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## **An Investigation into the Situation of Catholicism in the Tan Domicile**

by Zhao Wen

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(Translated by Lawrie Breen)

Catholicism in Nanjiang district, Shanghai, has a long history. As early as during the Ming dynasty, because Xu Guangqi and other senior officials and scholars were converted to Catholicism, the religion spread from its centre in Xujiahui in Shanghai to the surrounding regions. Nanjiang, which is close by, quite soon became an area from which Catholicism also spread. During the closing years of the Ming dynasty, in Xie Lane, Hengxie, the first Catholic church was built within the borders of Nanhui. From then on, right up to the time when the 'Rites Controversy' between the Vatican and the Qing government occurred during the Kangxi period and the Qing government expelled the western missionaries and banned Catholicism, the Catholic religion developed steadily in Nanjiang and established an early base there. After the opium wars, and especially after the second opium war, under the protection of the Unequal Treaties, the western powers arrogated to themselves the right to propagate their religion freely in inland China. Catholic influence staged a comeback: large numbers of missionaries poured into Shanghai and the masses of Catholic officials sent by the Vatican, using Xujiahui as their base, began opening churches one after another in the vicinity of Shanghai to spread their religion. The Catholic church in Nanhui also underwent considerable development and a number of churches were built there too. Among others, there were the church of St. Joseph at Hexi-qiao, built in July 1860, the Liu-jia church at Sandun, built in 1874, and the Gujialou church built in July 1850. In 1949, there were in Nanhui district altogether 29 Catholic churches, of which three were major churches and the other 26 were small ones. There were three priests, a total of 43 religious personnel of various kinds and 6,333 lay persons. In addition, there were ten Catholic primary schools and three Catholic organisations, comprising a Guild of Our Lady, a Holy Spirit Society and a Rosary Society.

After 1949, large numbers of Catholic laypersons joined the patriotic movement, and, taking 'loving one's country and loving one's religion' as their guiding principle, began taking the path of independence and sovereignty. The Catholic Church enjoyed further development. By 1965, the basic situation of the Catholic Church in Nanhui district was that, in the district as a whole, there were altogether 8,044 lay persons and 28 churches. There were 74 core persons in the church, divided up between 16 communes and the townships belonging to the two districts of Huinan and Zhoupu. There was a single joint Catholic Patriotic Association, with 13 members, divided between the five communes of Hengxie, Yancang, Zhoupu, Liuzao and Xiasha and the townships belonging to the two districts of Huinan and Datuan. During the 'Cultural Revolution', the Catholic Church suffered serious damage: churches were destroyed, religious books were burnt, religious activities were banned and everything came to a halt.

Since the beginning of the [opening up] reforms, and following the publication of Document 19 by the Communist Party's Central Committee, the guideline for religious policy represented in the phrase 'freedom of religious belief was implemented and the Catholic Church was quickly restored. Religious property was returned, churches were repaired and reopened, the numbers of lay persons soon began to increase again and there was development on quite a big scale. Now, in the district as a whole, there are more than 9,000

lay people, of whom more than 3,000 are newcomers. There are ten religious personnel of various kinds; six churches - at Zhoupu, Nanhui, Xingang, Datuan, Yuyang and Gulou - have been reopened, with further churches planned to be opened as circumstances permit with a view to meeting the needs of the Catholic people to have additional religious activities,

The present population of Nanhui is about 700,000, and the number of Catholics is nearly 10,000. Add to these the members of other religions (Protestant Christians, Buddhists, Daoists, etc.) and the number of religious believers forms a significant proportion of the population. Religion represents a widespread religio-cultural phenomenon and a force which is not to be underestimated. What impact has religion had, then, in the Nanhui area during the past hundred years? What sort of influence has it had, when all is said and done, on social and cultural development? How does one assess and evaluate the status and role played by religion in contemporary changes in society? These are all questions deserving of our careful consideration. In this report, we shall endeavour to give careful consideration and close study to such questions, on the basis of on-the-spot interviews and investigations and citing as an example the Tan Domicile of Feiqiao village in Xiasha township in Nanhui district..

## **1 Catholicism in the Tan Domicile**

When compared with other areas, Catholicism within the Tan Domicile has striking characteristics of a religious and communal nature and from the viewpoint of the way in which it is transmitted from one generation to the next. This is the product of a combination of Catholic regulations themselves and of the traditions handed down within the close-knit community of the village or clan. On the one hand, because of the church's strict insistence on marriage within the faith (ie Catholics must marry Catholics), each item of religious belief can, more often than not, develop into the corporate behaviour of the members of an entire family. Within a particular family, once the mother and father become devout Catholics, their religious ideals and aspirations, within the context of a family atmosphere, will gradually exert an uplifting influence, which can easily lead to their descendants all converting to Catholicism and so becoming 'natural Catholics'. The hereditary nature of this kind of Catholic belief within the family is a very common phenomenon within this area. Moreover, since the Tan Domicile is basically a religious village where everyone has the same surname, all the inhabitants of the village have a common ancestor and everyone lives together in the same place. In this sort of situation, the inherited and communal nature of Catholicism becomes even more apparent. Compared with neighbouring natural villages where people are not religious believers, the religious atmosphere of the family unit is more pronounced and, for this reason, it has become a small, unique village with its own Catholic society and culture, in the midst of all the natural villages of Xiasha township

### ***i The situation of Catholicism within the Tan Domicile***

#### **(i) Believers.**

The information I have obtained from on-the-spot interviews and from the records held by the household registry control department concerning the present numbers, gender, cultural level and age of those who believe in Catholicism in the Tan Domicile is as follows (see Tables 1 and 2):

**Table 1** Statistics re Situation of Catholics in Tan Domicile (November 1998)

	No of persons		Cultural level					Age Group				
	Male	Fem	Illit- erate	Prim- Ary	Low- Mid	Up- Mid	Univ	-20	20- 30	30- 40	40- 60	60+
	21	19	13	16	9	2	0	2	3	8	14	13
Totals	40		40					40				

**Table 2** Statistics for Tan Domicile Population, Cultural Levels and Age Groups (November 1998)

	Number of persons		Cultural Level					Age Group				
	Male	Fem	Illit	Prim	Low -Mid	Up- Mid	Univ	20-	20/3	30/4	40/ 60	60+
	51	49	14	24	29	7	0	25	7	36	19	13
Totals	100		74					100				

From the above tables, it is possible to see some of the characteristics of the Catholic believers in the Tan Domicile. The first thing is that the proportion of Catholics in the population steadily increases as the age group rises. In the village as a whole, the proportion of Catholic believers in the population under the age of 20 is only 8 per cent; between the ages of 20 and 40, the proportion is 25.6 per cent, while between the ages of 40 and 60, the proportion rises to 73.7 per cent and, of the 13 elderly people over the age of 60, all are Catholics. The second point is that, as far as the cultural level of Catholic believers is concerned, the number of persons in each category is in inverse proportion to the cultural level concerned. In the adult population over 18, the proportions of Catholic believers in each category are: illiterate 91 per cent, primary level 67 per cent, lower middle school 31 per cent and upper middle school 29 per cent. The results of this enquiry are at one with the outcome of research undertaken by scholars in the fields of religion and society. This is to say that elderly people whose psychological needs spring from the pursuit of an ultimate goal, and who are reluctant to leave the present world, are more likely than others to show an affinity with religion (the devout faith of the elderly people of the Tan Domicile also springs from their conscious preservation of a tradition of religious faith that goes back for over a hundred years), while the differences in cultural levels reflect the levels of individual understanding and perception of the supernatural and the strength of their control over their social circumstances. Generally speaking, those with a higher cultural level have better occupational backgrounds, stronger social and economic resources and greater self-confidence than those of a lower cultural level, and for this reason are less liable to be attracted by religion. What is worth noting is that, if a comparison is made between the numbers of male and female Catholics in the Tan Domicile, these are at variance with the conclusions reached by ordinary research. When the numbers of male and female Catholics in the village are compared, it is not the women who outnumber the men: there are in fact 21 men and 19 women. In other words, the numbers are about the same but the men slightly outnumber the women. This is a result of the unique history of religion in the Tan Domicile. In the past, because of the system of marrying within the church, a man from the village had to go outside the village to find a Catholic woman for his wife, while in the case of the women of the village they had to be married outside. This system of entering or leaving the village according to a person's gender, instead of exchanging land, meant that the numbers of Catholic men and women in the village remained broadly the same. After Liberation, the system of marrying within one's religion was gradually abandoned, and among young people today there are many non-

Catholic women who have been brought into the Tan Domicile on marriage. In the circumstances, it is inevitable that there should now be more Catholic men than women within the Tan Domicile.

**(ii) The Catholic faith and its religious activities.**

The present religious activities within the Tan Domicile resumed in 1985 (which was in the same year that the Ximen Catholic church in Nanhui district was opened to the public again after refurbishment). Now the number of devout Catholics in the village is small. Most come into the category of Catholics by habit and a few practise only on an occasional basis. In general, the elderly are more devout in their faith, while the faith of the younger generation is more superficial. If an assessment is made on the basis of such criteria as their degree of understanding of Catholic doctrine, enthusiasm about Catholic regulations and the frequency of their participation in Catholic religious activities (including going out to take part in religious services, saying their prayers and studying at home, etc), the most devout believers in the village are three elderly women. One is an old lady - Mme Zhou, the oldest person in the village - who is 89 years of age. Despite her great age, she continues to spend the whole day from morning to night studying, saying her prayers and reading the Bible. The next one is Wu XX, who is seventy years of age. She is the village convenor of those who go out to take part in religious services and is very much involved in religious activities. The most exemplary is 60-year-old Chen XX. She has a relatively deep understanding of Catholic doctrine and is not only familiar with the basic 'Twelve Virtues of the Catholic Faith', the Ten Commandments and all the holy days (the Catholic festivals), but also exerts a good influence upon her daughter, son, grandson and granddaughter, all of whom believe in Catholicism, and tries to bring others to the practise of the Catholic faith. She spoke to the present writer, not without some pride, of the way in which she had persuaded old Zhang XX, a 69-year-old who lives in the village, to convert to Catholicism. And this despite the fact that, in the Catholic church, unlike among Protestant Christians, ordinary lay people do not have the responsibility of bringing in new members. Chen XX has a lot of religious duties to undertake every day. In her house, there are pictures of the Virgin Mary, the saints and the Holy Father plastered all over all four walls and there is a crucifix in every room.

As for the other Catholics, their practice of the faith is less enthusiastic. Ordinary Catholics normally only undertake their duties, like scripture reading and saying their prayers, occasionally at home. It is only on the big feast days, like feasts of Our Lady, Pentecost, Easter and Christmas, that they go to the church at Nanhui or Zhoupu to attend Mass or other religious activities. As for the cathedrals at Xujiahui and Sheshan, very few go and those who do so only very rarely. They have only a very superficial knowledge - or no knowledge at all - of church doctrines and regulations, always voicing different opinions or making mistakes. For example, Pan XX reckoned that 'the Catholic Church just urges people to do good: whenever the church holds a meeting, it always teaches everyone that they should not fight and should refrain from abusing people and doing what is wrong'. Another Catholic, Tan XX even went so far as to say that 'what the priest preaches about going to heaven or hell after you die is just superstitious and untrue'. The Catholic Tan XX told the present writer, pointing at the holy pictures on the wall as he spoke, that 'I wouldn't give two RMB for this stuff'. 46-year-old Tan XX said: 'we are different from the old people - we don't attend Mass or go to church regularly: we only go, with other people, on the big feast days. I can't read the Bible, I just listen to others reading it'. Most of the middle-aged Catholics in the village belonged to this type of 'Catholic by habit'. They feel that the Catholic faith was handed down to them by their forefathers and that, as members of the younger generation,

they cannot betray that faith, but they believe only in general terms and not very well. And the faith of young people who are Catholics is even more easy-going. A 32-year-old Catholic woman, Tan XX, said: 'Catholicism is something that has been handed down, generation by generation, by my forefathers: why should I want to believe in it? Never mind about young people - there are old people who don't bother about it. I just regard it as part of one's background, something you are born with, like part of your family'. Even though she did not understand much about Catholic dogma or Catholic commandments, she was too lazy to find out more. And she never took part in any religious activities. On the other hand, she only had to encounter some health problem to want to say a prayer in front of a crucifix or a picture of the Blessed Virgin to ask the Mother of God to keep her healthy and grant her a speedy recovery. Such people are all Catholics when it suits them.

## ii Catholicism in the Tan Domicile in the past

There is no way of examining in detail the situation as regards faith and religious activities among the Catholics of the Tan Domicile in the past, and especially before Liberation, partly because of the passage of time and partly because of the lack of documentary material. All one can do is to try to understand the general outline from the reminiscences of elderly people in the villages and from the limited amount of documentation that survives. According to 89-year-old Mme Zhou, the Tan Domicile originally had a church at Feiyunqiao. This had been restored under the guidance of Father Chen of Xujiahui in 1920. Under the direction of Mme Zhou's father-in-law, Chen Zhiqing, the villagers of the Tan Domicile gave either money or their labour, and finished the [re-]building of the church within a period of eight months. When it was completed, it was placed under the control of two nuns belonging to the village (they were the younger sisters of Chen Zhiqing). The priest came to the church at regular intervals to administer the sacraments. When the church was at the height of its prosperity, it occupied an area of more than 7 *mu*, included a 9-roomed house, was surrounded by a wall and had a belfry. It also had a 'Sunday School' attached to it where the children from the main Catholic village and [other] neighbouring villages could attend scripture and literacy classes. The school had a choir and an organ. Every time Mass was celebrated on big feast days, the bell pealed out and could be heard three or four *li* away in every direction. At such times, the Catholics from the whole area around Hangtou, Xinchang and Xiasha would come hurrying to the church to hear the priest expounding the scriptures, celebrating Mass and, on occasion, carrying the Blessed Sacrament in procession. At full capacity, the church could accommodate a congregation of over two hundred people. Obviously, the Catholic church at Feiyunqiao became a kind of external symbol for Catholic believers in the Tan Domicile, which served to further intensify and strengthen their faith.

During the 20s and 30s, the Tan Domicile comprised more than ten households, in which everyone, young and old, male and female, was a Catholic. The village implemented a strict policy of 'marriage within the church': no woman who was not a Catholic was ever brought into the village as someone's wife, and the villagers carried out to the letter every commandment and precept of the Catholic Church. Every Sunday, the villagers all went to church to participate in religious activities, or to pray, or recite the scriptures, or go to confession. Further evidence for such religious fervour and such an intense religious atmosphere is provided by such scattered documentary evidence as is available for inspection. There follows a table which gives details of the situation of the Catholic church in Feiyunqiao soon after Liberation, which also broadly reflects the situation of Catholic villagers in the natural villages which centred on the Feiyunqiao church before the Liberation.

**Table 3** Statistics for Catholics of Feiyunqiao Catholic Church (Dec. 1953)

(Main facts about the church: Name of church - Xunhuo Holy Cross church; commonly known as Feiyunqiao Catholic church. Priests - Gu Pinxian, parish priest; Tan Zhangcai. Address of church - Feiqiao-cun qi zu. Period when built - 1920.)

Total Caths	Faith Level			By Age Group			By Social Class			
	Weak	Average	Devout	Under 17	18-45	46-	L'lord	Rich Farmer	Mid. Farmer	Poor Farmer
59 (m:30, f: 29)	1	46	12	27	22	10	0	7	13	39
Plus figures for Yingnan village:										
69		52	17	34	23	12				
Totals 128	1	98	29	61	45	22				

It is clear from this table that although the level of faith and devotion of Catholics was basically about the same as it is now, the proportion of the devout and of those whose faith was weak (i.e the 'occasional' Catholics) was lower, while the proportion of those in the middle column (i.e. those who were Catholics by habit) was higher. At the same time, the number of those whose faith was weak was much smaller than now - it was only a single person. In addition, there was a large number of young people, reflecting the powerful influence which, in the past, was exerted by the Catholic faith within the family: at that time, it was a common phenomenon for young people to be baptised and to go to church, which contrasts strongly with the situation today.

After the '8th September' affair affecting Catholic circles in Shanghai in 1955, and despite ceaselessly heavy pressure from 'leftist' elements, the devout members of the Catholic church in the Tan Domicile quietly continued to go about their religious and spiritual activities as before. According to 76-year-old Ca XX, during the few years before the 'Cultural Revolution', some people from the Tan Domicile still went to the Catholic church in Nanhui to celebrate Christmas, attend Mass and receive Holy Communion. Even during the 'Cultural Revolution', there were people who secretly 'enriched the faces' (the popular term for baptism) of new-born children. Zhao, a 67-year-old Catholic, and Tan XX, who is 56, said: 'By then, all the priests had been arrested, and we ordinary people who believed in the church had no alternative but to stop talking about our faith. In fact, we didn't dare believe, or read scripture or say our prayers for fear that the Red Guards might see us and assault or denounce us. However, while on the surface we did nothing, in our hearts we still believed.' Here, religious faith had changed from being openly displayed to something that was concealed inside. In all this process, the religious tradition which had lasted for more than a century, combined with the great psychological fear of betraying God and the Virgin Mary and being consigned to hell, was the powerful force that sustained the devout Catholics of the Tan Domicile in their determination to hold on to their Catholic faith. This is, indeed, exactly what happened.

## 2 The Catholic Church and the Tan Domicile

The religious tradition which the Catholic Church built up in this remote area of the Tan Domicile over a period of more than 100 years, and the way in which, over the same period,

it joined in or got itself involved in its social and cultural vicissitudes and played a part in exerting its own subtle impact upon them and moulding them - all this has influenced, to no small degree, the traditional culture and customs of the village people, their behavioural patterns and even their sense of values and their mode of thinking. The traces of this deep penetration can still be clearly seen to this day.

## i **The Catholic Church and marriage and funeral customs**

In the village, the older generation (i.e. those over 60) generally got married in church. On the wedding day, both the bride and groom would go to a particular church either by car or by boat or on foot. On arrival at the church, the priest would act as witness for those being married and preside at the wedding. Usually, the priest would ask bride and groom if they were practising Catholics and question them about some doctrinal matters. Afterwards, the priest would ask the bridegroom and bride in turn if they would take the other party as their wife or husband. When both answered that they would, the bride and groom would exchange rings, the priests would invoke the blessing of God and the Virgin Mary and the whole ceremony was over. The close relatives of the bride and groom and other Catholic friends would also attend the ceremony and, while it was in progress, those present might congratulate the couple and wish them luck. Such a wedding was not costly and all that was required was that the priest might be invited to take a meal (though even this was not obligatory). It may be described as simple but solemn and spiritual. This kind of church wedding basically no longer takes place in the Tan Domicile. Young people who get married now mostly use the popular ceremony, which involves people giving presents, getting engaged and meeting their relatives, and also holding a wedding banquet at which wine is provided, all of which is totally devoid of any Catholic flavour. But families with Catholic members would still have scripture readings at their weddings and prayers would be said offering thanks to God and the Virgin Mary and asking for blessings on the newly-wed couple.

Funerals are, for Catholic believers, even more important than weddings, because they relate to the big question of whether the Catholic's soul will go, after death, to heaven or not. Elderly people recall that, in the past, Catholics would, before their death, ask a priest to conduct a service for them (ie what Catholics would call conducting the 'last rites'). Only in this way would the soul of a Catholic be ready to enter heaven. In the ordinary way, the body of a dead person would be kept in the house for three days before being taken away for burial. When this happened, Catholics from the village would join in carrying the coffin to the family graveside. There, the priest would recite some prayers (or, if no priest was available, a lay person from the village who was good at reciting prayers would be asked to take his place), the hole would be dug and the coffin laid to rest in the family grave. The present practice at funerals is largely the same.

As a result of being steeped in and influenced by Catholic tradition over a long period of time, and because they adhere to Catholic doctrine and regulations, the people of the Tan Domicile generally do not celebrate the festivals handed down by folk tradition, such as Duanwu or the Mid-Autumn festival. They especially do not celebrate those festivals which are at odds with Catholic doctrine or regulations, such as that of Qingming. This is because, as they see it, Qingming involves holding a memorial ceremony for the ancestors and respecting their ghosts, to the accompaniment of the burning of paper and incense, all of which shows disrespect for God and the Virgin Mary and is some sort of blasphemous and superstitious activity. Every Catholic we interviewed in the village would tell you at the top



of their voices that 'we don't celebrate Qingming - that is a foreign superstition!' In the same way, the Spring Festival, the greatest and noisiest festival for the Chinese people is not seen as very important within the Tan Domicile, where [the traditional] couplets are not displayed and fireworks rarely set off - instead, people content themselves with eating some good food and visiting their relatives.

It should be pointed out that the Catholic Church makes little allowance for the customs and traditions of the Chinese countryside. But we can see that the traditional festivals and popular customs show a stubborn staying power. Their influence survives as it always has and as can be seen everywhere. The marriage and funeral ceremonies of the Tan Domicile are, still more, the product of the compromise, adaptation and interaction that have taken place between Catholicism and the traditions of village society. Although Catholics like to go to church when they marry, when they return home, they still like to enjoy their wine, worship heaven and earth and enjoy their wedding festivities. And although they do not celebrate the Qingming festival they do nevertheless ask their priests to pray for their ancestors on the great [Catholic] feast days (and especially on November 2, which is All Souls' Day). What is most interesting is that Christmas Day, which is the biggest and most solemn traditional religious feast day in the West, has acquired distinctly Chinese traditional festive trappings: the villagers of the Tan domicile commemorate Christmas with the kind of celebrations which accompany a Chinese festival.

## **ii Catholicism and marriage, the family and the patriarchal clan**

Village and family relations based on blood relationships have been the most basic, the most solid and the most characteristic form of relationship in traditional Chinese village society for thousands of years. Production within a small farming economy is the material basis for this kind of relationship and the married family system within the wider family pattern provides its moral basis within society. The Catholic Church does not have the means to shift this twin basis of society, nor does it have the means to exert a major influence on the village, family, clan, society or the system which these have produced in such a way as to cause a major change. Despite this, the Catholic Church, during the hundred or more years of the Tan Domicile, has managed to bring about a fairly substantial degree of change in the social relations of the Domicile as far as marriage, family and religion are concerned, and also in such areas as social mobility and relations between individuals.

Firstly, the Catholic Church had become a strong link holding together both family and clan relationships and strengthening the stability and cohesion of the family and the clan. As stated above, the Tan Domicile is a traditional Catholic village. On the surface, the people of the Tan Domicile, because of their belief in Catholicism, rejected the traditional ancestral worship. They did not build ancestral temples, nor erect ancestral tablets nor fill in their family trees. But this is not to say that the traditional village family activities - solidly embedded as these are, materially, in the small farmer economy and, ethically, in a family [based] society - do not survive within the Tan Domicile. The fact is that these things can be expressed and reflected, in a tortuous and metaphorical way, through a common faith in Catholicism, in all kinds of family ceremonies and in many different kinds of religious activities. The significance of this, it can safely be said, is that the Catholicism of the people who live in the Tan domicile is a variation of the 'patriarchal clan system'. The Catholic faith which they share has supplanted the worship of their common ancestors, Catholic religious services have supplanted the various sacrifices offered by their ancestors and Catholic churches have supplanted the ancestral temples. (Local people all call the Feiyunqiao

Catholic church the Tan family temple.) Catholicism became the firm link binding together the Tan Domicile, cementing relationships within the clan and making it more united and stable. As a result, the Tan Domicile became an extraordinarily powerful and close-knit entity. At times, its power expressed itself in an extremely violent fashion. Old Ca XX, a 76-year-old woman, recalled that, before Liberation, people of the Tan Domicile had become involved in an armed fight with people of a different family, something that was rarely seen in the area of Shanghai and Suzhou south of the Yangzi river. It just goes to illustrate how strong the force is which binds the Tan Domicile together.

Secondly, the influence of Catholicism on marriage and the family. Catholics have a rule about marrying within the church, namely that Catholics may only marry Catholics and that once a Catholic gets married no divorce is possible. At a certain level, this helps to maintain the stability of marriage and has enabled relationships within married households in the Tan Domicile to be more peaceful, and relations with outsiders relatively harmonious. For a long time, the divorce rate within the Tan Domicile has been extremely low, and in the past there was virtually no divorce at all. The family is a small cell of society and there is no doubt that stable marriage is conducive to stability, harmony and tranquillity in the entire village system. It has also helped to strengthen the unity of the Tan Domicile. Apart from this, the operation of the system of marriage within the church also certainly had an influence on the distance which Tan Domicile residents had to travel to seek their spouses. In the past, a man of the Tan Domicile who wanted to find a Catholic wife would often have difficulty in finding a suitable wife close to his village. For this reason, the area within which the search for a wife took place might extend to other districts, such as Fengxian and Chuansha. The distance from which a wife had to come might be much further than the 3 to 5 kilometres which is involved now (though of course where it proved impossible to find a suitable Catholic woman, a man would marry someone close by and get the bride to convert to Catholicism). Nowadays, marriages within the church are not so common, and most young men in the village look for their partners nearby in places like Hangtou, Xinchang, etc, so the area within which marriages take place has contracted again to the area within a radius of from 3 to 5 kilometres of the Tan Domicile.

Thirdly, the Catholic Church and social intercourse and social mobility among the people of the Tan Domicile.

At this point, we should like to concentrate on an examination of the admission and assimilation by the people of the Tan Domicile of people of other families. There are within the Tan Domicile only two families with other surnames, one surnamed Chen and the other surnamed Lian. The differences between the two families are considerable. The Chen family settled in the village a long time ago and its descendants are now in their sixth generation. The first Chen to arrive came from Chenjiaqiao in Nanhui, and his father had a butcher's shop. Because he was a Catholic and had to take a Catholic woman for a wife, [his father] found him a wife surnamed Tan from the Tan Domicile. He then bought 30 *mu* of land, built a large tiled house with several rooms and [the couple] settled permanently in the Tan Domicile. Obviously this was not, in the ordinary sense, a case of a son-in-law going to live with his wife's parents. In fact, the Chens, because of their wealth and economic power, gradually came to assume authority within the Tan Domicile. 55-year-old Chen XX recalled that it was his grandfather, Chen Xx, who had taken the initiative in persuading the Catholics in the village to put up the money and contribute their labour for the building of the Feiyunqiao Catholic church; he had also superintended the carrying out of the work, and later joined in managing church affairs. Before Liberation, his father, Chen XX, had acted as

principal guarantor. And when plots of land were demarcated at the time of the Land Reform, a Chen was designated as the landlord. From all of this it can be seen that, before Liberation, the status of the Chens within the Tan Domicile was by no means an ordinary one: even though they did have a different surname, their status was in reality equivalent to that of the head of the clan.

The Lian surname, on the other hand, entered the Tan Domicile from Hangtougou in 1951. The head of the Lian family was Lian X-lou and his wife was Zhang X-mei. Lian X-x's elder brother was an employee of Chen the landlord. At the time of the Land Reform, he was allocated a house but soon afterwards was taken ill and died. Before he died, he wrote a letter to his younger brother and his wife leaving his house to them. This is how the Lian surname moved into the Tan Domicile. Lian X-lou himself was already a Catholic while he was in Hangtougou and Zhang X-mei became a Catholic after coming to the Tan Domicile. Their eldest son was also a Catholic and their second son married a girl from the Tan Domicile. Thus the Tan Domicile admitted people with other surnames on a two-fold basis: a person of another surname who wanted to become a member of the Tan Domicile could only do so on the basis of both marriage *and* religion: just one of the two was not good enough. Nowadays, although Catholicism is weaker than it used to be, it remains an important part of the cultural background of the village and it is still a significant factor when it comes to the admission of a person with a different surname into the Tan Domicile. To take the case of the only woman in the village with another surname, Ms Cheng XX: her family home was in Chaohu in Anhui and she came to Nanhui in 1990 in search of a job. Later on, as a result of an introduction, she married Tan X-ming and set up a family. She is a Senior High School graduate (the highest cultural level of anyone in the village), and an able, extremely hardworking person, who has, moreover, born her husband two sons. Logic decrees that she should enjoy a higher status within the family than is the case at present. But when we interviewed Tan, Ms Cheng told us repeatedly how she was cold-shouldered and discriminated against by her mother-in-law. She felt very depressed: she was very tired and very unhappy. Apart from the fact that she was an outsider and spoke a different dialect, religious faith was probably also a factor to be taken into account. Cheng XX's mother-in-law was a devout Catholic, and Cheng XX was not only not a member of the church but someone from another area, in other words a 'non-Catholic outsider'.

### **iii Catholicism and value concepts and patterns of thought**

Religion is a kind of culture which, it goes without saying, exerts a powerful influence for religious believers over their value concepts and patterns of thought. The doctrines, precepts and Bible stories, and the vast area of teaching on morality - all of these things become imprinted on the minds of every devout believer imperceptibly through their daily religious life and the pressure of their spiritual activities and, without their noticing it, control their value concepts and patterns of thinking.

The research of religious anthropologists shows that all ancient mythological tradition contains within it deep symbolic meaning. It is a manifestation of mankind's collective subconscious, and forms a deep layer and a core element of man's thought patterns and value structures. Corroboration of this is found in two mythological traditions of the Tan Domicile. When we asked the village people where the three old ladies in the traditional story of the origin of the village had come from, they had different stories to tell. The devout Catholics, of whom we took Chen XX to be representative, told the present writer that the three old ladies had sent forth a great flood from the Eastern Sea, the whole earth had been flooded and

they had rowed a boat to the Tan Domicile. Does this not have a slight whiff of a version of the biblical story of Noah's ark? There is also the matter of the slave girl in the tradition about 'Feiqiao' [the flying bridge]. When an elderly Catholic, Tan XX, was telling me this story, she said that the girl was already pregnant, and that when she ascended into heaven she gave birth to a son. This child was the divine son of a dragon, who later ascended the throne as the Yellow Emperor. Is there not also a similarity between this and the story in the Bible about the Virgin Mary who, through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, became pregnant before she married and gave birth to Jesus, and was then assumed into heaven where she became the Mother of God? One of the biggest differences between Catholicism and Protestant Christianity relates to the worship of the Virgin Mary. Subconsciously, this has given rise to a certain degree to a worship of the whole female sex (motherliness) among the people of the Tan Domicile. In the handing down of these two myths, the principal character in both cases is a woman, and in my interviews on the ground I have come across many instances where it is the woman who runs the household. What is interesting is that, of five team leaders in the village after Liberation, three were women. The group leader in the village at the present time is also a woman. This has all dealt a severe blow against such traditional concepts in the village as that 'men are worthy of respect and women inferior' and 'rear a son as a precaution against old age'. When I have asked the elderly people I have interviewed whether they would rather have grandsons or granddaughters, most have answered: 'It doesn't matter. For us Catholics, there is no difference between boys and girls'. And young people, who are the product of a modern education, with its uplifting cultural example, have even more of an attitude of indifference to such matters. For this reason, village group leader, Tang XX, told me that 'family planning work is done well in the village and year after year is judged to be very progressive. Since the family planning programme was introduced, the village has never once exceeded its quota of births. And since we inaugurated the system of insurance for the elderly, the situation has been even better. There was a young couple who produced a daughter with congenital heart disease. Under the family planning policy, they would have been permitted to have another child, but they decided to forego that right'.

### **3 Conclusions**

#### **i The breakdown of the Catholic tradition and its inability to continue**

By comparison with the past, there is no doubt that Catholicism is weaker in the Tan Domicile now than formerly. Such a decline is all the more surprising when we consider it in the context of its growth in the Nanhui area as a whole. What, then, is the reason for the decline? The present writer is of the opinion that the reason is to be found in the uniqueness of the context and of the church's status in the Tan Domicile. The Catholic Church in the Tan Domicile is not merely a religious belief, it is also a kind of ancient institution, a kind of custom or tradition which has been handed down through many generations. This is the root of the whole question.

After Liberation, the violent disruption of religious belief as a result of the political pressure caused by the 'leftist' errors, especially the serious damage inflicted on orthodox religious activities during the Cultural Revolution, seriously weakened the Catholic tradition in the Tan Domicile. Moreover, the demolition of the Feiyunqiao Catholic church marked the end of a Catholic tradition in the Tan Domicile that had lasted for more than a hundred years. After the 13th Plenum of the 11th Party Congress, and the renewed emphasis, in the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party's Document 19, on the policy of freedom of

religious belief, normal religious activities were given the protection of the law. It should be said that this should have provided a good opportunity for the Catholic tradition of the Tan Domicile to revive. However, circumstances had changed and bygone prosperity is hard to restore. Along with the growth of a commodity economy and the development of rural enterprise, more and more young people left the land and went to work in industry. Gradually, these young people became the backbone and leading force of village life, with the result that the power in the villages, which had previously been wielded by the elderly, was now, with the growing prosperity of the industrial economy, transferred into the control of the younger generation. What they were increasingly interested in was how to get the economy to develop still further and how to build up a fortune for the benefit of their own families, instead of praying to the Holy Spirit and sitting back to wait for the good life to come down [from heaven]. Added to which was the fact that with the universal availability of culture and education and the improvement in the standard of such things, [the younger generation] adopted a more rational and conscientious attitude towards their Catholic faith. It would seem, therefore, that the revival of the Catholic tradition in the Tan Domicile would now be difficult to achieve.

## ii **Assessment of Catholicism in the Tan Domicile**

The hundred and more years in which Catholicism has been present in the Tan Domicile has produced a whole series of social and cultural changes. So far as the cultural level is concerned, there is no ignoring the fact that the hundred-plus years during which Catholicism has been present has been a period when Catholic culture, which came from the West, came into contact with and entered into dialogue with Chinese popular village culture. Speaking objectively from a historical point of view, the Sino-western cultural exchanges that took place within this tiny area were carried on harmoniously in circumstances of peace and equality. The final outcome was not a situation in which both sides were losers, nor was it a case of one side swallowing the other up; it was, on the contrary, a situation in which the two sides were tolerant and accommodating and blended together in such a way as to produce, in the Tan Domicile, a Catholic tradition with local characteristics and a distinctive village culture that was different from the normal pattern. From a social point of view, the role of religion in adjusting to, conforming with and controlling society is worthy of note. It is especially worth studying at a time of social change. The crime rate in the Tan Domicile is extremely low and there has not been a single case of a criminal trial [involving a Tan Domicile member] for many years. Relations between individuals in the Domicile are more harmonious than the average and the people are more honest in their dealings with each other. Such qualities are inseparable from the roles played by their Catholic moral principles, their social conformity and mental adjustment. Within the Catholic Church, the sacredness of the Catholic moral code, the enormity of the system of punishments as between heaven and hell and the example set by a variety of truly beautiful and moving images of morality all spur Catholics on to respect in all sincerity the Catholic behavioural model of upholding the good and rejecting evil. Such a system of moral self-restraint established on a basis of religious faith delivers greater self-restraint and control than ordinary secular morality or preaching.