

What's Missing in the Wenzhou Model?

The “Ritual Economy” and “Wasting of Wealth”

The local custom of people in Wenzhou is to support spirit mediums and access spirits and ghosts. They hold elaborate Buddhist and Daoist rituals, engage in extravagant expenditures, and exhaust their energies. Unconcerned with heavy-duty wastefulness, each year in the first lunar month, they have a lantern festival that lasts over ten days. These attract festivalgoers day and night, the men mixing freely with the women. They also hold dragon lantern competitions, each with fine detailed craftwork. Tens of gold pieces are wasted on a single lantern. Gongs and drums are beaten thunderously; the boisterous din is insane. In just a few days, the dragon lanterns are then put to the torch. This sort of reckless wastefulness must be immediately prohibited!

—Lao Dayü, *Leisurely Trip Down the Ou River*
(Qing dynasty, eighteenth century)

Classical economy imagined the first exchanges in the form of barter. Why [does it think] that in the beginning, a mode of . . . exchange [only] answered the need to acquire, [instead of] the contrary need to lose and squander? The classical conception is now questionable. . . .

Religion is the satisfaction that a society gives to the use of excess resources, or rather to their destruction. . . . This is what gives religions their rich material aspect, . . . when . . . spiritual life withdraws from labor a time that could have been employed in producing.

—Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 1

One might represent economic practice as comprising a rich diversity of capitalist and noncapitalist activities and argue that the noncapitalist ones had until now been

溫郡之俗好巫而近鬼，大舉佛事道場，靡不盡心竭力以為之。不惜重費，乃若正月初旬，以至燈市十余日，晝夜游觀，男女雜沓，競制龍燈，極其精工，大龍燈一條，所費不下數十金，鑼鼓喧闐，舉國若狂，不數日間，付之一炬，此種妄費，亦當急為禁革者也。

—勞大與著。
《甌江逸志》。（清）

“invisible” because the concepts and discourses that could make them “visible” have themselves been marginalized and suppressed.

—J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (as We Knew It)*

The conventional account of the Wenzhou Model is favored by economists, political scientists, and sociologists—but it only acknowledges the four features outlined in chapter 2. The focus of this chapter is to show what is missing in the conventional description of the Wenzhou Model, to examine the intersection of Wenzhou’s rich ritual life, religious material culture, and famous economic development. Generally overlooked by commentators on the Wenzhou Model is a fifth feature, what I call a “ritual economy” (禮儀經濟) (M. Yang 2007, 2009), which is predicated on ritual expenditures that circulate wealth in a parallel economy that is threaded through the profit-driven market economy. This chapter responds to Gibson-Graham’s call in the epigraph above, to show “the rich diversity of capitalist and noncapitalist activities” in Wenzhou, and to make visible the ritual economy that counterbalances and restrains the profit economy.

In recent years, many publications have argued that there is a Chinese version of what Max Weber has called the “Protestant Ethic” ([1904] 1958) of deferred gratification and reinvestment of profits back into expanding capitalist enterprises. They suggest there is a “Confucian Ethic” or family ethics that propels Chinese to work hard and save their earnings (Horn, n.d.; Redding 1995; Tu 1996), and this explains the success of Chinese businesses across China and the Chinese diaspora. Against this current, I will try to show that the Wenzhou Model is propelled by something quite different from both the “Protestant Ethic” and the putative “Confucian Ethic.” The genealogy of the Wenzhou Model is not the Protestant Reformation; rather, it traces back much further in indigenous time, to the “Chinese commercial revolution” of the Song dynasty, if not before.

Wenzhou family firms are not only units of production but also units of worship and ritual consumption, as well as nodes in larger kinship and ritual networks. Starting up a new enterprise entails consultation with diviners and fengshui masters to determine the most propitious time and place for the business start-up. To ensure the health of the firm and its members, one needs

to propitiate the gods and buddhas, and make sacrifices to them. Since the business is embedded in social and business networks, gifts and banquets must be given out to maintain good social standing, and offerings must be made to the ancestors. Thus, family firms pay for a variety of ritual services that are conducted inside deity temples and Daoist and Buddhist temples, and if they are Christian, inside churches. These are all the normal costs of doing business.

In family enterprise production, the principles of thrift, asceticism, discipline, and antagonistic stinginess with suppliers, hired laborers, and sometimes clients are the operational rules. However, in family and community ritual activities, often a very different ethos of exaggerated generosity and almost feverish ritual expenditure takes over. Whether rich or poor, family corporations in rural and small-town Wenzhou feel the urge to conduct rituals, festivities, and banquets lavishly—even if it sometimes requires depleting their savings. The surplus gained from productive activity is not only saved for economic accumulation, reinvestment, and the expansion of the firm; just as importantly, it is also expended on *nonproductive* and *nonaccumulative* activities, such as family and community rituals. In this tension between productive and nonproductive expenditures, thrift and generosity, asceticism and festive release, the Wenzhou Model posits a very different model of economic development from the austere rationalism of the Protestant Ethic that propelled the history of Western capitalism. In the midst of economic privatization in the post-Mao Reform era, there was a remarkable commitment to community development and the construction of public ritual spaces.

I define “ritual economy” as expenditures of wealth on ritual, religious, ethical, and social bonding practices, forms of consumption that do not directly lead to profit accumulation and indeed often eat up profits and savings for nonutilitarian ends. A ritual economy involves human transactions and economic exchanges with the divine world of gods, ancestors, nature spirits, and ghosts. It diverts a segment of wealth from the material economy. Unlike the profit economy, which stresses accumulation of wealth and the intake of profit, the ethos of ritual economy is generosity and self-abnegation and the willingness to give out or part with one’s material wealth. An important aspect of the ritual economy is the

spirit of private donations by ordinary people of all walks of life. No less than the building of infrastructure, the ritual economy is part of the Wenzhou Model and the growth of its thriving markets and rural towns. It deploys the gods in its redistribution of wealth, reconstruction of community, and promotion of the public good. Thus, its internal logic of “giving out” often acts counter to the capitalist logic of accumulation, or “taking in.”

However, in Wenzhou’s official discourse, the ritual economy was dismissed or condemned in the 1980s and 1990s as “ignorant” and “superstitious” behavior, and as “wasteful” (*langfei*, 浪費) and not contributing to economic development. Despite undergoing a modern revolution, these local officials strangely echo earlier Qing dynasty Neo-Confucian gentry condemnations of the ritual economy, as seen in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter. Here expenditures for the Lantern Festival are condemned as “heavy-duty wastefulness” or “reckless wastefulness” (重費, 妄費).

Wenzhou’s ritual economy resonates with Georges Bataille’s notion of “excessive ritual expenditures” and supports his call for a vision of the “general” rather than “restricted economy” (1985, 1989, [1947] 1991). In the above epigraph, Bataille takes issue with the “restricted” vision of classical economics, which only focuses on narrow barter and production. Instead, he envisions a much broader “general economy” that reaches beyond accumulation and production to take into account “wasteful” and “gratuitous” consumption practices, such as ritual and religious expenditures, which from a utilitarian point of view only wastes and destroys wealth. Indeed, part of Bataille’s definition of “religion” is the drive to divert time from productive labor to the “destructive” activity of expending wealth to become more “intimate” with divine forces.

THE FEATURES OF WENZHOU’S “RITUAL ECONOMY”

I have mapped out the main divisions of the ritual economy: (1) sacrifices and offerings; (2) rituals and festivals; (3) donations and charities; (4) construction of ritual sites; (5) gift circulation; and (6) ritual services: ritual performances, spirit possession, divination, geomancy, and scriptural chanting.

Wenzhou's Ritual Economy

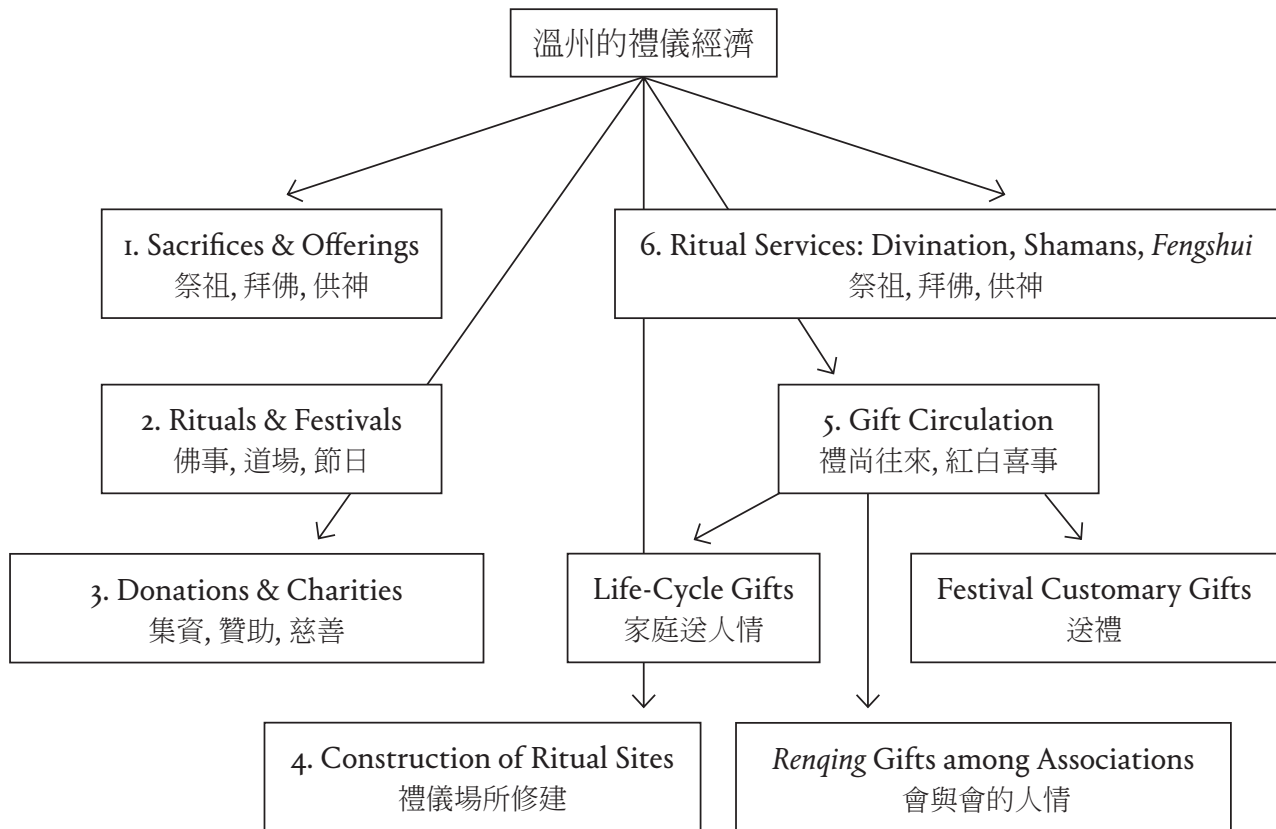


Figure 10.1. Wenzhou's ritual economy.

WENZHOU'S RITUAL ECONOMY

Sacrifices and Offerings

In sacrifices and offerings, gifts move from the human world to the divine one of the gods, nature spirits, buddhas, ancestors, demons, and ghosts. These are transfers of wealth whereby human beings petition or thank divinities for their assistance and protection, or placate and “bribe” demons and ghosts to spare them from misfortune or punishment. Sacrifices serve to connect and embed individuals and communities within the larger cosmic realm of natural/divine forces.

Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss saw sacrifice as “establishing a means of communication between the sacred and the profane worlds through the mediation of a victim, . . . a thing that in the course of the ceremony is destroyed” (1964: 97). Thus, sacrifice is a ritual-economic transaction that allows the mundane human and divine worlds to come closer together. These two worlds are mutually interdependent: the divine world expects nourishment and respect from the human world. In turn, the human world gains access

to the divine world through gifts of animal victims, food offerings, incense, candles, alcoholic beverages, paper spirit money, and prayers. Here I shall also follow Mauss and Hubert's distinction between sacrifice and offerings: "The difference between a simple offering and a sacrifice is that in offerings, . . . no victim is destroyed; in sacrifice, the degree of solemnity and efficacy is higher, and 'the religious energy released is stronger' and the havoc it could cause is greater" (Hubert and Mauss 1964: 11–12). In rural Wenzhou, formal ancestor sacrifice is designated with the archaic term "to sacrifice" (*jisi*, 祭祀), but the traditional practice of slaughtering live animal victims as part of ritual performance is less common. What we find more often are offerings, designated by the verb *gong* (供), "to offer [to divinities]." These are generally cooked food and rice grain alcohol offered to gods and ancestors on ceremonial occasions and then later consumed by the humans themselves. When the Wang Lineage of Yongchang Township celebrated the historical completion of their genealogy in 1998 with live animal sacrifices, it was a special year. The animals were slaughtered not during the ritual, but one day *before* the sacrifice. Ordinarily, the Wangs' annual ancestor sacrifices are observed with only cooked meat offerings.

The generic term "to worship" (*bai*, 拜) is used to describe everyday worship of the gods. On a daily basis at local temples, worshippers offer cooked meat dishes (pork, duck, fish, or chicken) for deities of popular religion and Daoism, fruit and vegetarian dishes for buddhas and bodhisattvas, and sometimes lit cigarettes for male gods. In the 1990s, the offerings were carried in the traditional round or square wooden or bamboo decorated "gift containers" or "gift boxes" (*lisheng*, 禮盛; *lihe*, 禮盒).

Worshippers also offer incense and candles, which are sold at the temple entrance and contribute to temple coffers. This temple income can be quite significant. For example, during the New Year Festival of 2009, the Daoist Temple of the Sacred King Who Disseminates Spiritual Efficacy (宣靈聖王廟), Yongxing Township, managed to sell 17,400 yuan (\$2,547) worth of candles (*Zhengxie Wenzhou Shi Longwanqu Weiyuanhui* 2011: 57). Giant candles as tall as human height, with a diameter of thirty to thirty-six inches, can fetch up to 10,000 yuan each. In 2008 at the Temple Curator Daoist Temple in Shacheng Township (沙城太保觀), the recycled wax from burnt candles alone fetched the temple 25,667 yuan (\$3,696; *Zhengxie Wenzhou Shi Longwanqu Weiyuanhui* 2011: 57).

A third nonfood offering is paper "spirit money" (冥幣, 冥錢), which comes in many different forms and shapes and generally must be first folded or stamped before being burned as wealth offered to divine beings. Gold



Figure 10.2. Ritual gift containers or gift boxes with food offerings to the gods, Celestial Immortal Deity Temple, Longwan District, 1993. Photo by the author.

paper money is reserved for the gods. Silver paper money is burned to placate ghosts. There is also a rough earth-brown paper money, produced using traditional handicraft techniques, which is often stamped with a design using a metal press and collected into large bamboo baskets. Paper money can be folded into shapes of lotuses or golden ingots (金寶), or printed to look like real *renminbi* legal tender, but with images of the Jade Emperor and the words “Bank of Hell” (地獄銀行). Burning paper money is discouraged by monks and nuns in Buddhist temples, who say it is a local custom that is not Buddhist.

At funerals, a rich array of other paper gifts are burned: giant paper flower wreaths mounted on thin bamboo stands; giant paper and bamboo mansions, complete with garages, kitchens, bedrooms, and living rooms with televisions and air conditioners; paper clothing; paper gold ingots, watches, jewelry, and mobile phones. These items symbolize the luxury items that people imagine the deceased would cherish using in the afterlife. All of these items cost real money to purchase for burning.

Rituals and Festivals

The range of rituals is quite broad, from the large Daoist communal blessing ceremony called the *jiao* (醮), which can last several days and brings out a whole village or several villages; to ordinary family life-cycle rituals commemorating birth, marriage, death, and house construction; to Buddhist temples' "opening of the light" (開光) ceremonies to activate the miraculous efficacy of newly installed Buddha statues. There are communitywide banquets celebrating temple deities' birthdays, and small-scale therapeutic and exorcistic rituals for individual psychological or medical maladies. The organizers of these rituals generally pay for the services of ritual experts, including Daoist or Buddhist monks and nuns, spirit mediums, and diviners, and they may also pay musicians, ritual organizers, opera performers, cooks, artisans and craftspeople, and workers. Expenses mount up for large-scale public rituals and street processions, where organizers must hire videographers, costume-makers, traffic police, and craftspeople to make the wooden palanquins that carry the gods or buddhas.

Festivals are celebrated according to the lunar calendar. One major festival is the Daoist Festival of Universal Salvation (中元普度), held on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, to appease the wandering ghosts and orphan souls. The Buddhist equivalent is called Yulanpen Festival (盂蘭盆節), which occurs at the same time and also takes care of the wandering souls. The Lunar New Year's Festival is perhaps the most important, when far-flung family members return home to Wenzhou to be with their family and kin. Wealth is expended in purchasing new clothes, throwing banquets, and giving New Year's gift money to the children. Each religious tradition has their own special festivals. The Buddhist calendar includes festivals to mark the birthdays (聖誕) of various buddhas and bodhisattvas, or their day of attaining enlightenment. These include the buddhas Sakyamuni (釋迦牟尼佛) and Amitabha (阿彌陀佛), and the bodhisattvas Guanyin, Wenshu, Mi-le, Puxian, Dizang (觀音, 文殊, 彌勒, 普賢, 地藏), and others. Daoist temples organize festivals and banquets to celebrate the birthdays of the Three Purities (三清), the Three Officials (三官大帝), the Jade Emperor (玉皇大帝), the Queen Mother of the West (西王母), and lower-level gods.

In addition, almost every local village or town temple holds a ritual and community banquet two times a month, on the first or second, and the fifteenth or sixteenth day of each lunar month. These ritual activities all entail large expenditures of income, but they also provide temples with worshippers' donations and an opportunity to recruit new worshippers.

Wenzhou temple activities confirm Adam Chau's (2006) observation that temple "folk event productions" reveal the business or enterprise character of temples.

Donations and Charities

In the spring of 2005, I chatted with Tang Weiwen, a woman in her thirties who studied at a vocational college and was trying her hand as an entrepreneur in the steel sheeting business. She asserted, "People are now more superstitious than ever. A lot of people are willing to spend money supporting superstitious habits of worshipping gods." She knows several old women who look deceptively poor, wearing tattered clothes, but were willing to donate tens of thousands of *renminbi* in hard-earned savings to build deity temples. As if exasperated with herself, she declared, "It's in our genes! Even though we don't believe, it's still inside us. When the time comes, we still feel like we should give some money!"

Throughout my fieldwork, I was struck by the pervasiveness of an ethic of generosity in community donations among the local people. They referred to these fund-raising activities as "accumulating funds among the people" (*minjian jizi*, 民間集資) or "sponsorship and support" (*zanzhu*, 贊助), the latter usually reserved for larger, more prominent donations of money. The notion of "public benefit" (*gongyi*, 公益) was often invoked by people explaining the local spirit of donations. Wenzhou entrepreneurs who had made money in far-flung places in China, or who lived outside Wenzhou and only returned for visits at New Year's, said that they were happy to donate money for their "hometowns" (*jiexiang*, 家鄉). People gave money to public community projects, regardless of whether they were ordinary pedicab drivers or wealthy local industrialists, although there was community pressure and higher incentive for the wealthy to give much more generously. According to the Party secretary of a town in Longwan District, Mr. Wu, whom I interviewed in 1993, the practice of "collecting funds among the people" was conducted in secret in the 1970s, but in the 1980s, peasants began doing it openly to raise money for the erection of temples and churches. Fund-raising started in the late Mao era as a way of re-establishing religious-ritual community spaces to connect with divine forces, but then it widened to secular community projects, such as building and repairing local roads, bridges, and schools.

The religious funding drives were so successful that many local governments also started conducting their own fund-raising activities. When he was township head, Mr. Ling held many fund-raisers among wealthy families to build a new elementary and middle school. He invited them to banquets and

made speeches impressing upon them the importance of education for their children and the future of their community. He received considerable contributions, many donations as high as 5,000 yuan, a large sum back then. He also went to Catholic and Protestant churches, carefully timing his visits to follow church services, so he could speak to the congregation about donating to their local schools. He estimates that about 75 percent of the Christian congregations gave him money.

Mr. Jiang established his medical instruments factory in 1988, and by 1993 his business was flourishing, with twenty-eight employees. In 1992, he paid 15,000 yuan in taxes to the state and contributed 14,000 yuan to various community causes, including 5,000 yuan toward the construction of the Zhen-nan Village Community Center; 1,000 yuan for relief aid to poor mountainous areas of Wenzhou; 3,000 yuan for the Hope Project (Xiwang Gongchen), a Taiwanese charity to help poor families send their children to school; another 3,000 yuan toward building an Old People's Pavilion in his village; and, finally, 2,000 yuan for the renovation of his 120-year-old Jiang Lineage Ancestor Hall. Although he received no government tax breaks for his donations, he said that, like most Wenzhou entrepreneurs, he just wanted to help out his hometown.

The organization that most often initiated and led these funding drives was the Old People's Association (*laoren xiehui*, 老人協會). In 1993, I interviewed Mr. Zhang, who headed a village Old People's Association established in 1984 in Yongzhong Township. The main purpose of these associations was to engage in "works for the public good" (公益事業). Old people are the most effective in soliciting donations, he said, because their seniority wins them respect and trust. Mr. Zhang's association was housed in an Old People's Pavilion (*laorenting*, 老人亭) built in 1989 with a funding drive that collected 130,000 yuan. They also collected donations to replace dirt roads with paved roads, and public toilets to replace the smelly and unsanitary "outhouses" (*maokeng*) that families kept along the roadside. The old people volunteered their labor (義務勞動), going door-to-door collecting money, hiring a technical expert, supervising construction, and even lugging rocks for the road foundation.

Religious organizations also actively participate in collecting donations. In temples, money is anonymously tossed into wooden donation boxes. The local people have also revived the practice of erecting carved stone tablets, or steles (石碑), commemorating the establishment or restoration of a temple or ancestor hall, on which names of major donors, and sometimes amounts contributed, follow a short introduction of the origin and history of the site. These steles recount an alternative history of localities and grassroots initiative, and the legendary history and powers of the gods or ancestors housed within.

Table 10.1. Donations to Wenchuan Earthquake Victims Made by Longwan District Buddhist Association Temples and Individuals in 2008 (in RMB yuan)

AREA OF LONGWAN DISTRICT	TEMPLE DONATIONS	INDIVIDUAL DONATION	TOTAL
Area 1: 浦州，状元，瑤溪	143,193	46,700	189,893
Area 2: 海濱，靈昆，外地	207,248	31,252	238,500
Area 3: 永興，沙城，天河，海城	199,015	43,750	242,765
Total	549,456	121,702	671,158

Source: Zhengxie Wenzhou Shi Longwanqu Weiyuanhui 2011: 68.

In 2008, six hundred members of the Daoist Temple of the Sacred King Who Disseminates Spiritual Efficacy (宣靈聖王廟) in Yongxing Township contributed a total of 200,000 yuan (\$29,200); about half of this sum was donated during the New Year's festival alone. Nearby, five hundred members of Shacheng Town's Temple Curator Temple (沙城太保觀) together donated 20,000 yuan (\$2,920). That same year, the prominent City God Temple in Ning Village (寧村城隍廟), Longwan District, collected a total of 200,000 yuan (Zhengxie Wenzhou Shi Longwanqu Weiyuanhui 2011: 56). In 2008, after the Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan, the Buddhist Association of Longwan District (龍灣佛教協會) quickly collected 671,158 yuan (\$97,989) from member temples and individuals to help the earthquake victims.

There are different individual motivations to give generously to public or religious causes. First, there is the deep-seated Buddho-Daoist idea that one accumulates spiritual merit from doing good deeds and demerits from doing evil deeds. Giving away money might mean a loss of material wealth, but one earns spiritual capital for this life or the next. According to Cynthia Brokaw (1991: 25–26, 31–52), the notion of accumulating merit and demerit points for one's moral behavior traces back to the fourth century CE in China, developing out of both Daoism and Buddhist traditions. In late imperial China, keeping personal ledgers of merit points became widely popular among the gentry and literati. Although I did not encounter anyone in Wenzhou who actually tracked their merits and demerits, people frequently employed the language of “accumulating merit” (集功德) when praising others for good deeds or when they chanted sutras repeatedly.

A second motivation for donating money is to repay the spiritual debts one has incurred from one's sins. In urban China, I almost never heard people

talk about sin or contrition for sins, but in rural Wenzhou, the religious notions of “sin” (罪) and “repentance” (懺悔) are quite common. Many Daoist and Buddhist sutras are called “repentance sutras” (懺). The notion of repentance for sins is also a connotation of two words used to describe Daoist and Buddhist funerals, “to transcend and cross into” (*chaodu*, 超度), which suggests that funeral participants help the deceased to “expiate for his or her sins.” Through the burning of incense and paper spirit money, the chanting of sutras and prayers, and the ritual performance, the funeral attendees help to “dissolve the sins” (化罪) of the dead so that they may receive lighter sentences in the afterlife. These rituals of penitence hark back to the Song dynasty, when, according to Richard von Glahn, the ubiquity of “rituals of redemption attests to the profound preoccupation with sin that suffused Song religion” (2004: 139–141). In both the Song dynasty and today, religious culture in a highly commercialized society came to quantify sin and merit.

On their path to wealth, many Wenzhou entrepreneurs employed morally questionable methods, stepping on weaker and less cunning people. So they feel they must make amends by giving large sums away in support of community ritual events. In some ritual processions, the largest donors and benefactors of the event are honored with the role of “prisoner”—they dress up as “criminals” locked up in cages and pulled on wheels as they repeatedly whip themselves for their crimes. Committing sins is understood as “being indebted” and “owing money” (*qianzhai*, 欠債), so there is the notion that before one dies, one must settle one’s accounts and give out wealth so as not to be in moral arrears. In the Buddhist tradition, when people are on their deathbed, they are haunted by images of their “debtors” (*zhaizhu*, 債主), people whom they treated unjustly or verbally maligned.

A third reason to give away wealth is to express gratitude to the gods. A pervasive relationship with gods and buddhas is one of humans “requesting divine assistance” (許愿) and “repaying the divine for granting their prayers” (還愿). Often people will go to a temple and offer incense and light candles, beseeching the gods for help and promising to repay with donated money or voluntary labor to help with temple maintenance, ritual events, or charities. The grateful person may also repay by hiring ritual masters to perform a ritual thanking the gods, and provide generous food and drink offerings.

Finally, a fourth rationale for making donations is not a spiritual but a worldly one: to gain social prestige or “face” (*mianzi*, 面子) in the community. Wealthy families feel more social pressure to give generously than families of modest means, and they are also expected to spend more money on life-cycle rituals and to invite the community to their banquets and ritual events. In

return for their loss of material wealth, they increase their social standing or cultural capital. When their names are carved into stone steles for their impressive donations, the world will know about their generosity. Rivalry among wealthy families or between village communities provides another motivation to give generously.

Construction of Ritual Sites

Beginning in the 1980s, there was a frenzy of building ritual sites, including temples, monasteries, lineage ancestor halls, churches, and family tombs. This followed upon the 1980 promulgation by the Bureau of Religion in the State Council of Document 188, *Report on the Implementation of the Policy on the Buildings and Properties of Religious Communities*, which paved the way for the return of religious sites and properties that had been confiscated by the state during the religious persecutions of the Maoist era (Guowuyuan Zongjiao Shiwuju 1980). Whenever I returned to Wenzhou after one or two years, it seemed that new or restored ritual sites had popped up during my absence (N. Chen 2016; M. Yang 2004). Obtaining permits for building new religious sites is much more difficult than for building industrial or commercial sites, partly because officials believed that religious sites did not add to the local economy and therefore would not show up in the records as an accomplishment that could help in their official promotions. The building frenzy was so acute in Wenzhou that in 1994 the city's Bureau of Religious Affairs decried the "uncontrolled building of Buddhist and Daoist temples" (Guowuyuan Zongjiao Shiwuju 1994b).

The size and space of most new temples far exceeded the size of older late imperial or Republican-era religious buildings. These new or restored religious constructions, too, should be considered part of the local economy, for they provide jobs to artisans, folk architects, wood carvers, ritual experts, decorative wall and mural painters, bricklayers, and so forth.

The sums expended on these sites can be quite high. For example, chapter 5 discussed the 2004 rebuilding of the great Taiping Buddhist Temple (太平寺) in Wenzhou City, a collective labor of love funded by 30 million yuan (\$3.65 million) in donations. That same year, another Buddhist complex of seven temple and monastic buildings, the Mei Feng Everlasting Spring Chan Buddhist Temple (梅峰永泉禪寺), also took off in the Mei Feng Mountains above Jin Shan Township, Cangnan County. Dating back to the Northern Song dynasty, the old complex had been entirely dismantled during the Cultural Revolution. Mr. Fu, the local village head and a leader in the rebuilding effort, told me in 2004 that the new buildings, along with large outdoor Buddha statues, were projected to cost 4 million yuan (\$487,800). Inside the main hall,



Figure 10.3. Beautiful craftsmanship in the wooden ceiling of a deity temple in Rui'an City, 2005. Photo by the author.

gazing up at the giant five-story wooden statue of a still-unpainted Bodhisattva Guanyin, I envisioned large crowds of worshippers making the long trek up to this mountain temple to pay homage to Guan Yin's "compassion and mercy" (慈悲).

In 2008, I interviewed a Daoist priest at the Great Sage Who Equals Heaven Temple (齊天大聖宮) in Linxi Town in Cangnan County, which honors the Monkey King God. The two-hundred-year-old original temple was expanded that year. The new hall and interior courtyard alone cost 4 million yuan (\$571,428) to build. A single stone post carved with a spiraling dragon cost 100,000 yuan (\$14,285), and there were about twenty posts, all shipped from Quanzhou in Fujian to the south of Wenzhou. The head of the temple managerial committee, who had retired from the shipping industry, where he made a lucrative living, donated large sums to the temple construction. Most of the other members of the temple managerial committee also donated impressively.

Table 10.2. Table of Jinxiang City God Temple Reconstruction Finances (in RMB), 2001–2004

INCOME		EXPENDITURES	
Donations	1,061,424	Fixed property	30,635
Incense sales	874,432	Regular expenditures	1,039,725
Candle & oil sales	61,460	Construction costs	1,496,129
Erecting statues	24,600	Deposits	500
<i>Renqing</i> fr. temples	531,298	Available cash	23,921
Qingming Festival	27,790	Bank savings	630
Trad. costume rentals	11,760	Storage	1,224
Total	2,592,765 (\$313,514)	Total	2,592,765

The Jinxiang City God Temple Committee (Jinxiang Chenghuangmiao Bianji Weiyuanhui 2007) reconstructed its temple from 2001 to 2004. In table 10.2, we see that this City God Temple accumulated funds in three ways: individual donations; *renqing* gifts from other temples or lineages; and temple business, such as incense and candle sales and renting of temple costumes.

In 2014, the White Cloud Daoist Temple (白雲道觀) in South White Elephant Street Committee (南白象街道) put out a poster soliciting donations to pay for various temple statues and furnishings, with this pricelist for donors:

Gold statue of the God of Wealth	280,000 yuan (\$44,800)
God of Wealth divine seat	220,000 yuan (\$35,200)
God of Wealth offering altar	38,000 yuan (\$6,080)
Gold statue of the Medicine King	280,000 yuan (\$44,800)
Medicine King divine seat	220,000 yuan (\$35,200)
Medicine King offering altar	38,000 yuan (\$6,080)

The poster promised donors spiritual rewards with these words: “Gather Records of Virtue and Good Karma from Far and Wide; Accumulate Countless Spiritual Merit” (廣紀善緣，無量功德).

The eagerness of today’s Wenzhou entrepreneurs to support temple-building resonates with the fourteenth-century description of the rebuilding of the main temple dedicated to goddess Mother Chen in Gutian, Fujian, which in the Yuan dynasty was under the same provincial administration of Jiangzhe Province (江浙省) as Wenzhou:



Figure 10.4. Gold-plated statues of Daoist immortals awaiting their placement in Hong Yan Daoist Temple, Chashan Township, Ouhai County. In 1998 each donor paid 6,000 yuan per statue. Photo by the author.

正七年邑人陳遂... 致力廟宮, 祇迓殊渥, 帥諸同志請于監邑承務公觀. 由典史魏某薛某上下翕合, 抽俸倡先. 雄資鉅產聞義悅從. 檜襁祈禱, 遠邇來者懽忻樂施. 遂斥金楮, 鳩工徙.
(張以寧著. “古田縣臨水順懿廟紀”) in 《四庫全書》

In 1347, Chen Sui... devoted all his efforts to making the temple even more beautiful. He gathered together people of generous spirit, all sharing a common purpose. He requested the prefectural official for the Inspection of Public Affairs to organize people of high and low stations [to rebuild her temple], and each competed in generosity by bringing contributions. Having learned of this righteous cause, the great landholders and rich merchants happily supported and donated to it. A religious service was arranged; everyone near and far took part and eagerly contributed funds. A large sum was thus raised, and builders were able to begin work to renovate the temple. (Zhang Yining, “Memorial on the Shunyi Temple in Linshui, Gutian County,” in *Siku Quanshu*, quoted in Baptandier 2008: 6–7)¹



Figure 10.5. Illegal family tombs (called “sofa tombs”) in the traditional Wenzhou style, Yaoxi Township, 2010. Photo by the author.

Despite the great span of time between the fourteenth century and today, there is a similar willingness among people of economic means to support temple-building and expansion, and a similar eagerness to win state approval and recognition for a locality’s patron deity and temple.

Family tombs are either legal or illegal. The illegal ones are secretly built on hillsides with good fengshui but are subject to unpredictable local government campaigns to demolish them. In recent years, the local government has encouraged people to house the ashes of their dead in new legal “public cemeteries” (公墓). These cemeteries generally cover a whole side of a mountain and are owned by a private company that builds endless rows of stone or marble tombs to sell to families. In 2008 and 2010, I accompanied my friend Wang Qinsheng, who was conducting fengshui siting of tombs in several public cemeteries. Tombs can cost a family anywhere from 50,000 to 2 million yuan (\$7,142 to \$285,714). Since tomb expenses are high, families start saving up early and often have the tomb ready years before their elders pass away.

These temples, churches, ancestor halls, and family tombs are ritual sites where local entrepreneurs can go to access higher cosmic powers and beg them to help in their family businesses. Thus, entrepreneurs have deposited some of their surplus into developing a ritual economy that accompanied the growth of the industrial profit economy. Investments in this supernatural economy rose in tandem with investments in the material economy, and the two cannot be separated. Wealth generated in the material economy spilled over into the ritual economy and propelled it forward. At the same time, the desire to expand and build up the supernatural economy, for divine protection and community pride, for personal salvation or gratitude for divine help, spurred on the growth of the material economy.

Gift Circulation

There are three kinds of gift circulation, and rural Wenzhou people make an explicit distinction between the first two. First, there is “giving renqing” (*song renqing*, 送人情), literally “giving human feelings,” in which families give gifts or throw banquets to renew social relationships at life-cycle events. These gifts or banquets are understood as voluntary gifts to relatives and friends at birth celebrations, engagements and weddings, housebuilding, funerals, and dragon boat races at the springtime Duanwu Festival. The amount of expenditure is not fixed; rather, it depends on the closeness of relations between giver and recipient and their relative income levels. Second, “giving gifts” (*song li*, 送禮) are smaller courtesy presents that local custom requires of everyone around the time of lunar calendar festivals. The type of gifts, their value, and whom to give them to, are said to be fixed according to local custom. However, with economic prosperity in recent years, local custom has experienced the inevitable gift inflation. Third, in the new millennium, once so many temple associations, lineage organizations, and lay and clerical Buddhist societies had been established, there emerged a new custom of renqing gift- and banquet-exchange among organizations and associations during each other’s temple festival or lineage ritual events. These interorganizational exchanges were also called renqing.

“Giving Renqing” (送人情): Giving Gifts of Human Affection

An important occasion for “giving renqing” is a wedding engagement. In the 1980s, engagement presents were simply a slab of raw pork, rice cakes, and modest cash brought from the groom’s family to the bride’s family. The presents were brought in stacked “gift containers” (*lisheng*, 禮盛) balanced as a pair on a bamboo shoulder pole. By the late 1990s, I chuckled at

encountering a wedding procession in which the bride's family had stuffed an outsized cassette player boom box into a lisheng made of woven bamboo strips. The boom box was so large and heavy that it teetered dangerously as the bamboo container creaked and swung from side to side on the shoulder pole. With increased gift inflation, I noticed the rapid decline in the usage of lisheng. By 2001, when Wang Zhaorong got engaged, she received a diamond ring, a watch, and a pearl necklace from the groom's family, and no lisheng was used.

Weddings involve the exchange of bridewealth (*caili*, 彩禮) paid by the groom's family and dowry (*jiazhuang*, 嫁妝) offered by the bride's family. Generally, the groom's family makes the major financial outlays for the wedding: the house that the couple will live in, the furniture, and the motorcycle or even automobile. In 1993, I learned from a cook that an average expenditure by the groom's family ran about 50,000 yuan, not including the house. The bride-price may include 4–5 *liang* of twenty-four-karat gold, worth over 20,000 yuan, and about 20,000 yuan cash (40,000 yuan = \$5,714). Following custom, the bride's family returns a portion of this sum back to the groom, called the "return gift box" (*huihe*, 回盒), the amount of return depending on her family's economic means. In the 1990s, there was a new trend for the bride's family to equal the wedding expenditures of the groom, either by giving back more of the bride-price (over 50 percent), or by rechanneling it into the dowry, so that dowries exceeded the traditional modest household bedding and utensils. Thus, increasingly a bride moved to her husband's home with more financial independence and enhanced social status, since her family had spent almost as much as her husband's, if not more.

The wedding is an occasion for the couple to receive renqing gifts and money from relatives, friends, neighbors, and even local officials. At the gift table on the day of the wedding, each gift and its donor's name is recorded, so that the couple will know the people whom they owe at future weddings and life-cycle ritual occasions. In the 1980s and 1990s, weddings were modest, with just a few banquet tables at the groom's home, spilling over into a neighbor's borrowed space. The labor of cooking and serving dishes was generally provided by relatives and neighbors. Nowadays, families pay large sums to stage the wedding at a fancy restaurant, seating hundreds of people, with hired performers and a master of ceremonies speaking over a microphone. In 2004, a businessman said that he spent 500,000 yuan (\$60,000) for his son's wedding, and 1 million yuan (\$120,000) for their apartment. The wedding costs included a new car and car permit, the wedding banquet, furniture and interior decor for the house, jewelry and clothing for the bride, and studio



Figure 10.6. Daoist funeral banquet, Yong Chang Township, Longwan District, 2001.
Photo by the author.

photography. These expenses illustrate the ritual inflation that comes with increasing prosperity.

Funerals are often more important than weddings, and people are willing to spend more hard-earned money on renqing gifts, usually money. Costs of funerals include hiring experts to perform the funerary ritual, which lasts at least one full day; hiring musicians; hosting many tables of guests for the funerary banquet; and consulting with divination masters to establish propitious dates for starting the funerary procession and lowering the coffin into the ground. A plot of land must be purchased and a tomb built on it. Skimping on funerals will bring nasty gossip about the lack of filial piety and how one is shortchanging the dead.

House-building celebrations provide another opportunity for giving renqing. In the 1980s and 1990s, most homes were built by family members themselves, with the help of kin and friends. The host would provide a big banquet to thank the volunteer laborers. The blessings of the new home's resident Earth God were invited during the ceremony. The project of house-building usually involves a consultation with a geomantic master who is paid to provide advice on the most auspicious location and direction for the new residence. The placement of the home must be in accord with the movements of the natural

qi (氣), or “primal energy force,” that circulates around the landscape. A good geomantic placement will bring the family good fortune for generations to come. Thus, a new home must be consecrated by the dual ritual procedures of geomantic placement and invoking the resident Earth God.

Renqing-giving is also evident at dragon boat rowing events for the spring Duanwu Festival. Villages or rowing societies organize rowers to bring incense burners from their village temple to pay courtesy visits to the villages where their married-out daughters now reside. They are received by the daughters and in-laws with long offering tables with food for their visiting god. In the 1990s, the issue of dragon boats was hotly contested, with local governments seldom granting permission to row, for fear of stirring up intervillage and interlineage rivalries that might break out in violence. Dragon boat rowing was also regarded as “superstitious,” since it invoked and propitiated patron gods. The local people sent teams to local government offices to allay their fears and campaign for permission, but still they were often denied permission. Since about 2008, many local governments have changed their negative attitudes toward dragon boat rowing, and some even organize their own races.

In May 1993, New Town Village in Longwan District (新城村, 龍灣區) was granted permission to sponsor a dragon boat rowing event. Three kinds of renqing were circulated for this event: (1) married-out daughters living in other villages returned to their natal village and gave money to the village Old People’s Association to support the event; (2) direct relatives of rowers in the dragon boats gave personal gifts to the rowers; and (3) parents of a daughter in her first year of marriage gave gifts to her and her husband. For the first kind of renqing, a standard money gift was 100–200 yuan, for which the donor would receive a briefcase that the village organizers had prepared. Those giving higher amounts would receive more valuable gifts. The organizers expected to receive a total of 300,000 yuan from the village’s married-out daughters living in neighboring villages, and since they expected the event to only cost them 100,000 yuan, they planned to use the extra money to build a village park and an Old People’s Pavilion for elders. The second kind of renqing could involve very expensive gifts, depending on the financial status of the donor. These are generally household items for the rower’s family, including big gifts like color televisions and even motorcycles. If the rower’s family was wealthy, then the “return gift box” (*huihe*, 回盒) would be 70–80 percent of the gift, and if they were poor, it was only a 30 percent return.

Renqing gifts and banquets are offered by wealthy families at any time of the year. Lavish hospitality overwhelms the recipients and strengthens social bonds. One evening in 2014, a Daoist priest dragged me to a fancy new

seafood restaurant where a rich woman entrepreneur was hosting over one hundred guests. She owned a successful aluminum mine in Yunnan Province. Returning to her native Wenzhou for a visit, she invited the priest, her local relatives, neighbors, friends, and business associates to an eye-popping feast of seafood delicacies. The dishes included raw lobster, frog brains in sweet soup, fish that cost 400 yuan per *jin* (about \$62.50 per pound), crab that cost 200 yuan per *jin* (\$31 per pound), abalone, and liberal amounts of French red wine and Chinese grain liquor. I was seated next to her neighbor, a local schoolteacher, and a pedicab driver who worshipped at her favorite Daoist temple. As the hostess came to each table to toast her guests, I could see social redistribution in action.

“Giving Gifts” (送禮): Small Customary Gifts

In the local understanding, “giving gifts” (*songli*) is distinguished from “giving renqing” (*song renqing*) in that the former is not voluntary, but constrained, and the kind of gift, amounts given, and lunar calendar festival occasions for giving are all fixed by local custom. In the 1990s, these small courtesy gifts for special occasions were said to be a custom that originated long before Liberation, and were also borne in traditional round decorated wooden or bamboo gift containers (禮盛). In the 1990s, I found the following customary forms of giving, which, having evolved out of an agricultural society, now seem quite modest:

1. New Year’s (春節)—married-out daughters return to natal homes with gifts of pork, rice cakes (*songgao*), liquor, and money
2. New Year’s—apprentices visit the masters who taught them their trade with pork, rice cakes, and liquor; their teachers reciprocate with small gifts of money
3. New Year’s—the younger generation gives gifts to their family elders, the older generation gives money to the children of the household
4. Qingming Festival (清明節)—fathers visit married-out daughters’ homes bearing white rice cakes; maternal uncles visit nephews’ (sister’s sons’) homes bearing the same items
5. Duanwu Festival (端午節)—nephews go to homes of maternal uncles with *zongzi*, sticky rice and meat wrapped in bamboo leaves; sons-in-law (daughters’ husbands) go to fathers-in-law’s homes with the same item
6. Qiqiaohui Festival (乞巧會節), when the Shepherd Star moves across the sky to visit the Embroidering Maiden on the seventh day of the

- seventh month—fathers-in-law and maternal uncles visit sons-in-law and nephews with white rice cakes or nine-layer cakes (*jiucenggao*)
7. Mid-autumn Festival (中秋節)—sons-in-law and nephews visit fathers-in-law and maternal uncles with rice vermicelli (*fengan*); married-out daughters in another village return to natal homes bearing moon cakes, clothing, chickens, or ducks
 8. Winter Solstice (冬至)—sons-in-law and nephews visit fathers-in-law and maternal uncles with sweet sticky rice flour balls (*tangyuan*)

In the 1990s, these gift-giving customs were standardized and applied equally to rich and poor families. These customs had declined in the Maoist era, especially during the Cultural Revolution, when they had to be conducted in secret because they were considered “feudal superstition” and “wasteful.” It was also during the Cultural Revolution’s “Smash the Four Olds” (破四舊) campaign that the traditional round gift containers (*lisheng*) were ordered to be destroyed. Each family was ordered to destroy them themselves, which was especially difficult when the containers were family heirlooms passed down through generations. This gifting custom and the containers resurfaced openly in the late 1970s, but in the new millennium, I noted a second disappearance of the containers. With increasing prosperity, these customary gifts have also become more flexible, prone to heavy gift inflation and thus no longer adhering to custom.

Renqing Gifts between Ritual Associations

In the new millennium, a new custom of *renqing* prestation between lineages, deity temples, Daoist and Buddhist temples, and religious or scriptural study associations took shape. These exchanges of *renqing* took place on the occasion of ritual events and festivals being celebrated by each organization. For example, when the Yingqiao Wang Lineage held their 1998 celebration for the updating of their genealogy, other friendly lineages made gifts of a live pig and goat as sacrifice to their ancestors. When a new deity temple invites Daoist temple management committees to their “opening the light” celebrations, they print out elaborate invitations, and their guests bring *renqing* gifts or cash. Likewise, Buddhist temples invited other Buddhist temples to their religious festivals, and their guests would come bearing gifts. These courtesy visits followed the principle of reciprocity, so that the *renqing* would be repaid at a later date when the donors held their own ritual celebrations. This ritual circulation of *renqing* gifts among religious and ritual organizations suggests that a dense religious network and civil society are in the process of formation.

Ritual Services and Occupations

Divination masters (算命師) operate from their homes or in temples and can be consulted on many important questions: auspicious dates and times for holding a ritual, opening a new business or new temple; one's personal fortunes in the future; the health of the family; and so on. Wang Qinsheng, an old diviner, told me that in the first five months of 2010, he made 50,000 yuan (\$7,400), while Fragrant Orchid, a female medium he took me to visit, made about 200,000 per year (\$29,600). Divination technologies are generally variant forms of the ancient *Classic of Changes* (易經), employing tools such as coins shaken in a turtle shell and the eight trigrams (八卦). Spirit mediums (靈姑僮, 神僮) also operate from their homes or small temples; they are hired to communicate with the deceased or with a god or wandering ghost. Geomantic masters (風水師) provide expertise on the best direction and location for siting a new home, tomb for the dead, or factory. A correct siting brings good fortune to several generations of family members.

Different ritual masters can be hired to conduct ritual services, including grassroots “hearth-dwelling Daoist priests” (火炬道士) of the Orthodox One sect of southern Daoism; formally ordained Quanzhen sect Daoist monks and nuns and Buddhist clergy; and ritual fixers, who serve as a sort of middlemen, assembling a full team of grassroots Daoist priests, Buddhist monks, and folk musicians to conduct rituals for clients. Although they themselves do not command ritual authority like the priests, they do possess the ritual knowledge to help priests set up the ritual site properly, light candles and incense at the proper moments, help with calligraphy for the written ritual petitions and talismans, and arrange offerings in the correct configuration. For the most part, these ritual services cannot command excessive prices, which would violate the ethical teachings of religious traditions. Since one's religious power is granted by the gods, being venal and greedy will incur doubts about how one received divine selection.

Although spirit mediums and shamanistic healers are popular and in much demand in Wenzhou, they come under special scrutiny by state discourse. In 2001, I heard several people referring to a national television show called *Focus Interviews* (Jiaodian fangtan, 焦點訪談) that presented an exposé of rural Wenzhou's “feudal superstitions.” I was able to obtain a copy of this half-hour show, which first aired on Central Chinese Television in 2000. The show targeted the village Party cadres of Yandang Village in the mountains of Yueqing City (樂清市) for colluding with a spirit medium in the village deity temple to “cheat people out of their money.” The village cadres entered into a “contract”

(承包) with a woman medium whereby she would “get possessed” (跳僮身) and communicate with spirits on behalf of her village clients in the temple. In return for being allowed to run her lucrative operations in the temple, each year she would deliver (上繳) to the village government 500,000 yuan (\$75,700) out of her earnings. The show accused the medium of faking possession in order to cheat the “superstitious masses” and decried the village cadres’ violation of Party principles. It condemned them for having the audacity to assist the medium at her ritual performances, chanting mantras and writing calligraphy, when they were Party members sworn to atheism.

Although the show admitted that the money collected from the medium did not end up in the private pockets of the cadres, but *did* go toward public expenditures such as local infrastructure and schools, it nevertheless claimed that the village reliance on “superstitious earnings” inhibited the village’s “economic and scientific development.” The show ended with a stern warning for other “absurd businesses” (荒唐的經營), informing the audience that the cadres involved had been “punished.” Here we see that in the state discourse on popular religiosity that was dominant at the turn of this century, the basic assumption of a structural opposition between religion and economic development still held sway and was unchanged from the Republican and Maoist eras. This thinking assumed that “superstitions” could only obstruct rational economic development. However, most rural and small-town people in Wenzhou understood this relationship between ritual/religiosity and economy quite differently.

A local woman cadre surnamed Liu told me in February 2001 that most people she knew in Wenzhou were very “turned off” (很反感) by this official television program in which big-city people chastised Wenzhou “superstition.” They lamented that the village cadres and even the township official lost their positions over this incident. According to Ms. Liu, many Wenzhou village governments do indeed enter into contracts with mediums who operate in deity temples:

It’s common in Wenzhou. If the village government doesn’t do this, then all the money earned in the temple would just remain in the private hands of the mediums. If the village takes a cut from the medium’s earnings, that’s doing something for the collective. This should be called “collective spirit” [集體精神]; it should not be treated like a crime, because those cadres actually benefited their village. It makes sense, it’s good for the economy, it provides a source of revenue and spurs on the economy. Lots of people really believe in mediums, and every year in the eighth lunar

month, many people flock to that area. The “incense fire is thick and abundant” [香火很盛] then. In fact, the village became so prosperous, the show itself said that the village kept on being chosen “Advanced Unit” [先進單位] [by higher officials] year after year!

Here we see that at the grassroots level, there is an entirely different understanding of the role of spirit possession for local communities from that presented in the television show. The locals have no issues with their cadres supporting mediums and taxing the mediums’ incomes. In the local understanding, the presence of mediums in local temples brings in more worshippers and therefore more money, which the temples then use to help fund community development, such as building roads, bridges, and schools, and to support local charities. Thus, in stark contrast to the urban television discourse about mediums cheating ignorant rural people and holding back economic development, mediums are actually seen to help stimulate the local economy! Although they derive personal profits, they are also catalysts of generosity and spearheads of community funding drives.

In addition to ritual experts, a panoply of occupations provide technical services required for rituals and temple-building. Before the 2001 banning of earth burials in rural Wenzhou, I saw many coffin-maker shops. Today there are makers of funeral wreaths, paper houses, and spirit money. Temple wall mural painters, casters of bronze deity statues and bells, porcelainware producers, and wood carvers of deity and Buddhist statuary all supply temples and home altars. Folk musicians, whether playing traditional Chinese instruments or Western-style trombones and drums, are in demand for ritual and funeral processions. Printers supply the many lineages with multiple copies of their lineage genealogies and invitations to renqing events. Ritual offering foods must be made by specialists. Candle- and incense makers supply the faithful with the basic tools they need to communicate with the gods. Needless to say, all these services for the rich ritual life of Wenzhou contribute to economic growth and the GDP.

RITUAL AND MARKET ECONOMIES:

BLURRED BOUNDARIES, DIFFERENT LOGICS

From the official point of view, the wealth that is plowed into the ritual economy by Wenzhou people is misused. It could be reinvested into expanding family businesses and industries, but instead it is “squandered” in ritual expenditures. However, as we can see in the examples above, Wenzhou’s ritual

economy is not separate from the market economy, but overlaps with, interpenetrates, and extends it; profit and ritual economies rely on and stimulate each other. It is also through the ritual economy that people gain the motivation, meaning, and rewards of working in the market economy. Competitive production for the market is often fueled by competitive religiosity. Here individuals, families, lineages, and local communities rival each other in generosity and depleting their wealth to put on more lavish banquets, rituals, and festivals or to build more expensive ancestor halls, temples, tombs, and churches.

At the same time, people with ritual occupations cannot derive unseemly profits, or else their greed may diminish their spiritual efficacy, showing that they lack the sincerity required to move the gods. In this section, I explore the blurred boundaries between these two economies and make the argument for their conflicting internal logics. The ritual economy harbors the countermarket logic that the more one gives away wealth and labor, the more one accumulates spiritual merit for one's afterlife. Thus, although the ritual economy interpenetrates with and stimulates the market economy, it retains a certain independence in harboring an older religious logic that refuses to submit to the maximization and cost-benefit logic of the market economy.

The mother of Tang Weiwen is a sutra-chanter who provides a ritual service at home for people who do not have time to chant themselves to accumulate merit. For a modest fee, Tang Weiwen's mother will chant the appropriate sutra for clients, using a calligraphy brush to cover a deity image with red dots. The images are printed on envelopes, and the dots indicate how many ten- to twenty-minute intervals she has chanted. The client then burns them in a temple, which is said to dissolve people's sins (化罪), grant wishes, and protect one's family.² Clients may also choose another paid ritual service that is performed by a group of twelve to fifteen middle-aged women called "repentance and worship groups" (懺拜團). For about 600–1,000 yuan per family (\$89–\$148), a client can ask one of these groups to chant or sing three sutras for the family, providing the name of the person they wish to help and the nature of the assistance they wish to obtain. With a presiding Daoist priest, the chanting group will hold a Daoist ritual service in their temple for the client. Tang's mother chanted in her local deity temple about five or six times a month and derived great satisfaction in helping others gain the gods' protection.

In 2017, when I mentioned this ritual service of chanting scriptures for clients during a lecture at the University of Antwerp in Belgium, a scholar in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of Leuven observed that these ritual services reminded him of the old "indulgences" sold by the Catholic Church to lighten sinners' punishment. Indeed,

five hundred years ago Martin Luther launched the Protestant Reformation with a passionate critique of the Church's practice of selling indulgences. Similarly, as we observed in chapter 3, both Catholic saints and Chinese gods were human beings who sacrificed themselves or made great contributions to humanity, becoming divine beings after death (Overmyer 1997)—and giving rise to cults and pilgrimages that generated high ritual consumption and expenditures. Indeed, Bataille ([1947] 1991: 120; 1989) harked back to the lavish ritual expenditures of medieval Catholicism, when giant cathedrals and idle monks absorbed so much of Europe's excess wealth.

In talking with Tang and her mother, I was struck by the economic language they employed to discuss these ritual services. Tang called the dotted paper records “cash” (鈔票), saying that they are like purchased presents for the buddhas or gods, as well as “currency” (貨幣), which implies that they are convertible, from economic value to spiritual credit or the ritual investment of wealth. Others also used religious and economic language interchangeably. Local people often said that “giving renqing” is like “making investments” (投資), because later one can reap benefits when the recipient does one a favor. It is also like “giving loans” (貸款), because what one gives away at a wedding for a neighbor may be recouped later, with interest, when that neighbor attends the funeral of one's own family member. Here we see the blurring of boundaries between economic and religious ideas.

However, the local people also recognize that the profit economy and ritual economy may also follow different logics, such as when people make donations and offerings to temples, ancestor halls, festivals, and charities. In the native classification, these actions belong to a separate category because, in the words of Tang Weiwen, “one cannot recoup one's money” (錢是拿不回来的). Even though the gods may grant people's wishes, the wealth that is given away to them is transferred permanently from our temporal world to the divine realms. As a middle-aged woman in a temple explained to me, “With renqing exchange, you get paid back the next time your own family has a wedding or funeral. They will give your gift back, so there is basically no ‘trade imbalance’ or ‘trade deficit’ [貿易逆差] here. However, with donations to temples and offerings to gods, you do not see that money again [錢就見不到了].” I will say more about the significance of this distinction between renqing as loan, and the permanent loss of wealth given to gods, buddhas, and charities, at the end of the chapter.

This ease with which an economic language and logic can be employed to discuss matters of the religious realm should not surprise us. Popular religious practice in southeastern China is deeply imbricated and familiar with the logic

of a market economy that stretches back a thousand years, to at least the commercial revolution of the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE). Indeed, popular religion as we know it today in southeastern China and Taiwan took shape and crystallized during the Song, which witnessed thriving handicrafts industries, specialized commodities markets, long-distance trade, and rapid urbanization (Edward Davis, personal communication; Hansen 1990; von Glahn 2003, 2004: 130–179, 2016: 242–254).

This religio-economic tradition can be seen today in the use of paper “spirit money,” an even more direct expression of wealth lost in giving it away to divine beings than food offerings. Spirit money is offered to gods at their temple birthday festivals or when a plea is entered; to ghosts, appeasing their tendencies to prey on the living, at the Universal Salvation festival (*pudu*, 普度); to ancestors on their birthdays, at the Qingming Festival of tomb-sweeping, or at annual ancestral sacrifices; and to the souls of the recently dead at funerals, to repay the gods for the debts incurred during the deceased’s life span and for the dead to use on their long journey through the Underworld. Spirit money offerings to the gods reveal the deep familiarity and savvy of these supposed rural “peasants” with a money economy and the intertwined logic of profit, indebtedness, accumulation, and a balancing of one’s accounts. Julie Chu (2010: 171–184) has also shown how Fuzhou peasants plotting their illegal migration to New York City have introduced a global element into medieval Chinese spirit money, with new printed currencies in US dollars, Japanese yen, and Hong Kong dollars. At the same time, paper money ritual offerings also express a willingness to part with material wealth in pursuit of higher ends in the divine world and the afterlife.

In Hou Ching-lang’s (1975) masterful French-language study of the history of Chinese spirit money, he describes two Daoist rites in which a transfer of funds is made to the Celestial Treasury in Hell. Anna Seidel writes that these rites “reveal the basic concept of life as a financial loan which has to be repaid. To be born is to receive an advance payment, to die is to have exhausted one’s loan from the Celestial Treasury” (1978: 421). Today in rural Wenzhou Buddhist-Daoist popular funerary rituals, the medieval notion of “reimbursing the Treasury” (填庫 or 交庫) is still kept alive when the surviving family members repay the treasury for the specific life span of the deceased. The preoccupation with the ritual storing and payment of money is seen today in three towns in Cangnan County, whose names date back to the Song dynasty: Money Storehouse (錢倉鎮 Qian Cang Town), Money Treasury (錢庫鎮 Qianku Town), and Gold Native Town (金鄉鎮 Jinxiang Town). What is revealed by the use of paper spirit money, economic language, and commercial logic in the realm of religion

and ritual is the deep interpenetration of religion and economy in this culture. It shows not only the embeddedness of religious activity in both the Song commercial revolution and the recent economic development of Wenzhou today, but also the mutual embeddedness of religious logic in indigenous economic rationality.

Here, much as I agree with what Hill Gates called China's "petty capitalist mode of production" (1996), I must demur from her Marxist analysis of money offerings to the gods (1987). Gates sees offerings of spirit money to the gods as merely a "penetration," a "reflection," or an "expression" of the petty capitalist economy (1996: 168–176). For Gates, spirit money produces "models of, and for human behavior, which [implies] that the creation of human life itself depends on capitalist-like principles" (1996: 170). She proposes that two practices of Chinese money offerings can be understood as parallel to Marx's distinction between money as mere medium of exchange of commodities (C-M-C), and "capitalist money," where money takes on a life of its own as "interest-bearing capital" (M-C-M) (1996: 174–175). Somehow she understands the money used by humans when they pay for their life spans as the former "unproductive" kind of money, whereas the spirit money presented to the gods is the latter capital-bearing, profit-inducing kind of money. In Gates's analysis, the gods are like capitalists who make profit, and they serve as models for human emulation of capitalist rules. For Gates, Chinese popular religion merely spurs on the "petty capitalist mode of production."

The Chinese use of spirit money extends back much further than Song dynasty commercialism, which puts Gates's argument for their merely derivative role as the "reflector" of Chinese "petty capitalism" in doubt. The first historical record indicating the use of spirit money dates to the early Tang period of the sixth century CE, fully "four centuries *before* the first use of paper money as legal tender" (Seidel 1978: 425). Paper money as legal currency appeared much later, in Sichuan Province during the late ninth century CE, when Certificates of Deposits or paper bills of credit known as *jiaozi* (交子) were issued by rich merchants and financiers of Chengdu, and the first legal banknotes were printed by the Song imperial state in Sichuan only beginning in 1024 CE (Gernet 1985: 324–326; von Glahn 2016: 233).

The problem of seeing ritual money as a mere reflection or expression of material economy is that it grants no autonomy to religious logics and practices; it sees them as mere epiphenomena or "superstructures" of the economic. Many religious practices historically *preceded* commercial and monetary cultures, not to speak of modern capitalism. For example, archaeologist K. C. Chang (1983: 108) pointed out that the arrival of bronze

metallurgy in ancient China was applied not to the making of agricultural implements and tools to develop the economy but to the religio-political technology of the archaic ritual-state: in manufacturing bronze ritual vessels and weapons of war. Since spirit money used in religious rituals emerged *before* Song commercialization and *before* the invention of paper currency as legal tender, we must expect that spirit money will bear the traces of a much older religious logic of animal sacrifice and food offerings for the gods and ancestors—as a shorthand to express a sacrifice or removal of material wealth from this-worldly life and its redeployment for higher ends in the divine world.

Here we can ponder the significance of Ms. Tang's words above: "With donations to temples and offerings to gods, you do not get that money back." Unlike the contractual exchange principles of *renqing* gifts, in which one's wealth given away is reciprocated with interest, sacrifice and donations to divinities are a temporal loss; they remove wealth from reinvestment and economic circulation. This means that they represent a cost to the dynamism and growth of the market or capitalist economy, and this is probably why local officials had a dim view of ritual expenditures as "waste." Furthermore, the divine world is not merely an extension or repetition of this world: it sits higher, on a transcendent plane, an expression of human ideals and aspirations, as well as fear and awe. Thus, far from what Gates views as a mere affirmation of the capitalist market, what is being expressed in making large offerings to divine beings is a willingness to sustain a material loss in this world for the pursuit of higher transcendent aspirations. This is a very different sort of reinvestment in the divine world, not for material profit, which would only bind people to this world, but for spiritual transcendence, communication with divinities, and access to eternity. The ritual action of burning spirit money to send wealth upward acknowledges a transcendent realm above and beyond this fleeting mundane life.

I have sought to show how the ritual economy parallels and threads through the market economy, yet has a relative independence. It subscribes to a different principle of operation and logic from the market or profit economy. Gift-giving, donations, sacrifices, and ritual site construction are all based on the *logic of generosity and the giving away of wealth* and conflict with the *logic of profit and accumulation of wealth*. Indeed, diverting funds into the ritual economy means a loss of material wealth and a slowdown in the growth of the profit economy. While these offerings may harbor a sublimated principle of interested exchange and "investment," the returns on the investment are primarily social and spiritual, not direct, predictable, or primarily material.

Social returns come in the form of the strengthening of social and kinship ties and obligations and the building up of social reputation and prestige in the community through one's generosity. Spiritual returns include the improvement of one's moral stature and the buildup of spiritual merit for that journey into the great unknown after death. The divestment of one's material wealth in this life increases one's spiritual credit and expresses a willingness to sacrifice material aspects of this-worldly life in pursuit of higher, more eternal goals.

Thus, the category of ritual economy in Wenzhou derives from its contrast with the profit-driven, accumulation-oriented market or capitalist economy, which focuses on expanding material production. Through the channeling of wealth into the ritual economy, today's rural Wenzhou residents not only construct and maintain a higher cosmic order but also keep in check the ravages of the runaway predatory modern capitalist market economy. Through such practices as "squandering" family and community wealth on ritual expenditures, rural Wenzhou people are carving out a social-ritual space and protecting it from the insatiable and ever-expansive logic of the market that has elsewhere taken over all of social life.

THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE: RITUAL ECONOMY AS BOTH INVESTMENT AND DIVESTMENT FROM CAPITALISM

For Max Weber, in the Protestant Ethic that gave rise to modern Western capitalism,

man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs. This reversal of what we should call the natural relationship is . . . a leading principle of capitalism, as it is foreign to all peoples not under capitalistic influence. ([1904] 1958: 53)

In modern capitalism, we witness a decline in sacrificing to the gods or displaying generosity to the community. Economic acquisition has become an all-consuming end in itself. The Calvinist spiritual anxiety about Predestination was allayed by the feverish activity of erecting material signs (factories, houses, heavy bank accounts) that proved that one was chosen by God for salvation. Ironically, it was the very pursuit of spiritual salvation that led Western civilization on the path to economic acquisition as the primary end

of existence. This new end has become extremely contagious across the globe and has arrived belatedly in post-Mao China, where capitalist accumulation has become all-consuming.

However, in pockets across China, especially in rural areas, an older indigenous market economy intertwined with ritual economy still persists. This discussion on Wenzhou's "ritual economy" has sought to answer Gibson-Graham's call in the epigraph above for retrieving "noncapitalist" practices from the peripheries and making them more visible. I suggest that the flourishing ritual economy in the Wenzhou Model actually represents a *reversal* of Max Weber's Protestant Ethic, not destroying the commercial ethos but acting as a check on its socially destructive impetus. In rural Wenzhou, good works, deferred gratification, and material success in this world are not sufficient to mitigate the deep sense of isolation and risk in the highly competitive world of state capitalism in China or to allay one's anxiety about one's spiritual destiny. Here it is not just by working hard that one gains a sense of security about one's supernatural destination. Instead, one must be willing to sacrifice a portion of one's material wealth in the ritual economy to gain social recognition in this life, assure a better future in the afterlife, and improve one's standing with the gods, ancestors, and buddhas.

In Wenzhou, the movement of wealth is different from the Protestant Ethic of raking in and accumulating wealth. One accumulates wealth, but then one must give out and release part of that wealth, circulating it in the ritual economy and investing in divine worlds. It is not so much that productive work brings family honor; rather, it is how one *spends and consumes* that wealth in social giving and ritual activities. While we can say that in Wenzhou the market economy produces wealth that feeds the ritual economy, we can also say that the need to assuage one's anxiety about the afterlife galvanizes people to *diminish* and even *deplete* their material wealth in ritual consumption to please the gods. Wenzhou people excel at amassing material wealth, but they also ritually consume much of it to ensure social well-being in this world and spiritual security in the afterlives to come.

When urban "boss" Protestants in Wenzhou City declare that their entrepreneurial prowess is somehow due to their "Protestant Ethic" or Calvinist doctrine (N. Cao 2011: 165–166), it immediately triggers questions about this causality. China's Song dynasty commercial revolution a thousand years ago had already demonstrated that Chinese culture is capable of producing and amassing wealth through commerce. This venerable heritage of entrepreneurial culture may also explain why, once the modern Chinese state's Economic Reform policies opened the floodgates in 1979, the Chinese economy took

off, propelled especially by private businesses, while large state-owned enterprises tended to languish. Economic growth took off just as much among non-Christian communities as among Christian ones. Since about 85–90 percent of the Chinese population is not Protestant, it is questionable that the Protestant Ethic can explain economic growth.

As we face global climate change and species extinction from industrial overproduction, it seems pressing to examine how diverse religious systems may exercise checks and restraints on an ever-expanding profit economy. We can take seriously Weber's critique of capitalism's elevation of "acquisition as the ultimate purpose of . . . life" ([1904] 1958: 53). Beginning in the Song, Chinese culture embarked on a path to material prosperity that did not open the floodgates to an unfettered capitalism, and the ritual economy seems to play an important protective role in this regard. Meanwhile, centuries of Neo-Confucian chastisement of excessive ritual waste did not close down the ritual economy until the twentieth century—and even then only temporarily. The difficult task before us is no longer the accumulation of wealth but how to "give away" wealth, which is entirely different from Marx's exhortation to better distribute wealth.

My fieldwork in 1990s Wenzhou revealed that local governments actively discouraged what they called "wasteful" (浪費) investment in the ritual economy, represented by lavish weddings, funerals and tombs, and temple rituals and festivals. Local state actions in rural Wenzhou were designed to capture much of the profits from industries. Taxes and local fees levied on enterprises in the 1990s ranged from about 35 to 55 percent of profits, depending on how each enterprise was able to elude such levies. In addition, for joint-stock enterprises, many local governments instituted a procedure called "standardization" (*guifanhua*), spelling out how each enterprise must spend their profits. In the early 1990s, Yongzhong Township government's Structural Reform Committee required all joint-stock enterprises to allocate their earnings after taxes thus:

- 50 percent expansion and reproduction
- 25 percent profit division to each stockholder
- 15 percent accumulation
- 10 percent public and worker welfare

This state formula attempted to channel surplus profits back into capital accumulation, the economic growth of firms, and the widening of the taxation base. Thus, the modern secular state attempted to capture the wealth generated from the local economy. While the state continued the late

imperial Confucian castigations of ritual extravagance, much wealth at the grassroots in Wenzhou today again eludes state capture to end up in the ritual economy.

In “the spirit of capitalism,” no penny should be wasted, and every penny must produce and expand wealth. According to Benjamin Franklin, “Money is of the prolific, generating nature. Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on. . . . The more there is of it, the more it produces every turning, so that the profits rise quicker and quicker. He that kills a breeding-sow, destroys all her offspring to the thousandth generation” (quoted in Weber [1904] 1958: 49). In rural Wenzhou today, this kind of profit motive is not at all alien. However, it competes with two other indigenous economic logics. Earlier in this chapter, I noted how rural Wenzhou people distinguish between the reciprocal and contractual nature of renqing-exchange among humans on the one hand, and the loss of material wealth when humans make offerings to the gods on the other. In renqing reciprocity between humans, one’s gift is like a social “loan” that will be repaid, while the social bond is strengthened. The end here is not profit but bond-strengthening through moral obligation to repay, as noted by Marcel Mauss (1967). In human-divine transactions, material wealth is thought not to return, or its return is so indirect or unpredictable that it must be put into a separate category from human-to-human reciprocity. In this sense, the indigenous logic of sacrifices and offerings to divinities in rural Wenzhou resonates with what Bataille (1985, 1989, [1947] 1991) wrote about sacrifice and religious expenditures as *pure* expenditure, something that involves a true “wasting” or “loss” of wealth, rather than a utilitarian investment with monetary returns. Both kinds of expenditures—gift reciprocity or social loan, and sacrifice to divinities—would earn Franklin’s scorn and disapproval, given his utilitarian logic of saving.³

Unlike the Protestant Ethic, which launched a process of “disenchantment,” deritualization, and radical iconoclasm or erasure of saints and their divine power, in rural Wenzhou economic development and commerce are brought back *along with* and even perhaps *because of* the reinstallation of gods, ancestors, buddhas, and immortals and the lavish rituals performed for them. In this movement, a portion of wealth is diverted away from production and accumulation and invested into the ritual economy that connects this world with divine realms. The ritual economy harbors a collection of ethics and logics that diverge from those found in the profit economy. Its ethics of generosity and giving out—its penitential sacrifice for sins—accumulates spiritual rather than material merit and delays material gratification in favor of investment in the afterlife.

CONCLUSION

When the market economy roared back to life in rural Wenzhou in the 1980s, it was not the deritualized Protestant kind, but an older indigenous late imperial Chinese market economy that was interwoven with a ritual economy. The market economy here had not disembedded itself fully from traditional institutions of kinship and religiosity. In the Wenzhou Model, *acquisition* is still not always the endgame, but often a means to public and community *ritual spending and consumption*. Here *giving away wealth* and conspicuous ritual consumption are sometimes just as important a means to power as accumulating wealth. In the Wenzhou Model, the ritual economy has managed to survive late imperial Neo-Confucian condemnations and subsequently the Republican and Maoist state secularization of society, which can be seen as attempts to create a Protestant Ethic in China.

Whereas the productivist profit economy widens the gap between rich and poor families, community ritual organizations reduce this gap, redistribute wealth, and provide community services, not least of which is attending to the spiritual yearnings for transcendence. This balanced model of economic growth means that in Wenzhou, more than in other places, economic development is better able to strengthen the horizontal ties of kinship and community and to reduce the alienation and individual isolation of competitive capitalism. Religious revival and ritual expenditure provide the basis for the reconstruction of an indigenous form of “civil society,” the society of localism and community, which was been decimated with the rapid expansion of the modern state throughout the twentieth century.

The Wenzhou Model has relaunched China’s “petty capitalist mode of production” through a reverse process of *reritualization* that often undercuts capitalist accumulation by promoting the “waste” of capital. Thus, although there is still profiteering and exploitation of migrant workers, the Wenzhou Model represents a quite different approach to capitalism from the Protestant Ethic version. It is the reinvention of an older indigenous model of market economy that possesses a built-in break, what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) called a “line of flight,” or escape from both the relentless teleological principles of capitalism and the ever-expanding modern state.