other, the inclusion of writings closely identified with the three great religious traditions of China. The limited place given to the Old Testament is based on the view that it is less relevant than the New Testament for the creation of a genuinely Chinese Christian theology. First, Leviticus, Kings, Numbers and other books of the Old Testament are deemed to be mere historical records of the Israelites which have no bearing whatsoever on the Christian message (Hu 1971b: 3). Secondly, the Old Testament is felt to record certain events which are unethical, indecent, and contrary to Chinese moral sensitivities as, for example, the account in Genesis of Lot's incest with his daughters (Feng 1968: 17). Thus, the syncretists argue that much of the Old Testament is irrelevant to Christian doctrines, constitutes an unnecessary obstacle to Chinese acceptance of Christianity, and should be omitted from a truly Chinese version of the Bible. On the other hand, Chinese cultural traditions, as contained in the Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist classics, should be included in order that Chinese Christians might be reasonably well versed in their own culture, instead of, as at present, alienating themselves from it through adherence to a religious teaching which has remained foreign.<sup>10</sup>

Broadly speaking, these and other proposals for a Confucian-Christian synthesis have failed to gain much support among Chinese Protestants. There are several factors which help to account for this lack of success. First, Chinese Protestants have tended to equate syncretism with impurity

10. A second main extension in syncretic thinking in contemporary Hong Kong is represented by the writings of a Lutheran preacher, Feng Shangli, who incorporates the Confucian concept of the Golden Mean (*zhong-yong* 中庸) into his suggestions for a new syncretic theology. Under his proposed scheme the 'Tao' (*dao* 道), which is defined as God's particular revelation as recorded in the Bible, is to be infused with the 'Li' (*li* 理), which is characterized as God's general revelation as represented by the Chinese classics. His thesis is most fully set out in Feng 1972.

of belief and to define orthodox Christianity as adherence to the Holy Bible in a strictly fundamentalist sense. This reflects not only a Protestant emphasis on doctrinal purity but also the Chinese concept of orthodoxy (*zheng-tong* 正統) which, summarily stated, implies that an idea will come to be accepted as orthodox only if its roots are located in the Chinese classics. This notion is transformed in the world of Chinese Protestantism into the idea that the Bible is the Chinese Protestants' classic and that the only orthodox form of Christianity is that sanctioned by God in the Bible. This has formed a powerful barrier to the popularization of the syncretists' message.<sup>11</sup>

The tendency of Chinese Protestants to equate syncretism with heterodoxy (*yi-duan xie-shuo* 異端邪說) is also reflected linguistically. Many church leaders, when expressing their opposition to syncretic proposals, use the terms *hun-be zhu-yi* 混和主義 and *hun-za zhu-yi* 混雜主義, both of which mean 'mixed doctrine' and have pejorative connotations. Although attempts have been made to improve on them by translating the verb 'to syncretize' as *rong-be* 融和 ('to combine harmoniously'), this provision of a more affectively neutral translation has by and large been ignored by most Chinese Protestants, who prefer the established versions, not only because they consider *hun-be zhu-yi* and *hun-za zhu-yi* to be more exact renditions of the English term (which indeed they are), but also because they wish to emphasise their dislike of the phenomenon of syncretism.

An additional pressure on Chinese church leaders has been the predominantly conservative attitude of Protestant missionaries. This was particularly important in the two decades prior to the Second World War and remains a factor in post-war Hong Kong where many denominations, although in principle quite free from direct missionary control, have nevertheless been dependent on mission funds to assist in their programmes of rapid church expansion. In the creation of indigenous churches Chinese Christians have, of course, given precedence to the politically crucial task of rendering Protestant churches free of missionary control.

11. In this connection, it is also worthwhile pointing out the influence on mainstream Chinese Protestantism since the 1920s of a number of indigenous Christian sects such as the Christian Assembly Hall (more popularly known as the Little Flock or Xiao-qun) and the True Jesus Church (Zhen Yesu Jiao-hui 真耶穌教會). Basing themselves on the ideal of the New Testament church, and exhibiting only the barest minimum of church organization, they have gained considerable support among Chinese Christians and have long constituted a flourishing contrast to the more conventional mainstream churches. The emphasis which these sects have placed on apostolic beliefs and practices as the only orthodox form of Christianity has reinforced mainstream Protestant antipathy towards syncretism. Although their teachings are still of some importance in shaping attitudes towards syncretism in present-day Hong Kong, it should be noted that since many of the members of these sects elected to remain in China after 1949, their influence in the territory is much less than it was in China in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.



But especially during the 1920s, it was very difficult for Chinese Christians to achieve full administrative independence unless they were able to demonstrate a proven ability to maintain an orthodox, that is Western, Christianity.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, if the proposed Confucian-Christian synthesis is placed in the context of modern Chinese intellectual history, then the reasons for its failure to create a Sinified Christianity become even clearer. The first two decades of the twentieth century in China saw a search for national salvation through a series of Western intellectual forces which included liberalism, scientism and socialism. Confucianism was discarded by many progressive thinkers on the ground that it was irrelevant to the construction of a modern China. By the mid-1930s, even fervent syncretists such as Wu Leichuan were prepared to acknowledge that these proposals were politically redundant: 'Chinese culture itself is now seeking a new direction of development. It is indeed a futile task for Christianity to identify itself with traditional Chinese culture' (Wu 1936: 18). Moreover, if we accept Levenson's analysis of this problem, then the syncretists' attempt to identify Christianity with Confucianism in the post-May 4th era has only served to weaken the position of Christianity. For the price which Chinese national pride demanded for the overturning of a great historical tradition such as Confucianism was the simultaneous rejection of Christianity, its foreign counterpart, and in this way anti-Christianity served as a mechanism to protect against the shock of rejecting Confucianism (1972: 122). What was demanded was a complete rejection of both traditional culture and Christianity. Thus church leaders, in their attempts to meet nationalist criticisms of Christianity, were not amenable to any explicit infusion of Confucian doctrines into Christianity.

In present-day Hong Kong, Confucianism is thought to be of little use in helping to enhance the image of the Christian Church in the eyes of the

12. An example of the kind of pressure which conservative mission societies could bring to bear is provided by the China Inland missionaries, who stipulated that the transfer of church ownership from mission society to local Chinese was conditional on the latter's observance of correct theological positions: 'Deeds of lease or transfer are to include the following stipulations, namely, adherence to the doctrinal standards of, and maintenance of fellowship with, the mission and that "no one teaching doctrinal views contrary to the recognized standards of the Mission should be invited to speak on the property"' (see Douglass 1933: 41). It should be noted that many of the contemporary Hong Kong proposals for the development of a Chinese-Christian theology are put forward through the magazine *Ching Feng* 景風, which is the official publication of the Tao Fong Shan organization, based in the New Territories (Sha Tin). This organization had its origins in the Christian Mission to the Buddhists, set up in 1922 in Nanking by K.L. Reichelt. The mission was re-opened in 1957 in Hong Kong by a group of European missionaries, the Anglican Bishop of Hong Kong, and several of the territory's leading Chinese Christians.

territory's Chinese population.<sup>13</sup> In this connection, it is important to stress that as part of its evangelical strategy, the Church in this industrialized and urbanized community presents itself as an institution which embodies the values of 'modernity' and through which some of the benefits of 'modern life' as found in Hong Kong might be gained by individual members. Such benefits include contact with the 'affluent West', success in the world of business, achievement of middle-class status and prospect of further upward mobility, participation in the attempt to realize a 'free and democratic China', and familiarity with modern technological developments. Given that these are among the possibilities which the Church symbolically claims membership can bring, it may be readily understood that local church leaders have little interest in the continuing attempts at producing a Confucian-Christian synthesis.

### *Burial*

The official policy of the Swatow Baptist Church in Hong Kong towards syncretism follows closely the general Chinese Protestant tradition outlined above. The territory's Swatow Baptists adhere to the view that syncretism is symptomatic of lower standards of belief, lack of piety, heresy, and secularism. They define the indigenous church principle of 'self-propagation' in a very simple manner as 'propagation by Chinese preachers'.<sup>14</sup> Considerable emphasis is placed on theological orthodoxy and, as fundamentalists, all Church members are expected to adhere closely to the teachings of the Bible.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, at the level of religious practice, there is substantial evidence to show that the members of the Swatow Baptist Church have incorporated a number of Chinese

13. It is important to stress here that while the churches are not prepared to identify themselves overtly with Confucian doctrine, this does not preclude them from sometimes utilizing Confucian teachings which directly coincide with Christian principles in order to illuminate their themes, thereby helping to enhance the commitment to Christianity.

14. In contrast, the Confucian-Christian syncretists proposed to develop a 'self-propagating' church not only by the use of Chinese preachers but also, of course, by creating an indigenous Chinese Christian theology acceptable on a widespread basis to Chinese Christians.

15. Note, for example, that the Swatow Baptists characterize the Unification Church, God's Children and other similar contemporary sectarian movements as propagators of *yi-duan xie-shuo* or 'heretical teachings'. They define as heretical (*yi-duan*) 'any Christian movement that calls itself Christian that is inconsistent with the teachings of the Bible'. Thus sects are broadly differentiated from denominational churches (*zong-pai* 宗派) on the ground that they are non-biblical.

religious and cultural elements into their Christian worship. In this section and the next, I deal with this contradiction.

I have described in detail elsewhere Sunday worship as conducted by the Swatow Baptists as well as the two rites of Baptism and the Lord's Supper which all Baptists consider to be particularly important and which, in Chinese contexts, are known to be especially vulnerable to an infusion of 'pagan' religious conceptions (see Soo 1980: 455-6, 459). The accounts of Sunday services show that Swatow Baptist Sunday worship is little more than a direct translation of Western congregational worship, with the possible exceptions of the doxology, which is sung at the end rather than at the beginning of the service, and, more importantly, the use of a limited number of Confucian moral postulates by some pastors in order to illustrate their Christian message better. This use of Confucian themes cannot, however, be considered as an acknowledgement of the validity of traditional Chinese religious beliefs, because these Confucian maxims are quite clearly drawn on only in order to illustrate essentially Baptist dogmatic principles for the benefit of some of the more elderly and less well-educated members of the congregation.

It is also possible to show that certain Chinese cultural and religious influences occur to a limited extent in the rites of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. In baptismal ceremonies, for example, women are *de facto* relegated to a secondary position, and this is probably a legacy of the patriarchal values of Chinese society which place women in a markedly inferior position to men (Freedman 1966: 56). And in the Lord's Supper, the role of the pastor is considered by members to be an indispensable part of the ceremony in much the same way as Buddhist or Taoist clergy are viewed as indispensable for the performances of the rituals of these religions. Again, however, I was more impressed by the restricted nature of such intrusions than I was by the mere fact that they were present in the Christian worship.

On the basis of my more extended accounts, then, I have concluded that the syncretic elements found in these Swatow Baptist rites are at most implicit only and are certainly not readily identified by believers as being in any way syncretic. The principle reason for this is that these rituals take place in a socio-religious setting which is defined by basic Baptist beliefs and practices that are fully understood by nearly all members and the correct implementation of which is reinforced not only by the Church's own stand against syncretism but also by the general mainstream Protestant opposition to syncretism. Deviations from conventional Baptist practice are always liable to be eliminated because church members *know* that there is only one correct way of performing these rites and rituals. Any explicit attempts at incorporating traditional religious conceptions meet with the congregation's collective voice of disapproval. But when the Swatow Baptists are confronted with Chinese traditions outside the

immediate social and religious context of their local church, then a rather different picture emerges.

One of the most striking features of Hong Kong's post-war development has been the increased importance of certain aspects of traditional Chinese religious culture. There are a number of reasons for this, and there is much that could be said on the subject. But for present purposes it is sufficient to point out that the membership of a number of religious organizations has expanded rapidly, and considerable sums of money are spent on celebrating traditional major festivals such as the Dragon Boat Festival (Duan-wu Jie 端午節), the Hungry Ghosts Festival (Yu-lan Jie 盂蘭節) and the birthdays of Tian Hou 天后, Hong Sheng 洪聖, and other gods. Immigrants from the Chaozhou region have been closely involved in many of these religious developments. As a result, the Swatow Baptists have to operate in a religious environment in which there is marked competition for members' religious loyalties. In order to expand or even simply to maintain its established position, the Church has little choice but to make allowances for some traditional ideas and practices which, accordingly, inform certain aspects of members' religious observance—in particular, those relating to life crises. This may be best illustrated by reference to the important rites of funeral and burial.

The vast majority of Swatow Baptist funerals<sup>16</sup> consist of three parts. The first part, *da-lian li-bai* 大殮禮拜, is a service for placing the deceased Christian's body into the coffin. This takes place either in the hospital where the Swatow Baptist has died or a funeral parlour. The second part is the actual funeral or *an-xi li-bai* 安息禮拜, which is carried out in the church. The final part is the burial service (*an-xiang li-bai* 安葬禮拜), which takes place in the cemetery. In principle, Swatow Baptists are not expected during any part of the funeral to adhere to the traditional Chinese mortuary custom of pronounced demonstration of grief and mourning over the dead.<sup>17</sup> They are taught to see death as a reunion with God which involves only a temporary separation from family and kin. In practice, however, this theory of 'Heavenly home' after death does not seem to have much effect, because all the Swatow Baptist funerals which I observed were accompanied by traditional expressions of grief and mourning.

It is also possible to detect a number of other elements that typically occur in Swatow Baptist funerals and which may be characterized as syncretic.

Thus, in the *da-lian li-bai*, during which the corpse is placed in the coffin, the Swatow Baptist mourner has a number of difficult decisions to

16. See Li 1968 for an account of traditional Chaozhou funerals and other rites of passage.

17. For a discussion of this mortuary custom see Fielde 1894: 49–70.

was both a church leader and a figure of some standing in society. An abundance of white roses, a large choir accompanied by a live band, and a huge congregation are characteristic features of the funerals of important persons.

In contrast to the church service, which is almost exclusively based on the features of Western Christianity, there are important features of the third stage of the funeral which clearly represent a syncretic mixing of Christian and Chinese beliefs and practices. This stage is the burial service (*an-xiang li-bai*). The first point to note is that the traditional Chinese preference is for burial in a permanent grave. This enables the descendants to remember the deceased through the 'sweeping of the grave' (*sao-mu* 掃墓) rituals undertaken each year during the Qing-ming and Chong-yang festivals, and it should be noted that as the Swatow Baptists also perform these rituals, their basic preference is for burial in a permanent plot. Permanent burial is also useful for both Christian and non-Christian in that it avoids the difficulties associated with the southern Chinese practice of double burial (see Freedman 1966: 119–21). However, the cost of a plot in one of Hong Kong's cemeteries is prohibitively high, and only a small number of families can afford this luxury. One result is that the majority of Swatow Baptist families practise a variant of the traditional custom of 'double burial'. The body of the deceased is temporarily interred and then exhumed after a period of six to seven years. The bones are then re-buried in the 'bone depository' (*gu-ku* 骨庫) of a Christian cemetery.<sup>19</sup>

A second aspect of Swatow Baptist burial is rather more clearly infused with traditional Chinese religious elements. This concerns the positioning of the grave and of the coffin within the grave. The Swatow Baptists, in common with many other Chinese Christians living in the urban districts of Hong Kong, continue to believe in and act by some of the tenets of *feng-shui* (the details of which are so well known through the writings of Freedman (1966: 118–43; 1969), Feuchtwang (1974), and others that it would be superfluous to reiterate them here). Thus one section of the territory's Christian cemetery is in great demand, and plots there sell at a high price because they enjoy a 'good view' (*feng-jing hao* 風景好). Indeed, the area in question is geomantically so well situated that it is designated

19. However, owing to the shortage of burial space in the very overcrowded urban areas of the territory, most Christians and non-Christians are compelled to dispense with any form of burial and instead to cremate the deceased. Among many Swatow Baptists, then, the body is cremated and the ashes immediately deposited in the *gu-ku*. It is a common belief among Chinese that cremation may affect the deceased's chances of reincarnation or resurrection, and the overwhelming majority of Swatow Baptist Church members adhere to this view—despite their pastors' insistence that Christians should not worry themselves on this score, because so many Christians in the West are cremated untroubled by any doubts about their prospects for life after death. Members also say that they are reluctant to cremate their parents because this seems to them unfilial, and I assume that this, too, is a view commonly held among non-Christians.

Canaan Land (Jianandi 迦南地), a biblical appellation signifying abundance and prosperity. In 1975, burial plots in Canaan Land cost between \$30,000 and \$50,000 (£3,000–£5,000) each, making them some of the most expensive pieces of real estate in the territory. Of course, the administrators of the Christian cemetery are not supposed to believe in geomancy nor to attend to any of its principles in their running of the graveyard. They forbid specialist practitioners of *feng-shui* from employing their craft within the cemetery even when hired by non-Christian kin of the deceased. Nevertheless, once the geomantic merits of a setting such as Canaan Land become known, there is no need for specialist advice. As soon as the secret is out, *any* Christian—including Swatow Baptists—who can afford to purchase a plot in that cemetery will almost certainly attempt to do so.

In addition, many Swatow Baptist families seek to improve the geomantic qualities of a grave by manipulating the position of the coffin during the actual burial ceremony. Indeed, in his discussions of this problem with me, one long-serving American Baptist missionary emphasised that he had yet to attend a single Swatow Baptist burial service in which the most important person in the deceased member's family had not been requested to supervise the 'proper' positioning of the coffin so as to ensure that the grave would benefit from what in *feng-shui* terms is thought to be the good influence from the south and at the same time so that it would be protected from what in *feng-shui* terms is the evil from the north. Similarly, the Swatow Baptists, like many of the territory's Christian believers, are sufficiently concerned with the problem of *feng-shui* to select a geomantically auspicious hour for burial.

### *Malevolent Ghosts and Ancestor Worship*

The above analysis of the influence of Chinese funeral customs and *feng-shui* does not exhaust the list of traditional Chinese religious influences on Swatow Baptist attitudes toward the dead. In this part of the essay, attention is drawn to the Swatow Baptists' continued concern with malevolent ghosts (*e-gui* 惡鬼), that is, disconnected souls who are forced by their adverse circumstances to be purposely harmful to the living.<sup>20</sup>

20. See also ch. 6 of my dissertation (1980), in which I explain how traditional religious practices and conceptions—including, in particular, a belief in malevolent ghosts—facilitated the acceptance of the Baptists' Christian message in the Chaozhou region. To some extent, this was a result of the emphasis which native Chinese preachers placed on the power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. But it was also in part due to the efficacy of Christian belief in the eyes of the Chaozhou people in affording protection against malevolent ghosts—an attitude which many Church members continue to hold in present-day Hong Kong.

The continued concern of Swatow Baptists with traditional Chinese worries about ghosts of people who have died by accident (see Wolf 1974: 169) is vividly conveyed in the following story. In the early 1970s, the son of a member of the territory's largest local Swatow Baptist Church was drowned as the result of a boating mishap which occurred when he was out rowing with some friends. A search lasting several days failed to locate the body.

The parents, overwhelmed with worry about the fate of their dead son, enlisted the help of their church pastor. They asked the pastor to accompany them to the exact spot where their son was thought to have drowned and at that place to pray to God for the recovery of the body. Failing to alleviate their worries in other ways, the pastor agreed to do as they requested, and within a day of the prayers being offered the body was recovered. The parents gave their son proper funeral and burial services and thanked the pastor for his help, adding that they could now be sure that their son would not turn into a malevolent ghost!

It hardly needs to be said that Swatow Baptist members' continued belief in the existence of harmful ghosts is inconsistent with the Church's official stance on syncretism. The following outline of the views of one pastor shows, however, that the pastors' definitions of ultra-human sources of evil and misfortune continue to facilitate Church members' simultaneous belief in the Christian God and Chinese ghosts.

The attitudes of this pastor, who became an important informant during the course of field research, are representative of the ideas of other Swatow Baptist pastors. He denies categorically the existence of traditional Chinese supernatural entities such as malevolent ghosts. His beliefs regarding ultra-human evil influences are those of orthodox Protestant Christianity. Thus the principal force for evil is Satan (*sadan* 撒旦), whom he characterizes as a degenerate angel with no physical form. Satan, however, has no power over good Christians, because they are protected by God. The pastor's eschatological conceptions are also quite conventional. When a Christian dies, his soul enters the Kingdom of God, where it remains until the second advent. In contrast, the soul of the departed pagan passes into hell and is punished by eternal fire. In both cases, it is impossible for the souls of the deceased to return to this world. The pastor expressly denies the traditional Chinese belief that when a person dies, his soul becomes a ghost or some other spiritual being capable of communicating with this world. In his own words: 'Ghosts do not exist, Satan is the supernatural source of wickedness and evil. Although Satan is an evil spirit, he cannot take possession of anyone at will, because God does not permit him to harm virtuous Christians.' Therefore, argues the pastor, Christians who fear ghosts or who believe that they are haunted or possessed by them are *ipso facto* insincere.

Although denying the existence of ghosts as conceptualized in

traditional Chinese religion, the pastor does nevertheless accept the existence of a second category of evil supernatural beings which have a great deal in common with Chinese ghosts. These are evil spirits (*xie-ling* 邪靈), which are the inverse of the Holy Spirit (*sheng-ling* 聖靈) and which assist Satan in his acts of malice. More specifically, traditional Christian notions of demonism stress the idea that certain types of illness, especially lunacy and epilepsy, are attributable to the presence of these evil spirits in the human body (see Cross and Livingstone 1974: 1300). Clearly, then, there are important similarities between the *xie-ling* and *e-gui*. Both inflict misfortune on humans, especially on those whose behaviour has been morally remiss, both are capable of possessing the human body and both (in the eyes of many Church members) can be rebuffed by the power of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the pastor's refusal to accept the existence of Chinese ghosts does not prevent him from recognizing that possession by supernatural malevolent spirits (in particular *xie-ling*) is an important religious problem among the Chaozhou. He acknowledges that exorcism was a very significant Church function in the pre-1949 Chaozhou homeland (Soo 1980: 347, also 297-311) and that it remains so in present-day Hong Kong. He admits to having conducted a number of exorcisms prior to his emigration to Hong Kong as well as in the territory itself.

Thus, for example, in the early 1960s a Church member (a medical student at the University of Hong Kong) introduced a middle-aged Chaozhou woman to the pastor and told him that the woman lost consciousness every day at noon and only recovered her senses after one hour. She had been sent to hospital (where the student made her acquaintance), but the doctors were unable to diagnose the problem. The pastor cross-examined the woman and concluded that this was not a case of mental disorder but rather of possession by *xie-ling*. In the pastor's view, these evil spirits had revealed themselves by denying not only that Jesus is the Son of God but also the very existence of God himself.<sup>21</sup> With the assistance of a deacon, he therefore prepared himself for exorcism. The two men fasted and prayed earnestly together for a whole day and then asked the woman to come to the church.

On arrival, the possessed woman struggled and refused to enter the church. We had to drag her inside. She became unconscious. We started to pray and asked the possessed to admit her sins. This she did. She gradually calmed down and began to speak fluently in the Peking dialect. The woman reported seeing a kind-looking old man, accompanied by two guards

21. The pastor quotes 1 John 4: 1-3 to support this assertion: 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of Antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already.'



coming towards her and ordering the 'evil spirit' to leave her. She said that there was some fighting and then murmured, 'they are departing'.

The evil spirits thus expelled, the woman regained consciousness.

On being questioned, she admitted to having been a medium for a certain pagan 'spirit' before emigrating to Hong Kong. During possession, she would prescribe medicine for clients who came to seek advice from her.

The pastor of another leading Swatow Baptist church also characterizes as *xie-ling* that phenomenon which non-Christian Chaozhou describe as malevolent ghosts, accepts the need of exorcism, and asserts the power of Jesus to ward off the evil attentions of Satan and other evil spirits. The sermon which he delivers after baptismal ceremonies firmly assures the new Church members that Christians enjoy 'freedom from the threat of Satan'. But in practice, there is plenty of evidence to show that many members of this and other local Swatow Baptist churches not only continue to believe in ghosts, but are also convinced that they must take extra precautions in order to protect themselves from the unwelcome attention of these ultra-human beings. As a result, it is fairly common practice for Swatow Baptist families to attach a large cross to the front of their apartment in an attempt to ward off harmful ghosts. Moreover, there is still a fairly widespread belief among members that a copy of the Bible is an effective protection against malicious ghosts. An even more significant example occurred in 1976, when the Christian cemetery in Hong Kong was flooded following a heavy rainfall. Many of those Church members whose parents were buried in the cemetery complained to their pastor of being troubled by dreams in which their parents expressed fears of being carried away by the flood. Members pleaded for immediate action to remove the graves to a safer place, lest their parents turn into homeless, and therefore harmful, ghosts.

This brings us to the question of the Swatow Baptists' solution to the problem of ancestor worship. First, it should be pointed out that in the Chaozhou rural homeland prior to the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, the new convert was required by the local Swatow Baptist church into which he had been baptised to declare publicly his rejection of ancestor worship by destroying the tablets of his ancestors. This reflected, *inter alia*, the hostility which the leaders of large-scale lineages expressed towards evangelical and other work of the American Baptist missionaries throughout the first thirty to forty years of their presence in Chaozhou. In present-day Hong Kong this rule is no longer rigidly enforced, because lineage organization in the urban area of the territory does not have the importance that it did in the Chaozhou region, for reasons that are broadly similar to those of colonial Singapore as described by Freedman. In both cases, the nature of ancestor worship has been changed, partly because of the *immigrant* nature of the population.

The changed structure of kinship grouping in Singapore has led to

corresponding changes in the grouping of ancestors *vis-à-vis* the living. Ancestors survive as individuals in what we may call a memorialist cult, but beyond the household they cease generally to be foci for clearly marked out groups of kinsmen. (Freedman and Topley 1961: 7)

In other words, as in Singapore, ancestor worship as a set of rites linking together all the agnatic descendants of a given forebear is no longer adhered to in the urban areas of Hong Kong.

Secondly, the Swatow Baptist Church, like many Protestant churches, does permit its members to observe a modified form of ancestor worship which includes paying respects to immediate forebears during the Qing-ming and Chong-yang festivals. During the latter festival, in particular, the Church holds special memorial services for deceased relatives<sup>22</sup> (*si-qin li-bai* 思親禮拜) which include the use of some of the hymns—for example, 'Honour thy Father and thy Mother' (*Xiao-qin Ge* 孝親歌)<sup>23</sup>—composed by Confucian-Christian syncretists such as Zhao Zichen and which normally have little place in Sunday services because they emphasise kinship and family concerns rather than those of the Church. After the service, individual families who have immediate forebears buried in one of the local Christian cemeteries go to 'sweep the graves' of their relatives. These families also perform the ritual during the autumn festival known as Chong-yang. During the 'sweeping of the graves' they provide their deceased relatives with flowers rather than the traditional sacrificial offerings of roast pig, chicken and wine. At the same time, minor repairs to the graves are carried out in the traditional manner.

### *Conclusions*

This paper has outlined the principal traditional Chinese religious elements manifested in the religious observance of the members of Hong Kong's Swatow Baptist Church. In examining the persistence of indigenous religious preoccupations in Swatow Baptist Christianity, the paper has

22. The traditional value of such ceremonies may be enhanced in those years when the celebration of the Qing-ming festival coincides with Good Friday, as, for example, in 1980, when both occasions fell on 4 April.

23. *Hymns of Universal Praise* (1977), No. 426. It might also be noted that one of the most important traditional Chinese cultural values underlying ancestor worship and memorialism, namely, *xiaoshun* 孝順 or filial piety, is given particular emphasis by Swatow Baptists churches on both Father's Day and Mother's Day. Members are reminded of the importance of being filial to parents. Filial piety is viewed as an expression of one's love of God; in the words of one pastor, 'If one doesn't love one's own father, how can one love the Heavenly Father?'

emphasised the general Chinese Protestant antipathy towards syncretism. In pointing out that most important kinds of traditional religious concerns relate to ghosts, ancestor memorialism and funeral ceremonies, it has also been indicated that these concerns have been accommodated or tolerated by Church leaders, either because they can be readily equated with Christian elements, or because they occur outside the immediate social context of the local church.

The view presented in this paper, that syncretism is not a strongly developed feature of the religious observance of Swatow Baptist Church members, is, possibly, open to criticism. It might be argued, for example, that my statements represent a one-sided acceptance of informants' claims to sound theology and firm adherence to official Baptist doctrine and practice. In reality, such an argument might continue, Church members' religiosity is more syncretic than either I or my informants suppose because the Swatow Baptist Church has, during the course of the last 120 years, been slowly and imperceptibly borrowing elements from traditional Chinese religions.<sup>24</sup> In such a situation, it would be difficult for the average practising Baptist to disentangle the components of the syncretic situation, which he would find simpler to regard as an orthodox manifestation of Baptist religious traditions. However, a criticism of this nature does not hold up to examination in the light of evidence drawn from my more general study of Swatow Baptist Church organization (Soo 1980). In particular, it must be stressed that an important aspect of post-war Church development has been a serious and sustained conflict between those Swatow Baptists who favour a conversionist interpretation of Baptist principles and those who are resolved to strengthen their religious vitality by maintaining a more introversionist commitment to fundamental Baptist positions. Not only does the existence of this schism reflect a reasonably firm commitment to and grasp of Baptist doctrines on the part of many Church members but, in addition, the rift between the two groupings has forced the Swatow Baptists to re-examine continually their knowledge of Baptist dogma.<sup>25</sup>

It must also be remembered that the decision to join the Swatow Baptist Church is a voluntary religious response. Church membership is a

24. I refer the reader here to Nutini's ethno-historical study of the syncretic cult of the Virgin of Ocotlan in Tlaxcala, Mexico (1976). Nutini argues that many Catholic believers in Tlaxcala regard the cult as a doctrinally pure manifestation of Christian belief. The synthesis of folk and Catholic traditions has been taking place over such a long period of time that church members are not even aware of the syncretic origins of the cult.

25. In this connection, it is important to note that American Baptist missionaries, who have closely observed and at times mediated in this dispute, have themselves neither detected any proposals that might be characterized as syncretic, nor observed either side make accusations that the other was adhering to a 'syncretic position'. From my knowledge of the hostile attitudes of the missionaries towards syncretism, I would expect them to have noted any such occurrence.

status gained only after a year-long period of probation and instruction, followed by submission to a test of merit administered by Church authorities. It is always liable to be lost by an application of the principle of the expulsion of the unworthy. The Swatow Baptists enjoy an eschatological vision of being part of an élite of the saved and see themselves as a community of believers who make sincere and determined efforts to remain loyal to Baptist principles. This rigorous policy has helped ensure the basically intolerant attitude towards syncretism. Finally, it should be pointed out that any incorporation into the religious observance of Swatow Baptist Church members has been spontaneous rather than guided. From the time of their earliest work in the Chaozhou region onwards, American Baptist missionaries have been resolutely opposed to any deliberate syncretism of Christianity and indigenous religion. Although the missionaries no longer retain direct control over the Swatow Baptists in Hong Kong, an important aspect of their continuing influence is an insistence that Church members maintain allegiance to pristine Baptist principles.

However, as the present study demonstrates, the success of the Swatow Baptists in restricting the incorporation of traditional Chinese religious ideas and practices into members' religious lives has not been complete. In seeking to explain this persistence of indigenous religious preoccupations, attention must not be given to any one single factor. Instead, we must take into account a variety of social and religious conditions. The most significant of these would appear to be the complex and competitive social environment of urban Hong Kong, the existence among the Chaozhou immigrants to the territory of what Wilson has characterized as thaumaturgical demands (1973: 70-195), and identifiable similarities between Baptist and traditional Chinese religion.

As indicated earlier, one of the most striking features of Hong Kong's post-war environment has been the competition between religious organizations for adherents. On the one hand, the evangelical possibilities engendered by the flow of refugees into the territory, the social dislocation resulting from Hong Kong's rapid industrial and urban growth, and the prospects of future evangelism in the People's Republic have encouraged expansionist policies on the part of the Christian churches. On the other hand, traditional religious institutions have flourished as a result, *inter alia*, of immigration and rapid social change, increased wealth and the Hong Kong government's tolerant attitude towards Chinese religion.<sup>26</sup> As a result, the Swatow Baptists have had to operate in a religious environment in which there is marked competition for a member's religious loyalties.

26. The Chaozhou residents of Hong Kong are involved in these traditional religious developments to such an extent that other ethnic groups characterize the Chaozhou as being highly 'superstitious' (*mixin* 迷信).

In order to expand or even simply to maintain their established position, they have felt that they had little choice but to allow traditional religious customs to continue to shape rituals and practices, especially among first-generation converts.

In this connection, it is important to emphasise that Hong Kong's urban and industrial setting limits the extent to which the activities of the individual Swatow Baptist believer can be insulated from traditional socio-religious pressures. It is quite true that the membership of a Swatow Baptist local church constitutes a fairly close-knit community of believers linked by ties of kinship, friendship, and neighbourly assistance and scrutiny (Soo 1980). Nevertheless, control over many of the actions of members is difficult to achieve in work, residential or educational contexts—Swatow Baptists are not always able to find employment in an enterprise run by another Church member, neighbourhood segregation is not possible in Hong Kong's crowded and continuously developing urban setting, and, for reasons that shortage of space do not permit me to examine here, many Swatow Baptist parents feel obliged to send their children to non-Baptist schools. Thus, while the Swatow Baptists are able to insist on the maintenance of firmly Christian beliefs and practices in the social context of the local church, members' continuing preoccupations with traditional mortuary customs, ghosts and ancestor memorialism may be seen as reflecting in part the unavoidable pressures of a social and religious environment in which approximately 90 per cent of the population are non-Christian.<sup>27</sup>

A second important factor encouraging the incorporation of traditional religious beliefs and practices into Swatow Baptist Christianity has been a profound demand from the Chaozhou population for thaumaturgical benefits—reassurance, personal gratification, protection from ghosts, health, and relief from mental anguish. I have elsewhere noted that many of the American Baptists' earliest converts in nineteenth-century Chaozhou were intensely preoccupied with thaumaturgical practices and ideas and

27. In this essay I have focused attention on the most important intrusions of traditional Chinese religion into Christian religious observance. I have not considered, for example, the role of traditional religious customs in Swatow Baptist marriage rituals, and a few remarks on this are made here. The church service follows conventional Christian practices. Nevertheless, most couples and their parents do use a Chinese almanac (*tong-sheng* 通勝) for the purpose of selecting an auspicious day (*xe-ji* 擇吉) for the wedding ceremony, which is usually followed by a wedding banquet (*bun-yan* 婚宴) held in a restaurant. It is common for the couple to extend an invitation to their Swatow Baptist pastor, who is expected to give God's blessing to the newly-weds at the feast. There is little difference between Christian and non-Christian wedding feasts, and some Swatow Baptist pastors on occasion feel compelled to leave the celebration when they feel that there is excessive feasting and drinking—the event has become too 'worldly' (*shi-su* 世俗). A brief account of other situations in which there is conflict between Chinese customs widespread in Hong Kong and Swatow Baptist religious ideas and practices is provided in Soo 1980: 464.

that these preoccupations were in some instances particularly important in facilitating the process of conversion to Christ (Soo 1980: 281–331). Elliott (1955) has demonstrated that thaumaturgy has been a highly significant factor in religious developments among the Chaozhou and other Chinese immigrant groups in pre-independence Singapore, and his findings are paralleled by evidence from Hong Kong that shows that the territory's Chaozhou immigrants support flourishing religious organizations which rely for a substantial part of their religious appeal on such thaumaturgical techniques as divination, spirit possession, automatic writing, and horoscope reading. Clearly, thaumaturgy is a recurrent characteristic of Chaozhou religion. In urban Hong Kong, where immigration, struggles for wealth and status, memories of the many deaths that occurred during the Japanese occupation (1941–5), problems of physical health stemming from Hong Kong's adverse living conditions, and an uncertain political future engender a very real sense of insecurity, the Swatow Baptists have felt impelled to respond to the continuing thaumaturgical demands for immediate personal reassurance and relief by conducting exorcisms for individuals and implicitly tolerating such practices as adherence to the principles of geomancy in relation to burial.

Finally, the persistence of traditional Chinese religious preoccupations in Swatow Baptist Christianity also owes something to the existence of points of convergence between elements in both religious systems. The Swatow Baptists' emphasis on the family church and recruitment through kinship ties (see Soo 1980: 341–66) is easily identified with the Chinese concern with family and has encouraged Church leaders to tolerate members' participation in such traditional rituals as the 'sweeping of the graves'. The deeply entrenched Chaozhou fear of malevolent ghosts is accommodated within Christian conceptions of Satan and evil spirits. Personal problems of ghost possession can therefore be remedied by Christian rites of exorcism.<sup>28</sup> The territory's Christian cemeteries offer the wealthy the possibility of selecting grave sites in private plots, and in taking this chance to escape the regimentation that befalls the dead who

28. I should add here that the problem of spirit possession shows no signs of diminishing. According to Chinese-language Christian newspaper sources, one Swatow Baptist church now offers a course of ten two-hour lectures on exorcism. Pastors, deacons, and interested persons from other mainstream Protestant denominations are invited to attend. The topics covered include case-studies of possession (including personal accounts of the experience), an introductory account of evil spirits (*xie-ling*) and evil practices (*xie-shu* 邪術), characteristics of ghost-possession (*bei-gui-fu* 被鬼附), preparations for and procedures followed in exorcism, and attitudes to the spiritual world (*ling-jie* 靈界) (*The Christian Weekly*, no. 907, p. 6 (1982)). Note also the recent comments of a Baptist pastor headed 'The Sweet and Sour of being a Pastor', in which he acknowledges that 'a most surprising thing happened to me in the spring of 1969, when I obtained the gift of exorcism. I now exorcise evil spirits from the bodies of some of our brothers' (*ibid.*, no. 861, p. 3 (1982)).

are buried in the large government cemeteries, Church members may also take the opportunity of seeking geomantically favourable sites. These syncretic junctures in the beliefs and practices of Baptist Christianity on the one hand and the 'folk' religion of the Chaozhou in Hong Kong on the other help Church leaders and members to allow—and sometimes to deal with—'pagan' religious intrusions without excessive detriment to their allegiance to Baptist principles.

In this essay I have emphasised that the Swatow Baptist churches, while strongly opposed to syncretism, have accommodated some indigenous religious elements into their religious observance. The Church's attitude has helped to ensure that members preserve a basic commitment to orthodox Baptist practice and doctrinal position while at the same time retaining their cultural identity as Chinese. The above characterization of the position of the Swatow Baptists prompts consideration of a final question—that of the differential willingness of Chinese religious groups and movements to combine both Christian and Chinese religious ideas and actions into their religion.

Clearly the Swatow Baptists, whose religious observance represents a fairly full acceptance and affirmation of the dictates of a particular Christian heritage, are located at or near one end of a wide range of possible combinations of Christian and indigenous Chinese religious characteristics. At the other end of the continuum, one can point to groupings which have not allowed Christianity to inform their religious preoccupations. These include, for example, the strict doctrinal Buddhist sects which oppose any Western-inspired attempts at reform and who argue that the golden age of Buddhism lies in the past, so that change means not reform but, rather, more rigid adherence to ancient rules, and the restoration of monastic order on the basis of models still embodied at Chin Shan and Kao-min Ssu (Welch 1968: 219). They also include those Confucian xenophobes who, during the early years of this century, insisted that Chinese converts to Christianity were 'jackals and wolves' and that the traditional way of Chinese civilization was manifestly superior to the barbarous customs of the West. It was these Confucianists who, displaying great enthusiasm, were behind the imperial edict of 1906 decreeing that Confucius was to receive the highest state sacrifices, thereby upgrading and institutionalizing the long-standing Confucian literati practice of offering private sacrifices in Confucian temples on the birthday of the sage (Shyrock 1932: 206). We might also place at this end of the continuum the educated and upper-class organizers of some of the late Qing and early Republican branches of the Great Way of Former Heaven (Xian-tian Da-dao 先天大道) which broke away from the established sectarian traditions emphasising vegetarian diet and sexual abstinence as ways to spiritual enlightenment. These conservatives saw no need to inform their religious activities with Christian elements, and instead declared

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themselves to be truly Confucian in their religious orientation.

Near the middle of the continuum, one would place not only the Confucian-Christian syncretists, whose proposals were outlined earlier, but also the explicitly syncretic cults of the Five (and sometimes Six) Worthies, which sprang up in China during the early Republican period and which, in some cases, continue to flourish in present-day Hong Kong and Singapore. It is these types of Chinese religious organizations to which sociologists interested primarily in syncretism should pay most attention, and it was such groups that caught the interest of Freedman in his own work on religious associations among the Chinese in Singapore. The central preoccupation of these syncretic cults is a perceived state of disorder in the world which is attributed to the unnecessary division of religions into sects and denominations. In their view, this state of affairs can be remedied only by an amalgamation of Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, Christianity and, in one or two instances, Judaism. To this end, the syncretic cults provide a semi-intellectual body of teachings which interrelate various elements drawn from these religious traditions by means of spirit-writing. Their major inheritance from Christianity would appear to have been a stress on the significance of love and charitable activities. Although they also emphasise moral regeneration, nevertheless these cults have a much less fervent approach to the importance of morally exemplary lives than do many Protestant Christian groups.

As Freedman has pointed out, an additional feature of these syncretic cults is that in China during the 1920s and 1930s they were based to a large extent on the reaction of educated and upper-class people to the problems of their day and on the desire of such people to raise Chinese religion from the level of what was thought to be popular superstition (Freedman and Topley 1961). My experience in Hong Kong is that the intellectual appeal of such cults has diminished and that some of them at least accommodate the pleas for personal reassurance and benefits that also continue to inform the religious observance of Hong Kong Swatow Baptists.

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