

Welcoming Dangerous Benefactors:

Incense, Gods and Hospitality in North-Eastern Taiwan

Stephan Feuchtwang

Hospitality and its dangers

As an ideal, hospitality is a practice accompanied by professions of benign inclusion and the maintenance of order and rank. But it is also fraught with dangers. Among them are reversals of hospitality, under the same code of civility, in which a guest visit is a raid, or the guest is a parasitic out-stayer of welcome. The hospitable code of sovereignty maintains the order of a household as a micro-court in the realm of a larger polity of rule by the same code (Sneath, this volume). But it is subject to rivalries and reversals of sovereignty while obeying and manipulating the order itself.

For those maintaining it, to respect the order is not to deny the dangers, but rather to disavow them or to avoid them. By this very token, the most common occasion of domestic hospitality and visiting in Chinese civilisation, namely the period around the new year, was explained to me as an obligation of joy and unity that includes the avoidance of bad words and anger. People in Shiding, in north-eastern Taiwan, told me that breaching this obligation could bring about the end of the world (Feuchtwang 2001:51-2).

Quite distinct from both the festivals of territorial protectors, to which I shall turn, and also this hospitality at the turn of the year is the threat behind the rites of societies that combined religions and formed congregations to save the world and themselves, called 'redemptive societies' by scholars (Ownby 2010). These were a mixture of elite and commoners, coming together to produce texts by spirit writing that were then printed for free distribution. They flourished on the republican Chinese mainland, as well as in Taiwan under Japanese colonial rule. One was secretly active (having been proscribed by Japanese rule) in Shiding's temple, where I conducted fieldwork some decades later during the late sixties. The principal god of this redemptive group was Xian Gong (the Immortal Lord, whose personal name is Lu Dongbin, one of the famous Eight Immortals who, together with two other gods, made up a trio of

benefactor mediators between the group, their world, and the supreme deity. As the writing revealed, wickedness in the world is bringing about its death, but it can be saved by intercession. If the moral instructions dictated by the interceding deities are followed, the world can be re-enlivened. The resulting morality book has the title *Enlivening the World for Renewal (Huoshi Youxin)* (Feuchtwang and Wang 2001, Chapter 7). Other redemptive societies were more explicit, writing that the supreme deity, Shang Di, had already condemned the world to annihilation, but had been persuaded by the mediating deities to stay his hand and give humans a chance at redemption (Goossaert 2018). This included acts of charitable giving and festivals in honour of the mediating gods, where the local communities of the redemptive society were their hosts. Xian Gong had an annual festival in Shiding, but it was a significantly smaller occasion than the other annual festival for its original principal god, its territorial protector, a pair of generals entitled Baoyi Zunwang and Baoyi Dafu, whose military and demon-quelling demeanour and mythology is frighteningly fierce.

This, together with other sides, undersides, and countersides of the obligation and the order maintained by hospitality, is the topic of this article. The feast at the turn of the year is an obligation, and the pleasure of a united family household, and the rest of the new-year season is a celebration of hospitality in visits from and visits to kin and matrilineal relatives, not to mention hospitality to ancestors. All such hospitality is haunted by the opposite, the ghosts that are without descendants to offer them hospitality. On a much larger scale, the redemptive societies, often also during the same season, seek to redeem the world's order from a disorder linked to that of uncared-for ghosts, in a world that has neglected its obligations. Territorial protector deities are benefactors of order who can hold disordering demons at bay. All these feasts to give thanks for order are, at the same time, bulwarks against the threat of disorder.

The sovereignty of the household is the basic unit of feast hospitality. It is augmented in scale linearly by the inclusion of ancestors as guests, and spatially together with its neighbours by the inclusion of territorial protector deities, and ultimately of the supreme deities of the pantheon, be it that of a redemptive society or of older traditions, a printed picture of which is often pasted on the wall behind the household's domestic altar shelf.

I will introduce the case of festivals of hospitality to gods that protect local territories rather than groups of world savers. Hospitality to territorial protectors is a performance and a plea for peace and abundance. As the texts offered and the other offerings themselves make clear, the rites of hospitality to protector gods are performed to make something happen. This is indicated in particular through the words *lingshi*, *xing* and *ganying* used to describe the deity, or the demons that the deity controls. *Lingshi* and *ganying* are best translated as ‘having a capacity for effective response’. *Xing* in its common usage is ‘to flourish’ or ‘to rise’, but in this context is more like ‘to flare’ or ‘to start something’ in response to a plea. For the territory and its domestic altars, the desired effect is peace and order (*pingan*), which is the restoring of the light connecting the celestial to the earthly and the human by means of the symbols in a dipper (a notional constellation). The Dipper is a measure of rice (*dou* being a pun with the designation of the constellation), in which are placed a lamp, a mirror, and the scissors that threaten the connection, but that also serve to sever the influence of malevolent stars (Feuchtwang 2001:208).

From the local culture of southern Fujian province on the mainland and on the island of Taiwan, I shall describe the rites of festivals of territorial protectors and their temples, or simply their statues and spiritual thrones. These are variants of festive rites for territorial ritual communities performed in different ways in all localities of the Chinese world. I shall argue that they constitute a special case of hospitality, in which the guest is both a benefactor and a threat, a guest that represents an encompassing and superior power in relation to the sovereign host, and to the territorial order of the place to which their hosts invite them. Certainly, this is a hosting of gods, as Adam Chau has argued (2004). But I am calling it hospitality, despite its not conforming to the classical Greek and Judaic models of hospitality to gods as strangers and outsiders. It is hospitality to a chosen guest as hosting is, but this guest is of such an order of scale and power that to not provide a sufficiently abundant welcome is to risk the destruction of order. I shall argue this by explicating the performance of the role of the master of the incense burner, who is the ritual host.

The ritual sequence of hospitality to gods

Each step in the ritual sequence of welcoming and seeing off a guest, and in the sequence as a whole, is one of deference, or supplication. The sequence consists of a cleansing and an invitation, a welcome greeting, an offering and a petition, a further offering of thanks, and then a separation enacted as seeing off the guest and expecting a reunion.¹ Each of these steps is an act of communication, its acceptance tested by the throwing of divination blocks, which is an invitation to respond, a test divulging the response, and a thanks and departure. Ordinary people at their domestic altars or at temple altars carry out simplified forms of this sequence.

The sequence is expanded in the more elaborate rituals performed by ritual specialists within a temple during a communal festival. Included in these more elaborate rituals is a document called a memorial (*biao*), which is burned alongside spirit money and incense as a means of communication with deities. A memorial may be written for a small rite for a household, or in a large rite for a liturgical community, which is a territorially defined place of domestic altars. Orally, then duplicated in written form, the place is named, as is the personal name of the chief representative of the household or of the community, and the offerings described. The memorial includes, centrally, a vow that is also a petition for an authorised command to bring about the desired effect if the petition is received, and the offerings and thanks for the presence of the deity are accepted. The deity is of course also named and eulogised. During the ritual service, the story of the deity is sung or incanted in verse. The vow and prayer are a pledge to give thanks at the same time in the next round of the festival. So each festival is at once a thanksgiving and a pledge.

Accompanying each of the movements in the ritual sequence is the burning of incense. Its most common form is gummed onto bamboo slivers. At the upper length, an aromatic sawdust mixed with gum is pasted, which then burns slowly when the tip is lit. The bare ends of a bundle of such sticks (the number and size of which are prescribed according to the rank and nature of the spirit being honoured or propitiated) are stuck in the sawdust, sand, and ashes contained in a bronze burner (*lu*). Sandalwood chips in an empty container may be offered to the more eminent

¹ Stafford (2000) gives a full exposition on how these normal rituals of greeting, separation, and reunion are elaborated into a particularly Chinese tradition, but one that illustrates a general theme of human life: dealing with separation.

deities. This is the most basic act of Chinese religious ritual. It marks offerings to the dead, whether they are ghosts (the dead without descendants to care for them), ancestors, or gods (who in China are legendary and historical figures capable of magical effects among the living).

I asked dozens of people in Shiding to give me a brief exposition of what is done by burning incense. All gave me various descriptions of opening and closing communication addressed to a responsive being, for which there were a number of different analogies: like offering someone a cigarette or handing them a name card for further contact. To describe the act of incense-burning as one of a number of instances of opening communication is helpful for saying what it is *like*. But we cannot ignore the fact that incense is burned, in contrast to an invitation card or cigarette being offered or, as another analogy had it, a telephone being rung. Burning incense is distinct from other Chinese forms of deferential communication, such as drinking a toast, offering and receiving gifts, or kowtowing to or petitioning a political leader. Incense marks an offering to a spiritual being.

There are a great number of other markers that differentiate such offering from the giving of gifts among the living, such as the act of burning spirit money (which is an abbreviated petition or plea for a divinely authorised command to malign spirits to remove themselves, and to maintain peace and order). But incense is the simplest. The incense creates a difference that makes the likeness an analogy.

I think the exegetic analogy given by ordinary practitioners is highly pertinent. They are saying that the burning of incense is like inviting someone in to receive a gift of hospitality, and to establish a relationship in which a reunion is possible. It is like the establishing of human relations (*renqing*) through gift exchanges and hospitality. I seem to have reached the same conclusion as Adam Chau (2004), who, based on much more recent fieldwork in northern China, has written that the ritual of festivals can be summed up as hosting. But incense marks offerings that include and are like, but not identical to hosting. We can begin to see this in the festival role of the representative host, the master of the incense burner.

Incense hosts

In Shiding, as elsewhere in Taiwan and in southern Fujian, the representative of the territorial community of a protector god is called ‘the master or host of the incense burner’ (*luzhu*). In other parts of China, other names, such as ‘incense head’ (*xiang tou*), are used. The importance of incense can be seen in the ritual duties involved in being master of the incense burner. He is chosen from the better-off households of the liturgical community protected by the god using a procedure of divination that seeks the protector god’s selection and approval. Divination blocks are thrown or dropped to the ground to single him out from the list of prior selection. The blocks are a pair of wooden or bamboo semi-spheres, one side flat, the other curved. A positive response requires one to have fallen curved side up and the other flat side up. The other two combinations are negative. There is some prior selection because his household has to be well off; he is expected to bear considerable expenses in providing the main offerings to the god and the leading bands and other troupes that make up the procession of the statues of the god and its incense burner that is taken out of the temple.

On the day, he carries the incense burner in the procession past every household, and members of his household help him in the exchange of incense sticks between the domestic altars that they pass and the wider territory’s burner that he carries. His other duties include attendance throughout the day in the temple as representative of the community, bowing obeisance with incense wherever instructed during the religious rituals that are conducted by a Daoist ritual specialist (who is household-based, and not a monk). These rituals include addressing the full range of the celestial hierarchy, from the supreme deity of Heaven (Tian), whose incense burner the master has kept at his house since his selection, to the hungry ghosts at the four corners of the territory’s borders that receive charitable offerings of food. In between are the gods of the temple at the centre of the community, which surround the principle deity of this festival. Vital to these proceedings is the master’s holding of the petition that the Daoist specialist has written out for the community, listing the gods, and pledging generous offerings for the divine gift of peace. The ritual symbol of the territorial community within the temple, which is the palace of the deities, is the *dou* measure and its stellar lamp, newly marked for the occasion with the wish for ‘peace (*pingan*) in the whole area’.

The master of the incense burner acts as mediator with the gods on behalf of all the other households. But beyond these obeisances, he is also responsible for organising the whole festival, employing the cooks in the temple, the players on the stage opposite the temple, the Daoists conducting the rituals inside the temple, and more. He plays host to the gods as representative of the territory, whose peaceful order they are begged to protect, and in particular he plays host to the god that is carried in procession around the territory.

Chosen outsiders

Most gift exchange and hospitality is for the making and maintaining of relations with known others. But the paradigm case of hospitality is the entertaining of a stranger. In Shiding, this would be giving to beggars or to hungry ghosts. Hospitality to a god lies somewhere in-between. The god is a familiar, coming from outside to be established inside.

To be a host is to be sovereign. The host chooses his guests and arranges the event. Adam Chau contrasts the highly selective and organised production of an event to host gods with the anthropological paradigm of hospitality to a stranger. I agree with him, but also wish to draw attention to the fact that the chosen god is also an outsider in a sense that I shall now elaborate. These known outsiders are contrasted with insiders, ancestors who are also addressed with offerings. But it should first be noted that the sovereign host in the case of hospitality to a god is himself chosen by the chosen god.

The appearance of a guest as a visitation, in which the guest is a god or the God in human form, in the tradition of either Greek mythology or the Bible is, as Adam Chau also rightly shows, inappropriate as a model for the hosting of Chinese gods. Gods are chosen guests. But the visitation of a stranger, who is a god in disguise in Greek mythology, is a test of the host, and the same can be said of hosting a Chinese god. The test is a courting of danger, to which the host of a feast, and even more so in the case of a festival, exposes himself, namely the possibility of insulting the guests, or especially the god if the offerings are not generous enough. In Shiding, to have been chosen by divination from a list of heads of households as the master of the incense

burner for the next round of a festival was considered to be an honour. But it also put the selected individual in danger, since he had to place his own personal wealth at the disposal of the liturgical community to guarantee that the offerings to the deities were sufficiently lavish.

The god is further conceived on a scale of being that encompasses the territory, that is, the circumstances of the liturgical community of households in that territory. The god is a chosen guest who exists at an inclusive scale of hierarchy. Adam Chau is surely right in rejecting the paradigm of a stranger as appropriate for Chinese hospitality to gods. But should we not interpret the invited god as a chosen outsider?

At a banqueting table, as in the main hall of a home, the most honoured guest is put in the position of the ancestor or the god on the domestic shrine shelf at the actual back wall of the main hall, while the host and his main assistant or representative sit next to the honoured guest, and another representative of the host sits opposite. The sovereign host appears to cede sovereignty to his most honoured guest, but of course this is just a way of honouring the guest, not of making him host. This is the order in each home that hosts a feast during a festival for a territorial protector god. By contrast, in the main hall of the territorial community that celebrates the festival, which is either a temporary or a permanent temple, the god is already in the host position, and the temple is the centre of the community. That year's master of the temple's principal god's incense burner is the territorial host, by divine selection. The god may come from a mother temple outside that community, and is in any case outside the homes in that community. The god is sovereign in his or her temple, yet is invited as a guest together with the divine hierarchical pantheon by the master of the incense burner through the mediation of Daoist ritual specialists.

It is normal to put the honoured guest, as distinct from the casual and intimate guest, in the position of host. But there is no incense between them, just food and wine. Adam Chau (2004:60) argues in the other direction, that rituals inviting the deity as an honoured guest are a transfer to religious ritual of the everyday practices and expertise in what he calls hosting. I agree that the same protocols and expertise are called upon, but in addition I insist on pointing to the distinction from these everyday practices, marked by the burning of incense, and by the sense of debt incurred from hosting the divine. It is likened to the debt owed for a parent's nurturance that cannot be repaid. A

parent's benevolence (*en*) is the same word used for the benevolence hoped for from a god. To this is added the fearsome power of the god to command demons and punish offence.

Divine responsiveness and mediation

In the everyday practice of feasting and giving, the ethics of human responsiveness (*renqing*) and fellow-feeling (*ganqing*) are invoked. But in the invitation to a god, something far more powerful is invoked: the human capacity for harmonising the relation between Heaven and Earth, a competence that was supposed to be the monopoly of the emperor, but, with the spread of territorial protector gods and their festivals from the Song dynasty onwards, was appropriated without opposition by every territorial community (Hymes 2002; Hansen 1990). The god, invited into the temple and into each household as an honoured guest, and then seen off, is the human host's own mediator, with the aid of Daoists, between Earth and Heaven.

As offerings of hospitality to gods, the incense master's pig and other foods are put on display before the deity raw and without eating utensils. In contrast, cooked food with eating utensils are offered to ghosts, who are trapped between death and life, and are on the same spatial level as humans, though they are outside the territory. The uncooked food offered to gods is a sign of their hierarchical superiority. Spiritual communication is one of invitation and feeding, whose sign in every description of obeisance to both gods and ghosts in China is incense smoke and fire (*xiang huo*).

The only instance that I know of in which incense was part of a ceremonial welcome and response by a living respondent in China was an audience with the emperor.² The only other living humans to whom incense is offered and can still be seen are those inhabited by a deity.³ The people in Shiding, in northern Taiwan, to whom I spoke

² I am relying for the most part on the meticulously detailed exposition by Allen Chun (1989), who provides translations and reproductions of key portions and illustrations from imperial publications of the last dynasty, the Qing.

³ I was informed by Vincent Goossaert (at a conference 22.05.05) that incense is offered to a living Daoist master when he is considered to have almost attained a state of perfection or immortality. And Jean DeBernardi (private correspondence) has described a mother making offerings of wine and incense to her son as a medium in trance, possessed by the god Guanyu Dadi. She also reminds me that, at pilgrimages and temple festivals, incense is offered to the visiting temple's possessed mediums

and who organised the rituals that I witnessed, never mentioned the emperor, and may not have known about imperial guest rituals, to which I shall liken the welcoming of a protector god. But they did refer to something that looked like the old imperial centre and hierarchy. They did this in the iconography of the gods pictured in the temple, in the books of its spirit-writing cult, in the costumes of its statues, in the architecture of the temple, and in the titles of its deities given as if by imperial investiture. I think I am also justified in bringing imperial audience into this context for two further reasons.

Hospitality to gods is like an audience with an emperor. It is like obeisance to a divine ruler in his status as Son of Heaven, except that rituals performed to a local god treat that god as a local sovereign. All gods have legends that include their lives as humans. But they are dead. The local sovereign, unlike the semi-divine emperor, is both dead and present, crossing the boundaries between dead and living, invisible and visible. Whereas the emperor was a living mediator, gods are dead but *presented* mediators. The host, master of the incense burner, exercises hospitable sovereignty by inviting and welcoming a sovereign guest.

When a god's statue is brought from a more central temple, it is met at the border of the festival territory of the lesser temple, in a similar way to the greeting and honouring of the imperial emissary, who comes as a guest, but takes the position of the unmoving host who is the emperor, coming from a more central position. Indeed, entertaining the emissary and his retinue requires great expenditure, a guest who verges on becoming a parasite, testing the host just as the god of a festival tests the master of the incense burner.

The hierarchy of temples as loci of a deity is expressed in pilgrimages, during which groups from different temples meet at the source, or host temple, and those bearing the incense container engage in a protracted ritual of greeting, at the climax of which they feed each other incense in a properly hierarchical pose.⁴ There is therefore a hierarchy of scales of encompassment, from the central or regional temple to the local

and martial procession troupe actors. In neither case is the offering with incense made to the human present, but respectively to the imminent state of immortality and to the god present in the body of the human.

⁴ My thanks again to Jean DeBernardi for this point.

temple, each represented by the sovereign deity. The other local temples to the same deity are centres of rival hospitality, especially when there is a rotation of festivals to the same god in the same region.

So the chosen guest comes from outside not because they are met at the border if they come from another temple. They are outside because they exist in a hierarchy of scale in which a protector god stands for and includes the whole territorial community. At the centre of the territorial community is the protector's palace, where he is sovereign.

Danger in preparing for extravagance

For the master of the deity's incense burner, the host representing the territory of hospitality to a god, the expense of preparation includes feeding a pig as part of a competition to breed the fattest and heaviest, which will then be offered to the god on the day of the festival (see Chau, this volume). The pig could be seen as a further representative of the offering community, as well as of the person representing it. Not providing enough is to risk offending the gods and their ignoring the petition for peace and order, including the three standard measures of prosperity, namely longevity, high status or wealth, and many male descendants. So the festival of social joy and abundance is based around the potential lack or loss of this benevolence, which thus needs to be recreated and renewed every year.

There are other rituals in exceptional circumstances, of plague or drought or military defeat, when offerings to gods and ghosts in China are more similar to the direct offering of vitality in rites of initiation and succession as described in other civilisations. In China, these exceptional rituals are similar to those of mourning, or, in other words, of recovering from the loss of life itself. But what I am describing is not the avoidance of calamity that has already occurred; rather it is the prevention of offence and calamity, and the renewal of benevolence.

The breeding or purchase of a prize pig to be presented whole to the god, then slaughtered, cooked, and feasted upon is just one part of the preparations involved to host a god. Wealth also needs to be accumulated to pay for the theatre troupes, music bands, martial arts performers, mobile tableaux of legendary scenes, and anything else that makes up the god's procession, accompanying the carriage of his or her incense

through and around the boundaries of the liturgical community, pleasing both the god and the households of its territory.

The master of the incense burner is responsible for obtaining the necessary funds to pay for the festival's expenses, with the help of a treasurer. Each section's head of household, selected by divination blocks from a list of the households in his section, collects a standard amount per male member from each household in his section; in addition to this base collection, donations in thanks to the god add to the festival fund. The names of the donors and their donations, and an account of all expenditures are published on red sheets of paper pasted on the temple wall for all to read. But, as chief host, the master of the incense burner must make sure that the figures are high enough to constitute a show of abundance as an offering to the gods in the rituals that precede his own and the other households' feasts.

In wealthier areas, where the expected expense was far more extravagant, only the rich were included in the households for divine selection. For instance, in Wanhua, the centre and commercial heart of Taiwan's capital Taipei, the only annual territorial procession I observed in the late sixties was that of its protector god Qingshan Wang, more formally titled Ling'an Zunwang, a fierce black-faced military god; whereas Shiding's Zunwang is a fierce red-faced general. Ling'an Zunwang's procession still takes place, always in the evening and in the same tenth lunar month as the annual festival of Zunwang in Shiding. During my observation, I was told that its incense master had not only been chosen from among the wealthy, but that also his wealth was ill-gotten; he was one of Wanhua's gangsters (*liumang*).

In other words, the prelude to the extravagance of hosting a territorial protector god is the accumulation of wealth, appropriately in this case by a locally loyal and locally protective organiser of violence. It is the release of accumulated wealth and possibly of financial debt.

The dangerous outsider and the dangerous stranger

Gods are outsiders, but not strangers. The spirits of strangers are those of the unmourned, without an ancestral centring on a domestic altar or a territorial centring on a communal altar. They are also outsiders, condemned to an earthbound existence

in wastelands on the outskirts of centred territories. They are permanently hungry. And they are likened to beggars, who gather outside temple entrances. Small shrines to these forgotten orphan souls, always on the borders between liturgical communities, were euphemistically and optimistically referred to as the shrines of those who are bound to respond (You Ying Gong), just as the ghosts themselves were euphemistically called the good brothers (*hao xiongdi*). They are regularly hosted, fed, and clothed at the seventh lunar month festival of Buddhist charity, invited onto the thresholds of communal altars, and then expelled back to the border. In the meantime, offerings are left on the ground beyond the thresholds of houses or at shrines as propitiations to avoid their malign influences. But it may be that the offerings result in beneficence, and should this become known and this benign reputation confirmed, what was previously an anonymous mass of forgotten souls is given the title of a single deity (Harrell 1974). Such deities can become extremely popular for their amoral responsiveness in granting good fortune in sexual encounters, gambling, or illegal trade (Weller 1994).

Territorial protector gods, guarding the liturgical community with retinues of soldiers that are represented by local militia of martial arts displayed during festival processions, continually threaten ghosts and malevolent star demons driving them out of the civic order. Their soldiers receive offerings just beyond the threshold of a home, just above the ground where orphan souls are fed. A protector god's soldiers are close to ghosts, fierce ghosts loyal to the commanding god.

Gods that have fought demons and that can control them are as fierce in their iconography as demons. And indeed gods that *relieve* drought or prevent pestilence and epidemics can also *bring* drought and epidemics (Katz 1995). Those protector gods that are the most desired guests at territorial festivals are also the most dangerous. As in the feasting that follows, in hospitality to them, they are offered meat and liquor. They are carnal. They are good, but they can also be bad. Their responsiveness is benign, and indeed, when offerings are made, the petitioner appeals to their reputation as righteous recognisers of the justice and merit of the case made to them. This distinguishes them from the amoral responses of ghost-become-gods described by Weller (1994). Even so, although they are righteous and good, offending them or a lack of response from them is a big danger. Gods further up the hierarchy in the pantheon of gods include saviour deities that are offered no meat, just fruit and

tea. But the supreme god can, like the emperor, be righteously violent, and so the countersides of saviour gods can be depicted as fiercely demon-controlling.

Hungry ghosts are the counterparts to protector gods in rites of hospitality. The gods welcomed into their sovereign positions at the centre are capable of generosity – peace, order, abundance, and life – far beyond human offerings. They are outside in scale, but inside the local territory. Ghosts are fed briefly as an act of virtue, before being fearfully returned to the outside on the same low scale.

In other civilisations, some hosts can be feared as consumers of their guests' good fortune (da Col 2012). That is one counterside to benign hospitality. Ghosts are another. Their benign equivalent would be holy Buddhist mendicants or Daoist hermits. Monks, depending on donations or payments for their holy services, would be other counterparts in the general order of hospitality. All of them are, in quite different ways, permanent guests.

Finally, allow me to cite a case from somewhere completely outside the Sino-Tibetan sphere, to which the terms I have used can be applied to equally good effect. In the equally hierarchical order of Ethiopian Orthodoxy in the holy forest of Zege (Boylston 2018), where feasts and fasts define and regulate the calendar, and differentiate self from others, the host of the Eucharist is the supreme model – both in scale and power – for a descending range of hospitable mediation and gift (pp 123ff). There, in addition to beggars, mendicants, and recluses dwelling in caves, another counterpart to benign hospitality is the fear that one's host may be possessed by a *buda*, known not just to serve poison, but to eat their guests too (p. 96), an ultimate example of parasitism similar to Giovanni da Col's feared hosts.

Conclusion

The invisible order of spirits is always hierarchical (Sahlins 2017). It encompasses the orders of human hosts, and it could therefore be argued that hospitality to gods and other spirits presents the human order of rules of hospitality to the human hosts as exaggerated and paradigmatic examples of their more ordinary rites of hosting. In any case, what I have described in this article indicates that hospitality is a constant rehearsal or re-establishment of a hierarchical order of scale and sovereign rank, of

feeding and of being fed. Outside this order are the holy on the one hand, the ghostly beggars on the other. On the underside of order is its decline into disorder, devitalisation, poisoning or being eaten, the dreaded parasitism.

As Sneath has pointed out in this volume, any such order is historical, the result of transformations of previous orders of civility, the least of which are the result of rivalling aspirations to high ranks of sovereignty, in power and scale.

The Chinese case of hospitality to gods that I have presented became an institution from the Song dynasty (12th century) onward, as an appropriation of the noble and imperial privilege of mediation between the celestial and the human and terrestrial. It has some features that are, I think, an extension of the range of the topic of hospitality and sovereignty. The guest is chosen, but is from beyond, from the invisible order that encompasses the territory, and much more powerful. As a guest, she or he is like the emperor. And like the emperor, the guest is extremely dangerous if offended.

As an epitome of hospitality, the rites of welcoming in and separating from this powerful outsider (albeit one who is a chosen guest) is enacted as a structure of recognition that is an enlivenment, in the language of Shiding's redemptive association. The dangerous benefactor reflects the territorial community onto itself as part of an encompassing hierarchy and its order of inside centres and outer borders. Hosting a benefactor god in a regularly repeated festival continually restores a structure wherein the territorial community is recognised by its addressee, the god addressed in the ritual of abundant feasting by the households that recognise her or him. The macro-order of hospitality recognises the micro-order of household hospitality that occurs simultaneously among its households after the god's acceptance of hospitality.

Department of Anthropology, London School of Economics (England)

S.Feuchtwang@lse.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT

Chinese festival ritual offers an extreme case of hospitality to outsider benefactors, to gods. They are invited outsiders. Their host is a territorial community of households

represented by their divinely selected master of the god's incense burner. Mediation to communicate with and separate from powerful guests is a courting of great power and avoiding its danger. Their welcome poses the danger of offence. To these points I add other sides and counterparts to rites of hospitality, such as rites of charitable feeding. I begin by arguing that the dangers of hospitality suggested by others in this volume are applicable in this case. Finally, I suggest how the terms in which I analyse these Chinese rites are applicable to other orders of hospitality.

Le rituel du festival chinois offre un cas extrême d'hospitalité aux bienfaiteurs étrangers, aux dieux. Ils sont des outsiders invités. Leur hôte est une communauté territoriale de ménages représentée par leur maître du brûleur d'encens de dieu, choisi par le dieu. La médiation visant à communiquer avec des invités puissants et à se séparer de leurs invités puissants est une cour de grande puissance qui évite le danger. Leur accueil pose le danger d'une offense. À ces points, j'ajoute d'autres côtés et contreparties aux rites de l'hospitalité, tels que les rites de l'alimentation de bienfaisance. Je commence par dire que les dangers de l'hospitalité suggérés par d'autres dans le présent volume sont applicables en l'espèce. Enfin, je suggère comment les termes dans lesquels j'analyse ces rites chinois s'appliquent à d'autres ordres d'hospitalité.