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**The Study of the Offerings in Hong Kong:
Joss Paper Ingots, Joss Candles and Joss Sticks**

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

Giving offerings has a long history in Chinese culture. Over the years, under the influence of local traditions, Confucianist and Taoist, as well as the introduction of foreign Buddhism, offerings have been changing in their materials and ways of usage.

“Joss Paper Ingots, Joss Candles and Joss Sticks” is how Hong Kong people name the most common offerings made for rituals. The offerings play a crucial role in various situations connected to worshipping gods, ancestors and ghosts in vernacular religious practices. However, these practices were overlooked in academic research and literature.

This thesis examines how religious practices and especially offerings are involved in Hong Kong people’s daily lives, regular and occasional ceremonies and rituals. The research is based on fieldwork conducted by the author to investigate the specific features and situations of offerings and worship in Hong Kong and Macau.

Keywords: offerings, worshipping rituals, vernacular practices, rites.

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Introduction

When I was a child, my family worshipped various gods, including Buddhist and Taoist gods. My mother gave Joss sticks to the gods housed at home twice a day and my family took my siblings and me to different temples to worship the gods during festivals. In the Ching Ming Festival, also known as Tomb Sweep Festival, my relatives and I climbed up the hill without signage and found the ancestors' graves by memory. My relatives also brought food offerings like roasted pork, chicken, red boiled eggs and paper offerings to worship our ancestors. Then, the worship ritual was set up by cleaning the grave, showing the food offerings, giving Joss sticks one by one and burning the paper offerings to the ancestors. After the ritual, we enjoyed the food offerings on the hill. Over time, I no longer climbed the hill to worship, since my ancestors moved to the columbarium due to the government acquiring private land by resumption.

Hong Kong is an international city and urban change is common. However, there are still various temples and offering shops that can be found everywhere. People go to temples to worship the gods whenever they want, ancestors during the Ching Ming Festival and burn offerings in the street during the Hungry Ghost Festival¹. Thus, the people of Hong Kong continue to participate in vernacular practices, which shows that these practices are part of the Hong Kong people's lives.

The offerings play an essential role in various situations, such as rituals when people worship gods, ancestors, and/or ghosts, as well as in Taoist and vernacular religious practices. However, the offerings in Hong Kong have received little attention in academic research. On one hand, this study will examine how vernacular ritual practices are involved and affect Hong Kong people's daily lives by using the offerings as an example.

¹ "Hungry Ghost Festivals" or "Yu Lan Festival", was originally from the Indian Buddhist classics: "Yulanpen Sutra", which is a folktale of "Mulian Rescues His Mother". To rescue Mulian's mother from the torture of hell, he must offer hundreds of flavours and five fruits to the monks on the 15th day of the seventh month on the Lunar calendar every year to offset his mother's karma. After the classics were introduced to China, people mixed up with "the Zhongyuan Festival" 中元節, which is the Taoist Ghost Festival, and it became the Ghost Festival on the 14th of the seventh month on the Lunar calendar. Furthermore, drawing on the traditional Chinese folk culture, the hell gate would be opened in every seventh month on the Chinese Calendar every year, these integrations show on the "Hungry Ghost Festival" that the ritual incantations, ritual operas are performed by the Taoist priests, giving offerings etc., to transmute and absolve the sufferings by using the Taoist rituals. As time passes, people worship in the "Yu Lan Festival" as a sign of filial piety, repayment of their kindness and to commemorate their ancestors, also extending the worship to transmute and absolve the sufferings of all deceased. (Chan 2015: 6-7)

On the other hand, hopefully, this thesis can fill the academic gap in the research of worship rituals in Hong Kong. My research questions focus on three main aspects:

1. What are the offerings and what is their origin?
2. What offerings do Hong Kong people give during worship? What is the procedure for giving offerings in Hong Kong? Why are Hong Kong people giving offerings? What are the vernacular meanings and understandings of the offerings?
3. What are the similarities and differences of the offerings in Macau in comparison with Hong Kong?

This thesis answers these research questions in five main chapters. In Chapter 1, I will provide the historical and cultural background of Hong Kong and Macau. Also, the theoretical background of the offerings will be discussed, as well as vernacular religions and the function of worshipping rituals from the perspective of folkloristics and anthropology. Furthermore, it will be about my fieldwork in Hong Kong and Macau. In Chapter 2, I will briefly discuss the offerings' origin, related to the history of Buddhist, Taoist and Confucianist rituals. Chapter 3, I will focus on the application and interpretation of offerings in Hong Kong, why, what and how the offerings are given; their influence on the daily life of common practitioners; and what specific regulations and taboos are applied during the offering rituals. Chapter 4 will discuss the meanings and understanding of giving offerings and the transformation of offerings. In Chapter 5, I will examine the offerings in Macau and compare them with those in Hong Kong. In this thesis, I will apply an emic and etic approach to study the details of these offerings.

1. Background

1.1 A Brief Background of Hong Kong, Macau and the Offerings

Since the founding of Hong Kong in 1841, it has been a British colonial city. Many immigrants from different places have brought their beliefs and ritual practices to Hong Kong. Also, many local native communities in the rural areas, i.e. New Territories, still retain their traditions and customs of ancestral and other kinds of worship. Hong Kong has not been affected by politics during the colonial period. In modern China, religious and folk beliefs were once broken after the anti-Confucianism trend in the May Fourth Movement, the atheist rule of the Chinese Communist Party and the Cultural Revolution's "Four Olds" movement that attacked temples, destroyed statues of gods and Buddhas, and also prohibited believers from religious life. However, religions in Hong Kong can still be carried out uninterruptedly. Throughout the years, these traditions and customs developed a unique and varied worshipping pattern of Hong Kong (Luk, 2005: 39).

Offerings in Hong Kong can be roughly divided into food, flowers and burning items. The food offering will not be burned in the worship; some will be eaten, such as fruits, candies, tea, wine, chicken and roasted pork. The descendants usually prepared the food that their ancestors liked to eat. The burning items like Joss paper ingots, Joss candles and Joss sticks will be burned during rituals. Hong Kong people prepared offerings very differently. One of the interviewees, Ms. Chan mentioned that the way she chose fruits based on the Cantonese homophonic puns, such as an apple (蘋果 ping4 gwo2), the pronunciation in Cantonese is close to the word "safety" (平安 ping4 on1), which is a good sign. However, the pronunciation of orange (橙 caang2) is close to the word "poor" (慘 caam2), which is a bad sign and not good to offer. My family usually prepares flowers like chrysanthemum or lilies.

The offerings also differ in various situations and occasions. For example, at the Hungry Ghost Festival, people usually prepare food offerings like longan, tofu, bean sprouts, etc., to worship ghosts. Another example is the "Praying for Four Corners rituals" performed when moving to a new home; then people prepare food offerings, including fatty pork to wish a prosperous family.

Nonetheless, the offerings to every Taoist god vary, such as the paper clothes between Dragon Mother, also known as Lung Mo 龍母 and Empress of Heaven or Tin Hau 天后 are different. Furthermore, the ranking of the gods in Taoism² would require different offerings and affect the order of giving paper offerings, such as paper gold and paper silver will be given to ancestors and lower-ranking gods like Lord of the Land, also called Tudi Gong 土地公; another paper offering 壽金 will be given to higher-ranking gods like Tin Hau.

No Joss paper ingots and Joss paper offerings are usually involved in Buddhist rituals. However, Joss Sticks and some vegetarian food are offered. For example, rituals including a ceremony for bathing the Buddha, lantern lighting, etc., on the Buddha's Birthday in Hong Kong.

Therefore, different offerings are given differently, based on personal choices, worshipping objects, festivals, Taoist rituals and Buddhist rituals.

Macau is also located in southern China, near Hong Kong. These two cities have a similar historical and cultural background. Both cities also experienced foreign colonial rule; while Portugal resided and managed Macau from 1887 (Hao, 2020: 210). From the cultural background, their mother tongue is Cantonese and they write traditional Chinese characters. They are all in a multi-ethnic society where Chinese and Western cultures coexist. Although it has gone through the colonial period, Macau has retained traditional Chinese religions and folk beliefs such as Taoism and Buddhism. For example, Taoist temples and offering shops, festivals like “Festival of A-Ma” 娘媽誕 (A-ma is another name for Tin Hau) and Hungry Ghost Festival in Macau are still found.

In this research, I mainly focus on the three offerings “Joss paper ingots, Joss candles and Joss sticks” because they are very popular in Hong Kong and Macau, involved in various rituals related to worshipping the gods, the ancestors and the ghosts who are not living in

² The book *Chart of the Ranks of the Perfect Souls of Pervasive Mystery and Numinous Treasure*, also known as *Dongxuan lingbao zhenling weiye tu* 《洞玄靈寶真靈位業圖》 was the first genealogy of Taoist gods compiled between 499 and 517 by T'ao Hung-Ching 陶弘景 (456-536 AD) (Gesterkamp, 2021: 87). The book divides the Taoist system of gods in heaven, gods on earth, ghosts, immortals and saints into seven subsystems, or seven levels. Each level has a main god in the middle, assisted by gods on the left and right (ibid.: 87-88).

the human realm. Although these offerings are made with different materials, they will be burned when performing rituals during traditional Chinese religious festivals and daily life.

1.2 Theoretical Background of the Offerings

Offerings in Chinese are 「祭品」³ meaning worship with numerous items. In this sense, many items are offered for worship. In this thesis, the term “offerings” (rather than “sacrifice”) was chosen because the researched rituals include Joss Paper Ingots, Joss Candle and Joss Sticks, not animals or their substitutes. According to Van Baal, “... an offering any act of presenting something to a supernatural being, a sacrifice an offering accompanied by the ritual killing of the object of the offering. This definition does not permit the use of the term sacrifice for killing rituals (a term introduced by Jensen, 1951) that are neither preceded nor followed by the presentation of the object of the rite to a supernatural being.” (Baal J., 1976: 162). The offerings applied in the religious customs and vernacular rituals and their meanings are reflected in actual worshipping behavior. Offerings are usually found at vernacular rituals. The British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor stated that sacrifice was originally a gift to the gods to please them (Tylor 1920: P.375). He also mentioned that humans give offerings to express homage, and worshippers give up what they consider a virtue (ibid.). He provided an idea of what offerings are and divided sacrifice into three stages. In the first stage, sacrifice is understood as a childlike “gift” of giving, without any commitment between the recipient and the giver. In the second stage, sacrifice is a kind of “homage” to express dedication or atonement to the gods. In the third stage, when the giver offers a more valuable sacrifice, it is more efficient and acceptable to the gods. It is called “abnegation” (Tylor 1920: 375-376, 387, 397). Sacrifice was an act of exchange between humans and the gods, people offered sacrifices to please, thank or appease the gods in exchange for blessings, wishes, health or success. Tylor also emphasizes that the basis of sacrifice relates to the early

³ Offerings in Chinese are 「祭品」 which is combined with two characters. According to the *Explaining simple and Analyzing Compound Characters*, also known as *Shuowen Jiezi* 《說文解字》, the first character 「祭」 means sacrifice; the lower part of this character 「示」 is hands holding meat. It showed that ancient people held offerings, usually meat, in their hands to the gods during worship. The original text in 《說文解字》 is 「祭：祭祀也。从示，从手持肉。」 (Xu, 1815: 24). Furthermore, 「品」 means numerous, the diversity and richness of items included. 《說文解字》 「品，眾庶也。从三口。凡品之屬皆从品。」 (Xu, 1815: 350). Therefore, these two characters combined as 「祭品」 specifically mean that the items used to worship gods and ancestors.

human belief in souls, i.e. animism. They believed that what the gods need is similar to that of humans, such as food, so people give offerings to the gods. This anthropomorphic perspective of the gods drove the practice of sacrifice. This placing of human needs equally on the gods drove and influenced the practice of sacrifice and the offerings made. He further stated that these offerings were associated with religious sacrifices: a social, symbolic, ritualistic expression of respect (Tylor 1920: 395). Tylor provided a detailed and explained the framework of the purposes of giving offerings which enable me to look at offerings at a broader perspective.

However, Van Baal had another perspective with the statements from Tylor and argued that "The reciprocity of the gift is binding" (Baal J., 1976: 172). He believes that sacrifice is not only an exchange or a trade, but also a way to express reciprocity, commitment and gratitude. Baal expanded its religious implications; reciprocity is the manifestation of sincerity and the core of true religious sentiment.

These two articles analyze the meaning of sacrifice from an anthropological perspective. Tylor proposes that the concept of exchange means that sacrifice is considered a "gift to the gods" in exchange for blessings, protection or forgiveness. While the concept of homage from Baal is an unrequited expression of respect, symbolizing human beings' recognition and submission to the supreme status of the gods. I agreed with both of their statements including Tylor's three stages and the statement of reciprocity from Baal, to understand the characteristics of offerings in Hong Kong compared to other regions and understand the similarities and differences between the same offerings in different regions of the same cultural circle.

A French sociologist and anthropologist, Marcel Mauss pointed out that giving offerings means exchanging gifts, even when sacrificed for specific wishes or purposes (Hubert H. & Mauss M. 1964: pp.13). In another article from Mauss, "The Gift," it was further stated that offerings are part of the "gift system" and there are three obligations to reciprocate presents received: to give, receive, and repay (Mauss 2002 [1950]: 16-17). The act of worshipping the gods is part of the "exchange system", a social mechanism for people to establish, fulfil obligations and obtain blessings from the gods. Therefore, worshipping rituals reinforce social order and interpersonal relationships. Mauss provides a sociological framework for understanding the nature of sacrifice. His argument tends to

discuss the functionalism of gifts, which makes me understand the social mechanism that sacrifices play and maintain in religion.

Firth gave a more precise definition of giving offerings, stating the difference between humans as the senders and the supernatural as the recipient, including the status, willingness to accept and the emotional attitudes of the offer in religious offerings or oblation (Firth 1963: 12). It is very close to the Chinese culture who worshipping gods that sending the believers' wishes by using offerings to exchange, a valuable literature to study. However, people also worship ancestors and ghosts for different purposes in vernacular practices in Chinese culture, which cannot apply the concepts to all the occasions in Hong Kong.

From a folkloristic perspective, Primiano proposed the concept of "vernacular religion" and argued that "institutionalized religion" is not the same as "vernacular religion". On one hand, "institutionalized Religion" was described as religious practices and beliefs that are orthodox, systematized and transcribed, as established and maintained by religious authorities, such as the church and priests. It usually represents the mainstream or official religious views and is the religious form with legitimacy and authority in society. On the other hand, "vernacular religion" refers to the way people practice, interpret and transform religion in their daily lives. It is not limited to the norms of institutionalized religion and may include personal religious experience, localized faith practice, integration of religion, folklore, culture and social interaction. (Primiano 1995: 45). He argues that there is a way to understand beliefs and practices as they are lived by people (ibid.: 44). He also stated that religion is lived in everyday life. Beliefs are a process of continuous reshaping through practice, including verbal, behavioral and material culture from a worldwide perspective (ibid). In Hong Kong, a variety of religious expressions coexist and refer to different institutionalized and vernacular forms, it is hard to differentiate between the gods, ritual practices and offerings. Moreover, even though there are some "guidelines" from the institutionalized religions, which are Buddhism, Taoism, people tend to have their own ways to give offerings in Hong Kong. It is close to what Primiano stated, reshaping beliefs through practices. The term "vernacular religion" is applied in this thesis as an analytical category to investigate diverse expressions, occasions and understanding of the Joss Paper Ingots, Joss Candle, and Joss Sticks offerings. Hong Kong scholar Tik Sang Liu also stated similar ideas that compared

with institutional religion, folk religion is relatively fluid and mixed with different social and cultural elements (Liu 2012: 424).

The worshipping objects can be categorized as gods, ancestors and ghosts in Hong Kong. The anthropologist Arthur Wolf once explained the system of Taiwanese folk beliefs with the concise concept of three groups of gods, ghosts and ancestors. These objects of supernatural belief correspond to the three types of people in real society: gods represent officials, ancestors represent relatives and ghosts represent outsiders or strangers (Wolf 1974: 131-182). In Chinese culture, the spirits of one's ancestors are respectable, not scary and will protect their descendants; as for the ancestors of others or the ancestors no one worships, they are considered not approachable at all and are feared, so they become "ghosts".

Although I reckon the theories stated above from the scholars are very close to the offerings and rituals in Hong Kong, most of them relate to the meanings of the offerings; there are still some omissions. First, the offerings are indeed, as Tylor said, what people have and exchange wishes with the gods. It is also, as Baal stated, to pray the gods with a grateful heart. However, ancestral worship is an important folk religion in Hong Kong; the meaning is neither just a simple exchange of gifts like children, nor asking for something from the ancestors. Instead, it is a unique concept of Chinese culture from Confucianism. Ancestral worship is for expressing filial piety and remembering the ancestors. Of course, there are people who worship their ancestors also to pray for blessings, but it is not the same as praying for blessings from the gods. When people have something to pray for, they will go to worship gods instead of ancestors, because they generally believe that gods have the ability to fulfil their wishes. While they pray for blessings from their ancestors, just as they took care of their family when they were alive. Therefore, Hong Kong people worship their ancestors mainly to express filial piety and commemorate their ancestors; it is not a trade like worshipping gods. Second, Mauss proposes the concept of three stages of obligation: to give, receive, and repay when giving offerings. However, people give offerings to ask the gods for their wishes, then they should offer and perform rituals again to return to the gods when their wishes come true in Hong Kong. Therefore, according to Mauss, the obligation should be four stages: to give, receive, repay and return. Offerings are given not once, but twice, to return to the gods to fulfil their wishes. The reasons for the two times are also different; the first time is for exchange, and the second time is for gratitude.

The folk religions in Hong Kong have been studied for the last few decades. Recently, studies of “intangible cultural heritage (ICH)” items have increasingly been conducted, which enhances various topics. Studies of religions were found and focus on the relationship with society (Lam 2016; Lam & Wong 2017). The popular gods in Hong Kong, like Tin Hau (Liu 2002) and Wong Tai Sin (Wong 1985), were studied in terms of birthday festivals, history, and folktales. Other relatively less prevalent folk religions like worshipping Tudi gong (Au 2018) and fox cult (Chan, 2017) also contributed to and enriched the understanding of various gods in Hong Kong. The origin and development of Tian Hau, analyze different Tian Hau temples in Hong Kong (Chun 2002). Covering the detailed procedures of funeral rituals and customs (Wilson 1960-1961, Waters 1991). Vernacular practices like “Beating the villain” a witchcraft ritual popular among the people in Hong Kong and Guangdong, recorded the details about the origin, development, cultural significance, transformation and the item listed on the ICH in Hong Kong (Sun, Leung & Ng 2007; Chiao & Leung 1986) Taoist Rituals in the rural areas and the community social relations (Mathias 1978). Festivals such as the Hungry Ghosts Festival organized by the Chaozhou community, which is listed on the ICH in Hong Kong, described the process of listing on the ICH, the ICH, collective memories and the identification relationship (Chan 2018) and Jiao Festivals are celebrated by different communities and organizations (Chio 1990). Another ICH item is the ancestral worship in spring and autumn, which records the details of worshipping in both rural and urban areas (Cache 2021). Some studies about the offerings were also found, like paper crafting, which introduced the differences between festivals, the decoration used and funeral paper crafting. Wong & Lee focus on the development and craft listed as an ICH item (Hong Kong Museum of History 2010; Wong & Lee 2023). Gate and Preparata looked at the paper offerings from an economic perspective to discuss the social and cultural contexts. Scott’s study consisted of massive materials from her publication of paper money to gods, ghosts, ancestors, and rituals. (Gate 1987; Kochhar-Lindgren 2015; Scott 2007; Preparata 2021) Studies about the incense industry, materials and time measurement were conducted in studying Joss Sticks (Chan 1989; Webb 1995; Cheung 2011).

The above-mentioned topics enriched the contemporary studies of religions, folk religions, deities, temples, vernacular practices and festivals in Hong Kong. However, the offerings under study include the Joss sticks and Joss candles, which are often performed as part of the vernacular rituals. Since the last decade, the ICH items have been

particularly focused on research, making non-ICH projects even more inconspicuous. As a result, this study will apply academic research from nearby similar cultures, such as Taiwan and the Canton area, from the perspectives of anthropology, ethnology, folkloristics and history to hopefully fill this study gap.

1.3 Fieldwork Overview

Joss sticks have been an important industry in Hong Kong since the late Ming Dynasty (1368 -1644 AD) (Chan 1989: 95) and the manufacture of joss sticks is on Macau's inventory of intangible cultural heritage (Intangible Cultural Heritage). I would like to know if the believers know what, why, when and how they give offerings and if they know what the offerings mean. Moreover, in order to find out if people in Hong Kong still place shrines at home nowadays, the interviews provided a good tool to collect this data. To study the offerings, I originally planned to conduct 50 interviews with the temple keepers, the believers and the offering shop owners during my field trip; the targeted interviewees were Hong Kong people who visited temples and offering shops.

This study conducted ethnographic research, utilizing participant observation and interviews in my fieldwork, drawing on my personal experience and secondary data as the basis for data collection and analysis. My fieldwork was carried out in Hong Kong from June to August 2024, and 1-day trip to Macau. I have visited 25 venues, including 22 Taoist temples, two Buddhist monasteries, and one columbarium (Appendix 1). I have participated in five events, including four “Hungry Ghost Festivals” 盂蘭節, in which three organisations performed Taoist rituals and one in the Buddha monastery. Furthermore, I also participated in one less popular event, “the Seventh Sister’s Birthday Festival” 七姐誕⁴.

I conducted 50 face-to-face and online interviews during my fieldwork, mainly in Cantonese, the common language in Hong Kong and Macau. The original targeted research participants were the believers who had finished the rituals in temples, temple

⁴ According to Chinese folklore, the Cowherd and his wife, the Weaver (also known as the Seventh Sister), meet every year on the seventh day of the seventh month on the Lunar calendar, which is called "Seventh Sister's Birthday". The Weaver, who is good at sewing, therefore, people worship the Seventh Sister to pray for dexterity, finding a good lover, a happy family, etc. (Seventh Sister's Birthday: 2012)

staff and offering shop owners, all Hong Kongers. Therefore, I prepared three sets of questions individually to ask more relevant questions (Appendix 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3). The similarities of these three sets of questions are asking the interviewees about the offerings, what, when, where, and how to use them, as well as the meaning of these offerings. The difference is the personal information. For example, I asked the believers about their age, occupation and educational attainment, but I did not ask the shop owners and temple staff these questions. Rather, I asked them about their jobs, the industry and their customers to get the answers from different angles. Things never go smoothly; something unexpected happened out of the original plan in both good and bad ways, leading me to revise the plan to complete the study better.

Firstly, the two major organisations that dominantly manage the Hong Kong Taoist temples rejected my interview invitations and did not allow me to interview the believers inside the temples. Therefore, it was not possible to interview the temple staff officially and I just had a brief conversation with them without recording, which I included in the interviews as they told me useful and relevant information. On the other hand, I randomly invited the believers outside the temples to be interviewed after they finished the rituals and recorded them with their consent.

Secondly, as the believers that I met were outside the temples in hot weather, it was hard to conduct in-depth interviews, which usually took about 5-15 minutes. Thus, I have invited my friends and family, who gave offerings at festivals or in temples to worship gods or ancestors, within two years. These interviews included face-to-face and online interviews and more in-depth interviews, asking extra questions such as if they had any workplace worship experiences.

Thirdly, I divided the questions into personal information, practice and the interpretation of the meaning of the offerings in the beginning. However, the questions mainly focused on the usage of the offerings in the temples but did not ask about at home, which I would also like to find out if people in Hong Kong still place shrines at home nowadays. Therefore, more questions were added to ask the believers after a month of fieldwork. I have followed and asked the set questions during the interview, but it would be flexibly amended to follow our conversation flow and add additional or follow-up questions to help me understand if the interviewee knew what and why they did.

Fourthly, a funeral home and a social media channel organised a Hungry Ghost Festival event, and I contacted them to ask for participant observation and interviews. The staff of the social media channel referred me to another Hungry Ghost Festival event organized by the Punti Tradition (locals). The interview was conducted successfully with one of the organizers. On the other hand, I accidentally met another Hungry Ghost Festival (Hoklo) organiser at “the Seventh Sister’s Birthday Festival” and interviewed him successfully. Therefore, I have interviewed two event organizers who were not included in the original plan but made the sample of the research participants even more diverse.

The research participants included 22 males and 28 females. All the interviewees were aged 30 or above. Their educational attainment is all-inclusive, including primary school, secondary school, college and university or above. They are also from various sectors, including blue-collar and white-collar workers and retired interviewees. Furthermore, interviewees included believers, the Hungry Ghost Festival organisers, one musician in traditional Taoist worship rites (In Cantonese: 醮師 ziu3 si1), a few temple keepers and offering shop owners.

This study uses secondary data as the research methodology, including books, journals, articles, newspapers, and related government agencies. All reference materials are not limited to Hong Kong but also from Taiwan and other parts of the world in English and Chinese.

2. Diving into the Non-human Realm: Definition and Origin of the Offerings

Ronald Grimes states, “Ritual is one of the oldest human activities” (Grimes R., 1982: xi), concordant with the long Chinese history of records about worshipping or performing rituals. In ancient times, China already had sacrificial activities and a developed religion, which can be traced back to the Neolithic period. The important Neolithic Niuheliang archaeological site 牛河梁遺址, located in Liaoning Province, North-eastern China, was discovered in 1983. (Fang and Wei, 1986, pp.1-17, 97-101). This archaeological site is a large-scale worship site distributed on the tops of hills, where graves, cemeteries and the “Goddess Temple” were found. Among them, the Goddess Temple is the earliest known temple site in China so far. Moreover, the unearthed burial objects, such as jades engraved with animals and deified clay animal statues, showed that ancient religions and sacrificial activities had already developed (Fang and Wei, 1986, pp.1-17, 97-101).

According to Van Baal, offerings are an act of giving, usually as a sign of respect or prayer to a god and can be material or symbolic (Baal J., 1976: 161). Throughout the history of China, giving offerings has been part of the rituals. The procedure, the materials, and the items have been changing during worship for gods, ancestors, and ghosts.

2.1 Joss Paper Ingots

Joss Paper Ingots 元寶 are one of the various types of Joss Papers 衣紙 offerings, also known as hell money 冥鈔, paper gold 金紙, paper silver 銀紙 and many other names. The public would usually burn these Joss papers for worship rituals, ancestral worship, and offerings to gods, ancestors, and ghosts. Each Joss Paper has its own shapes, colors, sizes, purposes and meanings; some are used for money, some are to relieve bad luck, and some are to pray for safety and sound. Some of the Joss Papers will be given to different gods, ancestors or ghosts respectively.

The Joss paper ingots are made from hemp, usually light brown for worshipping gods, ancestors and ghosts. In Hong Kong, people will make a “bowl” shape as a bottom, not necessarily counting the quantities. People will put other paper offerings on top and burn

them after the rituals. According to the temple staff, the function of the Joss paper ingots is like our wallet to hold money.



Figure 1. Joss Paper Ingots

Joss money has been recorded in many Taoist documents and books; its function is generally offerings to the gods and ghosts. Burning paper money played a significant role in Taoism; the Joss paper differed in material, pattern, and appearance, according to the objects, levels, and purposes. Common purposes include replenishing the treasury, repaying life debts, praying for blessings, eliminating disasters and rewarding, etc. (Lai 2007: 47-64)

From the Buddhist perspective, there is no burning of Joss paper practice. The eminent monk Yinshun's publication pointed out: "Later, for the sake of economy, paper was used instead of burning silk custom in ancient China. In later generations, Joss paper, Joss paper ingots, hell banknotes, houses and cars were burned. These customs and habits have evolved from ancient times; not all are in Buddhism." (Yinshun 2012: 36) and "..., better not burn Joss papers now, there is nothing like this in Buddhism." (ibid.: 37) This same approach can also be found in Hong Kong: "Buddhism does not advocate burning Joss Papers", stated by The Hong Kong Buddhist Association (Learning Buddhism 2025). Buddhism does not burn paper money, as reflected in my field trip. When I visited the

Western Monastery in Hong Kong during the Hungry Ghost Festival, the monks and other participants only chanted sutras, not burning Joss paper under my observation.

The Origin of Joss Paper Ingots

The custom of the Chinese people worshipping ancestors since the Xia dynasty (2000 – 1500 BC) and Shang dynasty (1600 – 1027 BC); shell currencies and the imitated money made from wood, bones, stones and clams have been found in the tombs of the Xia and Shang dynasties from Chinese archaeology (Zhang 1995, P.13-14). It showed that the ancient people not only had the concept of currency but also believed that their souls would go to another world after death. The descendants would give real and imitation currencies for burial to let the ancestors enjoy the same in another world as when they were alive. The *Book of the Han* 《漢書》⁵ stated that people dug up the money from the funeral and grave robberies were rampant for a while⁶. The word “Joss money” used in the original text is 瘞錢 (Cantonese: ji3 cin4), which means burial money with the deceased.

The Joss money, i.e. the real and imitation currencies, was given during worship at the burial, but not burned. Until it was the innovation of papermaking from Cai Lun 蔡倫 (63–121 AD) in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 AD), papermaking became popular because of the development and maturity of the technique. The book *Master Feng's Records of Hearsay and Personal Experience* 《封氏聞見記》⁷, described the use of

⁵ *The Book of the Han, Zhang Tang*, also known as *Hanshu* 《漢書》 was written by Ban Gu 班固 (32 – 92 AD) et al., the book records the history of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC - 9 AD) (Hulsewé 1993: 129-130). It is China's first biographical history and one of the *Twenty-Four Histories* 二十四史, also known as the *Orthodox Histories* 正史 of China. The *Twenty-Four Histories* are the books officially compiled or approved history covering from the legendary Yellow Emperor 黃帝 to the Ming Dynasty, which recorded Chinese history for more than 2,000 years. The books consisted of the military and national affairs, social changes, personal activities, etc., during the reign of each emperor. It formed complete and systematic records of Chinese historical books (Wilkinson 2012: 626).

⁶ The original text in *The Book of the Han, Zhang Tang* Volume 59 《漢書·張湯傳》卷五十九 is 「會人有盜發孝文園瘞錢.....」 (Ban, Eastern Han 25 – 220 AD).

⁷ *Master Feng's Records of Hearsay and Personal Experience*, also known as *Fengshi wenjian ji*, 《封氏聞見記》 written by Feng Yan 封演 in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD). The book covered a wide range of themes such as religion, administrative statutes and regulations, customs and habits, historical and touristic spots and the stories of an individual. The author wrote down what he saw in person and what he heard from the others. Thus, the book recorded the social life and the historical materials of the Tang Dynasty in detail, which made it valuable to historians.

giving Joss papers and their transformation. The word “Joss papers” used in the original text is 紙錢 (Cantonese: zi2 cin4), literally meaning “paper money”. The text states that offering gold coins, copper coins, jade and silk to ghosts and gods since ancient times. After worshipping, these things would be buried as offerings. The text also showed that people gradually used imitated currencies made of copper, clay, or lead as burial goods to replace real currencies because of grave robbery issues. Moreover, it stated that Cai Lun innovated paper in the Eastern Han Dynasty and Joss paper appeared in the Wei and Jin dynasties (220–420 AD)⁸.

After many years of war during the period of the Three Kingdoms, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties (220–588 AD), something gradually changed in worship. According to the *Thicket Draft of the Love-the-Sun Studio* 《愛日齋叢鈔》⁹, the 6th emperor of the Southern Qi, Xiao Baojuan 蕭寶卷 (483–501 AD), who was fond of gods, ghosts and witchcraft, and cut paper as Joss papers to replace the real clothes for offerings¹⁰. Based on this data, Joss papers were used not only for ancestors but also to worship gods and ghosts, which were offered as money. Also, people began to offer Joss paper rather than burial money during the Southern Dynasties (420–588 AD) in inference.

Giving Joss money during worship was very common in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD). Tang Dynasty official named Wang Yu 王嶼 introduced the practice of offering burial money to the various national worshipping. According to the *New Book of Tang* 《唐書》¹¹ stated that the Emperor Xuanzong of Tang 唐玄宗 followed the thoughts of Laozi 老

⁸ The original text from the “*Master Feng's Records of Hearsay and Personal Experience*”, Volume 6, “Paper Money” 《封氏聞見記》卷六 <紙錢> stated that 「今代送葬為鑿紙錢，積錢為山，盛加雕飾，舁以引柩。按古者享祀鬼神，有圭璧幣帛，事畢則埋之。後代既寶錢貨，遂以錢送死。《漢書》稱盜發孝文園瘞錢是也。率易從簡，更用紙錢。紙乃後漢蔡倫所造，其紙錢魏晉已來始有其事。」 (Fan, Tang 618–907 AD).

⁹ *Thicket Draft of the Love-the-Sun Studio*, also known as *Airizhai congchao* 《愛日齋叢鈔》，was written by Ye Zhi 葉真 during the late Song Dynasty (960–1279 AD). The book mainly focuses on analysing famous objects and examining allusions. However, the writing style does not reach certain standards. The book is still considered valuable, such as the criticism and correction of the older texts.

¹⁰ In the *Thicket Draft of the Love-the-Sun Studio* 《愛日齋叢抄》 Volume 5 卷五 stated that the original text is 「南齊廢帝東昏侯好鬼神之術，剪紙為錢以代東帛，至唐盛行其事，云有益幽冥。」 (Ye, Southern Song 1127–1279 AD).

¹¹ The *New Book of Tang*, also known as *Xintangshu* 《新唐書》 written by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072 AD) et al. It is a historical book in the form of chronicles that records the official history of the Tang Dynasty, as one of the *Twenty-Four Histories* (Wilkinson 2012: 626).

子 (571-470 AD), the founder and philosopher of Taoism. The Emperor Xuanzong of Tang was fond of things related to gods and ghosts. He regularly revised and organized the rituals and places of worship and prayed respectfully to all gods. Wang Yu 王嶼, who was an official of the Tang Dynasty, was favoured by Emperor Xuanzong because Wang studied witchcraft and hired wizards. He was promoted as “the ambassador of Sacrifices” after suggesting building a temple of heaven to worship the gods. Wang was based in a similar way to Chinese shamanism and witchcraft to perform rituals. Since the Han Dynasty, burial money has been seen as a funerary item used in funerals and has become an indispensable part of funeral customs. This custom was brought into the imperial worshipping rituals by Wang.¹² Since then, offering the Joss paper to worship ghosts and gods became a common practice in the national worship rituals.

The book *Master Feng's Records of Hearsay and Personal Experience* 《封氏聞見記》 further stated that burying Joss money in ancient times, but people burned them in the Tang dynasty.¹³ It can be seen that paper money has undergone a great transformation in the Tang Dynasty. From national worship rituals to ordinary people, it is used for worship. It was not only offered to ancestors but also extended to worship gods and ghosts. At the same time, they no longer bury paper money but burn it instead.

By the time of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907–979 AD), another chaotic and separatist period from the late Tang Dynasty to the early Song Dynasty. At this time, benefited from the development of papermaking techniques and became stable and mature and offering Joss paper became popular. Furthermore, the classification of the Joss papers was found. The *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* 《新五代史》¹⁴ ,

¹² The original text in the *New Book of Tang* 《新唐書·王嶼傳》 stated that 「玄宗在位久，推崇老子道，好神仙事，廣脩祠祭，靡神不祈。嶼上言請築壇東郊祀青帝。天子入其言，擢大常博士、侍御史，為祠祭使。嶼專以祠解中帝意，有所禳祓，大抵類巫覡。漢以來，葬喪皆有瘞錢，後世里俗稍以紙寓錢為鬼事，至是，嶼乃用之。」 (Ouyang, Northern Song 960-1127 AD).

¹³ The original text from the “*Master Feng's Records of Hearsay and Personal Experience*”, Volume 6, “Paper Money” 《封氏聞見記》卷六 <紙錢> stated that 「古埋帛金錢，今紙錢皆燒之，所以示不知神之所為也。」 (Fan, Tang 618–907 AD).

¹⁴ *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* or *Wudai Shiji*, 《新五代史》 was written by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072 AD) is a Chinese history book about the Five Dynasties Period (907-960 AD). This is one of the official Twenty-Four Histories 二十四史, also known as the Orthodox Histories of China (Wilkinson 2012: 626).

stated that on the day of the Cold Food Festival, the emperor watched the mausoleum from a distance and burned royal clothes and Joss papers¹⁵. Another data from the book *Records of the Pure and Marvellous* 《清異錄》¹⁶ stated that during the Five Dynasties Period (907 – 960 AD), on the day of the funeral of Emperor Shizong of the Later Zhou Dynasty 後周世宗, offerings were given on the route when the funeral car passed by. His ministers invented Joss papers, which were made from samples of gold and silver coins by using paper and printed the words on the papers as Joss papers¹⁷. This is believed to be the beginning of paper gold and paper silver nowadays and the beginning of the development of many styles and types in the future.

Until the Qing dynasty (1644–1912 AD), there were many kinds and classifications of Joss papers found. According to the *Annual Festivals of Su-chou during Ch'ing times* 《清嘉錄》, it stated that the local customs, Joss paper must be burned when worshipping ancestors at home or at their graves. Joss papers in white colors and cut into small squares were called white paper ingots. The colored paper strips would be cut in a long shape and hung on the tomb, which was called “hanging money” or “hanging tomb”¹⁸. Thus, Joss paper had different colors and shapes. In addition to burning, it was also hung in front of the tomb in the Qing dynasty.

In the transformation process in various dynasties and periods, a preliminary understanding of the use of Joss paper money during various dynasties. Starting from the buried real and imitation currencies, as burial objects for the deceased in ancient times. After the Wei and Jin Dynasties (220-420 AD), it gradually evolved into the practice of

¹⁵*Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* 《新五代史·晉本紀》 originally stated that 「庚午，寒食，望祭顯陵於南莊，焚御衣、紙錢。」 (Ouyang and Song, Northern Song 960-1127 AD).

¹⁶ *Records of the Pure and Marvellous, also known as Qingyilu* 《清異錄》 was written by Gu Tao 陶穀 (903-970 AD) and was first completed between the end of the Five Dynasties and the beginning of the Northern Song Dynasty. It is an important notebook in ancient China and records many important historical materials on Chinese cultural history and social history (Deng and Li 2008: 48).

¹⁷ *Qingyilu* 《清異錄》 stated originally 「顯德六年，世宗慶陵殯土發引之日，百司設祭於道。翰林院楮泉大若盞口，余令雕印字文，文之黃曰『泉臺上寶』，白曰『冥游亞寶』。」 (Gu, Song 960-1279 AD).

¹⁸ The original text in Chapter 〈紙錠〉 from *Annual Festivals of Su-chou during Ch'ing times* 《清嘉錄》 stated: 「土俗家祭墓祭，皆焚化紙錠。紙以白阡，切而為陌，俗呼白紙錠。土俗家祭墓祭，皆焚化紙錠。紙以白阡，切而為陌，俗呼白紙錠。有滿金直甍之分，以金銀紙箔糊成。其有掛於墓者，則彩箋翦長縷，俗呼掛錢，亦曰掛墓。」 (Gu, Ching 1644-1912 AD).

burning and sending paper money to commemorate the deceased. In the Tang Dynasty, Joss paper money was used as money in the underworld and burned during worship. Also, this custom of using Joss paper money was extended to the national worship. By the Qing dynasty (1644–1912 AD), there were many kinds of Joss papers found. Joss papers were used not only for funerals given to ancestors but also to gods and ghosts during worship. Furthermore, people no longer buried Joss Papers but changed to burning them.



Figure 2. Various Joss papers from left to right: Joss paper ingots, paper gold, paper silver and Joss coins

The folktale of Joss Papers

There are various folktales of the origin of Joss papers and the most common was related to Cai Lun 蔡倫 (63–121 AD), who was the innovator of papermaking and made paper in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 AD). It is said that Cai, based on past experience, switched to using raw materials such as tree bark and hemp to make paper, which improved the papermaking process and resulted in a lower cost of papermaking in the large-scale manufacture and production of paper. However, people did not understand that the newly launched product led to unsellable. Cai colluded with his wife in order to promote and increase the sales of his products, who prepared to stage a scene about “The resurrection after burning Joss paper for the deceased.” Cai reported his illness to the emperor and returned home. Soon after, he pretended to die lying in a bottomless coffin. His wife kept burning the prepared, rectangle-shaped paper with silver foil in front of the coffin. Some relatives and friends who came to mourn Cai were very confused and asked the reason why she burned the papers. His wife said that these were the currencies used in the underworld, which helped the deceased bribe the jailer and the God of Death in the

underworld. If she continued to burn Joss papers, Cai probably could be resurrected in seven days. Everyone was shocked that Cai really came back from the coffin in seven days. Cai said to everyone that he was taken to the God of Death by the Ox-Head and Horse face after death. On the way, he met many officials and gave them the Joss papers burned by his wife. Later, the God of Death checked and saw that Cai had done many good things when he was alive. Also, Cai gave Joss papers to the officials and then the God of Death let Cai return to the world. Since then, people have believed that burning Joss papers is a way to accumulate merit and prolong life. People started burning Joss Paper (Lai, 2008: pp.27-29).

Whether from the perspective of historical data or folktale, it can be seen that the transformation of Joss paper during various dynasties, such as the use of materials, i.e. from giving the real and imitation currencies to give papers; the method of giving offerings, i.e. from burying to burning the Joss papers; the classification of offerings to worshipping objects, i.e. different Joss paper would be given to different gods, ancestors and ghosts, which still to have an influence of the paper offerings nowadays.

2.2 Joss Candles

Joss Candles 蠟燭 is red in color. It is made of two different materials, including trimmed bamboo and red wax. The trimmed bamboo is wrapped in wax and is measured by weight and the unit is tael 兩. Some patterns on the candles, such as three little circles or flowers, are often not attributed to having a particular meaning. However, they are specified for gods and ancestors, while the candles without any pattern are for ghosts. During rituals, people light up a pair of candles when making offerings for gods, ancestors and ghosts. A few versions explain its function from the interviews conducted; one of the popular ones is to let the gods know the believers are here when lighting up. Another version is from one of the temple staff who said that Joss candles represent brightness and wisdom. Another interviewee said, it is like a fire on people's shoulders when lighting up the Joss candles to let the gods know their arrival. Interviewee Ms. Chan said it is to light up god's eyes to see who is here. Interviewee Mr. Wu said it is for guiding ancestors' way; another explanation is sending wishes to the gods.



Figure 3. Joss Candles

From a Taoist perspective, it also has various meanings of the Joss candles. As recorded in a Taoist classic,¹⁹ Joss candles or lamps, both of which can be used for ritual purposes²⁰. From the *Liturgical Manual for the Yellow Register Retreat from the Highest* 《太上黃籙齋儀》²¹ stated that burning incense and candles play an indispensable role in Taoist offering rituals and have to be the first thing to do in rituals²². It further stated that Taoism

¹⁹ *Chronicle of Sacred Revelations of the Emperor on High of the Dark Heaven* 《玄天上帝啟聖錄》 was written by unknown authors during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368 AD). This Taoist classic recorded in detail the process of Xuantian Shangdi's 玄天上帝 descent to human form, his practices in the mountains, as well as the rituals of offering to Zhenwu 真武, etc.

²⁰ In the original text from *Chronicle of Sacred Revelations of the Emperor on High of the Dark Heaven* 《玄天上帝啟聖錄》 stated that 「…明燈或淨蠟燭一檠…」 (*Chronicle of Sacred Revelations of the Emperor on High of the Dark Heaven*, Yuan 1279-1368 AD).

²¹ *Liturgical Manual for the Yellow Register Retreat from the Highest*, also known as *Taishang huanglu zhai yi* 《太上黃籙齋儀》 compiled by Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933) in about 891 AD. The book recorded the ritual sequence of the fasting ceremony, the prayers and mantras used. It is used to help people save their ancestors from sin, save ghosts, pray for mercy, ward off disasters and bring blessings, etc.

²² In the original text from *Liturgical Manual for the Yellow Register Retreat from the Highest* 《太上黃籙齋儀》 stated that 「夫禮燈之法，出金籙簡文。凡修齋行道，以燒香然燈，最為急務」 (Du, Five Dynasties Period 907–960 AD).

believes that candles are vital when performing rituals and chanting, as they can provide light to dispel darkness, shine through the heavens and reach down to the nine netherworlds of hell. Moreover, lighting also enables the souls in the underworld to see a way to escape from the underworld and ascend to heaven²³.

From *Emperor Liang Jewelled Repentance* 《梁皇寶懺》 stated that lamps 燈供養 are one of the ten offerings²⁴ in Buddhism. The symbolic meaning of "lamps" is "brightness". Anything that can illuminate darkness falls within the concept of “lamp” offerings, including candles. A “lamp” means to dispel darkness and bring up the light; hoping everyone can be a lamp to light up the dark road, drive away the dark world and illuminate the universe (Bao 2017: 174). Therefore, Joss candles are important parts of Taoist and Buddhist rituals.

The Origin of Joss Candles

Joss candles were inherited and divided from the use of torches in ancient China; there were no “candles” 蠟燭 in that period and they used the Chinese character “燭” to describe “torches”²⁵. The purpose was to light it during the night. From the *Book of Rites* 《禮記》²⁶ states that:

“When it got dark, someone lit torches and brought them to stand up.
When it was time to eat, someone brought the meal and asked him to

²³ The original text in the book *Liturgical Manual for the Yellow Register Retreat from the Highest* 《太上黃籙齋儀》「燈者，破暗燭幽，下開泉夜。所以科云燒香然燈，上照諸天福堂，下照長夜地獄。苦魂滯魄，乘此光明，方得解脫。」 (Du, Five Dynasties Period 907–960 AD).

²⁴ The "Ten Offerings" 十供養 are ten kinds of offerings to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, symbolising the believers' bodhicitta and their sincere intention to pray for the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to descend to the altar and perform the Dharma. The ten offerings include incense 香, flowers 花, lamps 燈, perfume 塗, fruits 果, tea 茶, food 食, beads 珠, treasures 寶 and clothes 衣, each item has a unique meaning. These ten offerings were recorded from the book *Emperor Liang Jewelled Repentance* 《梁皇寶懺》 or *Repentance Dharma of Kindness and Compassion in the Bodhimanda* 《慈悲道場懺法》，which was written by Master Bao Zhi 諸大法師 during the Southern and Northern dynasties (420–588 AD).

²⁵ The word “candle” in Chinese is “蠟燭”; when we separately read these two characters “，蠟” means “waxes” and “燭” means “torches”.

²⁶ The *Book of Rites* or *Liji* 禮記 is one of the classical collections from Confucians that describes the social forms, administration and ceremonial rites of the Zhou dynasty (1027–256 BC), was written during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) by the Confucian scholars (Wilkinson 2012: 626).

stand up. Stand up when a distinguished guest arrives. Don't wait until the candle is burned to the root before changing it.”²⁷.

The philosopher and scholar Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648 AD) interpreted the above texts that “There were no candles in ancient times, they only called torches as candles”²⁸ which is stated in *The Correct Meaning of the Book of Rites* 《禮記正義》²⁹. Therefore, it showed that people used a “torch” as a “candle” for lighting purposes and candles had not yet been invented in ancient times.

In the Western Zhou Dynasty, the *Rites of Zhou* 《周禮》³⁰ showed that during the Zhou Dynasty (1027 - 256 BC), torches were used in funerals, which were considered big events. People would light up the "grave torches" to set up outside the door and set up the “courtyard torches” inside the courtyard for lighting³¹. It also named these torches differently, those set up outside the door were named “big torches” and those set up inside the door were named “torches of the courtyard”. Furthermore, the word torches used in the text is 麻燭, which are hemp-made torches³². Therefore, whenever there were large events, torches would be set up inside, outside the door and in the courtyard respectively

²⁷ The original text in the *Book of Rites* or *Liji* 《禮記》 ‘Chapter 1 Summary of the Rules of Propriety Part 1 <曲禮上>’ is: 「燭至起，食至起，上客起。燭不見跋。」 It means that when it gets dark and candles are lit, you stand up; when it’s time to eat, you stand up; when distinguished guests come, you stand up. When the candles burn to the end, you should leave to respect the host if you go to someone’s house in the evening to have a drink or chat after a meal (Zheng, Eastern Han 25-220 AD).

²⁸ The original text in the ‘Volume 2 Summary of the Rules of Propriety Part 1’ <曲禮上第一卷二> *Annotations and Commentary of Zhou Li* 《禮記注疏》 states that: 「古者未有蠟燭，唯呼火炬為燭也。」 (Zheng, Han Dynasty 206 BC-220 AD).

²⁹ *The Annotations and Commentary of Liji*, also known as *The Liji Zhushu* 《禮記注疏》 is a book of the correction and annotation of the meaning of one of the Confucian classics, noted by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 in the Han Dynasty (206 BC–9 AD); annotated and corrected by Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648 AD) in the Tang Dynasty (907–960 AD).

³⁰ *Rites of Zhou*, also known as *Zhou Li* 《周禮》, is a blueprint of a conceived political organisation of the government during the Western Zhou period 西周 (1027-771 BC). It was compiled during the Warring States period 戰國 (475-221 BC).

³¹ The original text from the *Rites of Zhou*, also known as *Zhouli* 《周禮》, in the Chapter ‘Office of Autumn’ <秋官司寇> stated that: 「司烜氏：掌以夫遂取明火於日，以鑿取明水於月，以共祭祀之明燭、明燭，共明水。凡邦之大事，共墳燭庭燎。」 (Zheng, Eastern Han 25 - 220 AD).

³² From the book *Commentary and Definition of Zhouli* 《周禮訂義》：「凡邦之大事，共墳燭庭燎。故書“墳”為“蕘”。鄭司農云：“蕘燭，麻燭也。”玄謂：墳，大也。樹於門外曰大燭，於門內曰庭燎，皆所以照衆為明。」 (Wang, Song 960-1279 AD).

to illuminate. However, lighting up torches only for illuminated purposes, not because of worshipping rituals. On top of the above, an explanation from the scholar Wang yuzhi 王與之³³ described that the production and materials of “torches” were reed as the middle part, wrapped with cloth and spread with beeswax, which is similar to candles³⁴. Even though scholar Wang described as the candles are similar to the one “nowadays”, nowadays meant back to the Song Dynasty. The materials commonly used in current candles are wax rather than beeswax.

The *Classic of Mountains and Seas* 《山海經》 describes the ritual of worshipping one of the Mountain Gods, which states that “use torches during worshipping” and “the torches made of unburned herbs, and the white mats used for rituals are decorated with silk fabrics with colorful patterns.”³⁵ Even though it did not mention if the ritual was at night or in the morning, people used torches to light up the temple when worshipping, which cannot prove that it was for religious ritual purposes. A further explanation from the *Notes on the Classic of Mountains and Seas* 《山海經箋疏》³⁶ mentioned the material of the torch was: "This is the beginning of the use of candles by the ancients. It stated that 'the grass is not ashes'. This means that in ancient times, torches were used and reeds were also steamed with hemp. These steaming reeds and hemp were used as “wicks”³⁷, which is similar to modern candles, a wick in the middle of the candle we use nowadays.

³³ *Commentary and Definition of Zhouli* 《周禮訂義》 was written by a scholar in Song Dynasty (960 – 1279 AD), Wang yuzhi 王與之 who reinterpreted some contexts, as well as explained and provided extra information on the previous annotations.

³⁴ In the original text in *Commentary and Definition of Zhouli* 《周禮訂義》 stated: 「以葦爲中心，以布纏之，飴蜜灌之，若今蠟燭。」 (ibid.)

³⁵ The original text from *Classic of Mountains and Seas* 《山海經·西山經》 are: 「隃山，神也，祠之用燭，或作煬。」 and 「燭者百草之未灰，白蒂采等純之。」 (Guo, Jin 265–420 AD).

³⁶ *A Note on the Classic of Mountains and Seas* 《山海經箋疏》 completed in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912 AD), written by Yixing Hao 郝懿行 (1757–1825 AD). This is a book of supplementing notes, collecting previous annotations and various historical documents, and examining and explaining difficult issues for the book *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* 《山海經》.

³⁷ The original text from *Notes on the Classic of Mountains and Sea*, also known as *Shanhaijing jianshu* 《山海經箋疏》 stated: 「郝懿行注：「此蓋古人用燭之始，經云『百草未灰』，是知上世為燭，亦用麻蒸葦苳為之。詳見詩疏及周禮疏。」 (Guo, Jin 265–420 AD).

In the Qin Dynasty (221 – 207 BC), historical data from *Records of the Grand Historian* 《史記》³⁸ stated about the founder and the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty, Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇 (259–210 BC) used “mermaid cream”³⁹ as one of the materials to produce torches, which will last for a long time in his mausoleum⁴⁰.

Moreover, the “torches” are already used in funeral rites. “*The Book of Rites*” 《禮記》 :

“During the emperor’s funeral, two torches are lit in the hall and two torches outside the hall. At a doctor's funeral, one torch is lit in the hall and two are lit outside the hall. When conducting a funeral for a scholar, only one torch is lit in both the hall and outside the hall.”⁴¹

The above ancient data showed people already used torches during worship and materials like wood, reed, hemp and beeswax to produce “torches” from the Shang to the Qin Dynasties (1600-207 BC). However, the word “torches” 燭 was still written as “candles” 燭, which means the same Chinese character in these periods. Until the appearance of candles in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 AD) resulted in the distinction between the words “torches” and “candles”; “candles” 燭 began to refer specifically to candles. The earliest data about the word “candles” 蠟燭 was from the collection of short semi-

³⁸ *Records of the Grand Historian* or *Shiji* 《史記》, was written by historian Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–86 BC) during the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-9 AD). It recorded from ancient time the mythological Yellow Emperor's or Huangdi's 黃帝 era, the Xia 夏 (2000-1500 BC), Shang 商 (1600-1027 BC), Zhou 周 (1027-256 BC), the Warring States period (475-221 BC), Qin 秦 (221-207 BC), to the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-9 AD), including a total of more than 3,000 years of history. The contents are not limited to philosophy, politics, economics and military. *Records of the Grand Historian* is one of the official Twenty-Four Histories 二十四史, also known as the Orthodox Histories of China (Wilkinson 2012: 626).

³⁹ “Mermaid's cream” was literally translated from “人魚膏” in Chinese; “人魚” means mermaid and “膏” means “cream”. There are two explanations about the “mermaid cream”. The first interpretation is the commonly named “Chinese giant salamander” 娃娃魚 or the “Andrias Davidians” 大鯢 in scientific name from the book *The Annotation and Commentaries of Shiji*, also known as *Shiji jijie* 《史記集解》 was written during the 420–479 AD. Another interpretation of the “mermaid cream” is the “whale cream” from *Imperial Reader*, also known as *The Taiping Yulan* 《太平御覽》 was compiled from 977-983 AD. However, there is still no conclusion made with all the data that people have now.

⁴⁰ The original text from the *Records of the Grand Historian*, also known as *Shiji* 《史記·秦始皇本紀》 「九月，葬始皇鄜山。始皇初即位，穿治鄜山，及并天下，天下徒送詣七十餘萬人，穿三泉，下銅而致槨，宮觀百官奇器珍怪徒臧滿之。令匠作機弩矢，有所穿近者輒射之。以水銀為百川江河大海，機相灌輸，上具天文，下具地理。以人魚膏為燭，度不滅者久之。」 (Sima, Western Han 206 BC-9 AD).

⁴¹ The original text is 「君堂上二燭、下二燭，大夫堂上一燭、下二燭，士堂上一燭、下一燭。」 from the *Book of Rites*, also known as *Liji* 《禮記·喪大記》 (Zheng, Eastern Han 25 - 220 AD).

historiographical stories from the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–9 AD) named the *Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital* 《西京雜記》⁴² stated:

“The emperor of Minyue gave the Emperor Gaozu of Han with five hu of wild honey, 200 mei of beeswax candles, and a pair each of silver pheasants and black pheasants. Gaozu was very happy and generously rewarded the emissary.”⁴³

It started not only separating the words “candle” and “torch”, but also the “beeswax candles” showed that the material used was beeswax, which was very precious and rare and was offered as a tribute to the emperor at that time.

Another record found to describe “candles” as “candles” from *A New Account of the Tales of the World* 《世說新語》⁴⁴ during the Southern and Northern dynasties (420–588 AD). stated :

“One day, Zhou was drunk and came home, said to his older brother with eyes wide open: “Your talent is not as good as mine, but your reputation is so high.” Then he picked up the burning candle and threw it at his brother.”⁴⁵

⁴² *Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital*, also known as *Xijing Zaji* 《西京雜記》 is a collection of short semi-historiographical stories written during the Han Dynasty, with unclear authorship. It is a miscellaneous history of the Western Han Dynasty. It contains both history and many anecdotes of the Western Han Dynasty.

⁴³ The original text from Chapter 4 《第四》, *Miscellaneous Records of the Western Capital* 《西京雜記》 stated that 「閩越王獻高帝石蜜五斛、蜜燭二百枚、白鷓黑鷓各一雙，高帝大悅，厚報遣其使」 (Liu, Han 206 BC - 220 AD).

⁴⁴ *A New Account of the Tales of the World*, or *Shishuo xinyu* 《世說新語》, was written by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403 - 444 AD) during the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–588 AD). Most of the contents recorded the dialogues, short stories and anecdotes of some celebrities from the Eastern Han (25-220 AD) to the Southern dynasty (420-588 AD). Even though the books recorded in the book were real people in history, it is classified as a novel rather than historical data. On the other hand, it mainly describes the lives and thoughts of the scholars and the situation of the ruling class in that period, allowing readers to understand their thoughts about the political and social environment of the people at that time. On the other hand, it is arguable that this can be considered historical data.

⁴⁵ The original text is 「周仲智飲酒醉，瞋目還面謂伯仁曰：『君才不如弟，而橫得重名！』須臾，舉蠟燭火擲伯仁。」 from the book *A New Account of the Tales of the World* 《世說新語》, 6. Cultivated Tolerance 〈6. 雅量〉 (Liu, Southern Song 1127-1279 AD).

The real object candle holders were found in Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 AD) tombs in Guangzhou in 1956. The candle holders were used as funeral candles for lighting, and they were placed in front of the coffin (Guangzhou Museum, 2015). This is the earliest record related to candles in China, showing that candles already existed in the Eastern Han.

Until the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD), the *Book of Jin* 《晉書》⁴⁶ stated that when Liu Yao 劉曜 buried his father and wife, he lit the candles one by one.⁴⁷ Another data found from *the Comprehensive Institutions* 《通典》 is also related to the use of candles during the funeral rituals, which stated “That day, a few feasts were arranged first; incense and candles were placed in front of the spiritual tent, and all the officials dressed in mourning clothes.”⁴⁸ From these two data from the Tang Dynasty, candles have become essential items for people to use for worship and funeral rituals and have been passed down to the present day.

2.3 Joss Sticks

Joss Sticks are made from incense wood powder and trimmed bamboo. There are various scents of Joss sticks and sizes; some Joss sticks have Chinese characters. There are different shapes of joss sticks, usually the straight ones and coil shapes, but the incense coil without bamboo inside. From the interviewees, there are so many meanings about joss sticks: the meanings also change from time to time. The temple staff said it was like a device to connect people, gods or ghosts; some said it was food for ancestors and ghosts. Usually, people give three joss sticks when they worship. I have also seen some people give 1 or 5, but it has to be an odd number; some gave a bunch of joss sticks.

⁴⁶ The *Book of Jin* 《晉書》 covering the history of the Jin Dynasty (265 – 420 AD), was written by Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 and other scholars, and was completed in the Tang Dynasty. This is one of the official Twenty-Four Histories 二十四史 or the Orthodox Histories of China (Wilkinson 2012: 626).

⁴⁷ The original text is 「曜將葬其父及妻，親如粟邑以規度之。負土為墳，其下周迴二里，作者繼以脂燭，怨呼之聲盈于道路。」 from *Book of Jin* 《晉書·載記》 (Fang, Tang 618-907 AD).

⁴⁸ The original text is 「其日，未明，內所由先整拂几筵，薦香燭於靈幄前，內外百僚俱服縗裳，去杖。」 from the *Comprehensive Institution* 《通典·小祥變》 (Du, Tang 618-907 AD).

In Hong Kong, people holding some items like the Joss papers move in an anticlockwise or clockwise direction on top of the burning incense three times, called a "passing the incense burner" 過香爐 motion for different reasons, such as for purification. My parents bought the pinwheel from the Che Kung Temple in the Lunar New Year; they held the pinwheel on top of the burning incense to notify Che Kung and pray to him, "Please go to our home to protect our family". Thus, the Joss sticks also have the function of a consecration ceremony 開光.

It is a custom among Hong Kong and Taiwan people to burn the "First Incense Offering" 頭炷香 at the beginning of the Lunar New Year. On New Year's Eve, people queue up in the temple. When the moment turns to the first day of the Lunar New Year, people as quick as possible to be the first one to place Joss sticks and offer to the Gods. People believe the "First Incense Offering" offered to the gods in the Lunar New Year has the most outstanding merit. Therefore, they are competing to give the first Joss sticks, which means striving for success in everything and praying for peace and happiness in the Lunar New Year (Religious Affairs 2025).

From a Buddhist perspective, they believe that using incense can help practitioners reflect on and remind themselves of their cultivation and understand the principles and implications of Buddhist scriptures through the process. On the other hand, burning incense became a way for Buddhist disciples to resist worldly temptations and strengthen their beliefs (Ku, 2012:8). Incense, one of the "Ten Offerings" in Buddhism, has the meaning of peace of mind, cleanliness of body, and purification. Incense can ventilate the body and nourish the mind, making people feel peaceful and calm.

In Taoism, Joss sticks are one of the "Five Offerings"⁴⁹. Like Joss Candles, believers must light up the Joss Candles and Joss Sticks first during worship. Joss Sticks connect the

⁴⁹ The five offerings 五供 in Taoism include incense 香, flowers 花, lamps 燈, water 水 and fruits 果, which are used to seek the blessings of the gods. Each item has its own meaning. It has the meaning of being, intending to seek repentance and may the deceased be reborn in heaven soon. 「五獻皆圓滿，奉上眾真前，志在求懺悔，亡者早生天。」 (Blog, 2025)

heart, express the faith and wishes to the gods, and feel the true spirit⁵⁰. In addition to the significance of the five offerings, incense also plays an important role in Taoist rituals. The use of incense varies in different rituals, which were pointed out by the Chinese scholar Liang Chongxiong, 梁崇雄, in his publication about the significance of burning incense: 1. Offerings to the gods; 2. Sending messages; 3. Resurrection of the Dead Soul; 4. Purify the body and mind; 5. Remove dirt and get rid of evil, and 6. Pray for others (Liang,2004: 51-53).



Figure 4. Joss Sticks

The Origin of the Joss Sticks

Joss Sticks in China were used in rituals and worship for an extremely long time, which can be traced back to 4000 – 5000 years ago in the late Neolithic period. At the Niuheliang archaeological site, the late Hongshan Culture 紅山文化, based on the ash left on the mud pit and its color, it is believed that one of the functions of the pit is to offer sacrifices (Hua, 1994: 58-59). Therefore, a kind of worshipping practice burned woods and created smoke to give offerings to heaven, named “sacrifice by burning” 禋祀⁵¹, which had already been formed by the extensive use of fire many times found in the Goddess Temple and the excavated worshipping pottery cylindrical vessels. (Hua, 1994: 59).

⁵⁰ The original text stated in *Liturgical Manual for the Yellow Register Retreat from the Highest*, the Volume 56 《太上黃籙齋儀》卷五十六 禮燈: 「凡修齋行道, 以燒香然燈, 最為急務。香者, 傳心達信, 上感真靈。」 (Du, Five Dynasties Period 907 – 960 AD).

⁵¹ “Sacrifice by burning” 禋祀 was a ritual worshipped to the gods in ancient times. The procedure of the ritual was first to pile up firewood, add animal bodies, coins, silk and other offerings and burn them on the firewood to make the smoke rise, signaling to heaven. As time went by, this word became a general term for worshipping (Zhou 2008: 206-207).

In the Western Zhou (1027-256 BC), the system of ritual and worshipping objects was developed and classified. The book *Rites of Zhou* 《周禮》 stated that the objects of worship include the gods of heaven who rule the universe, the sun, moon, stars, wind, rain, life, etc., other gods of the earth who rule land, mountain, river, ocean, etc., and spirits such as the emperors in ancient times. The rituals, offerings and methods of giving were different for different objects. For example, when offering to the gods, they would perform a gratification sacrifice and used smoke to worship to the heaven to pray for blessings; when giving to the sun, moon and stars, they would perform a firewood worship and then burn it as firewood; when giving to the wind and rain, they used the firewood rituals, that is, when the fire is burning, the wine would be sprinkled on the wood⁵². Therefore, it showed that the system of rituals, the classification of worshipping objects and the offerings had been comprehensively organized in the Western Zhou Dynasty. Although different rituals and objects had different offerings, the method of worship was the same, which involved burning them with fire to create smoke as a medium between humans and gods and giving offerings through smoke. At that time, the burnt firewood using materials such as orchid plants, wood or mugwort mixed with animal fat and burned did not create a fragrant smell during worship.

A history of fragrances 《香乘》 further explained that before the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), only orchid, hui, pepper, and cinnamon were used in the incense⁵³. Therefore, the materials used were mainly local plants and the way ancient people used incense was to burn it.

Until the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), various types of spices were introduced from the neighboring regions because of the opening of the Silk Road, such as agarwood and rosemary, which were recorded in many historical books. “Agarwood”, one of the materials blended in Joss sticks, was recorded by the *Compendium of Materia Medica*

⁵² The original text stated in the *Rites of Zhou*, Volume three 《周禮·春官·宗伯》第三：「以禋祀祀昊天上帝，以實柴祀日月星辰，以禋燎祀司中、司命、風師、雨師，禋之言煙，周人尚臭，煙，氣之臭聞者。」 (Zheng, Eastern Han 25-220 AD).

⁵³ The original text stated in *A history of fragrances* 《香乘》：「秦漢已前，未聞惟稱蘭、蕙、椒、桂。」 (Zhou, Ming 1368–1644 AD).

《本草綱目》⁵⁴, which stated that the agarwood and other spices were from India.⁵⁵ The variety of incense was introduced, and many new spices were grown domestically in the Han Dynasty, which enriched the choices of fragrances and helped to create a fragrant culture.

In addition, there was a shift towards burning incense with the introduction of Buddhism in the Western Han. According to the *Loose records from the Studio of Possible Change* 《能改齋漫錄》⁵⁶, the rituals of worshipping the Buddha do not slaughter animals as offerings and only burn incense during worship rituals.⁵⁷ Therefore, people started the practice of burning incense when worshipping Buddha. Incense is continuously connected with the vernacular practices such as worshipping gods and ghosts, which invisibly formed the origin of the Han people's habit of burning incense during worship. *A history of fragrances* 《香乘》 stated that Joss sticks were not used in ancient Chinese rituals and it was only used after Buddhism was introduced to China. Then Taoism and Confucianism followed the same practice⁵⁸. Thus, the worshipping behaviors of the people in the Han dynasty changed to burning incense and following the Buddhist act of worshipping rituals and offerings.

The use of incense was very popular among the royal family and the nobles in the chaotic Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties (220–588 AD). *A history of fragrances* 《香乘》 stated that Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty in the Southern Dynasty was the first

⁵⁴ *Compendium of Materia Medica*, also known as *Bencao Gangmu* 《本草綱目》 was compiled and edited by Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1552-1578 AD) and published during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 AD). This book is the most comprehensive medical encyclopaedia in the history of ancient Chinese medicine.

⁵⁵ The original text stated in the *Compendium of Materia Medica* 《本草綱目》: 「恭曰:沉香、青桂、雞骨、馬蹄、煎香,同是一樹。出天竺諸國。」 (Li, Ming 1368–1644 AD)

⁵⁶ *Loose records from the Studio of Possible Change*, also known as *Nenggaizhai manlu* 《能改齋漫錄》 was written by Wu Zeng 吳曾 during the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279 AD). It recorded history, geography, poetry, textual critique, etc.

⁵⁷ *Loose records from the Studio of Possible Change*, volume one 《能改齋漫錄》卷一<焚香始於漢>: 「又按漢武故事亦云:毗邪王殺休屠王,以其眾來降。得其金人之神,置之甘泉宮。金人者皆長丈餘,其祭不用牛羊,唯燒香禮拜。然則燒香自漢已然矣。」 (Wu, Song 960-1279 AD).

⁵⁸ *A history of fragrances* volume 12 《香乘》 stated that 「昔人於祭前焚柴升烟,今世燒香於迎神之前,用爐炭爇之。近人多崇釋氏,蓋西方出香,釋氏動輒燒香,取其清淨,故作法事則焚香誦咒。道家亦燒香解穢,與吾教極不同。今人祀夫子,祭社稷,於迎神之後,奠帛之前,三上香。古禮無此,郡邑或用之。」 (Zhou, Ming 1368–1644 AD).

person to use agarwood to worship heaven. He also used agarwood to build a palace and mixed mud and incense in the northern suburbs to express the closeness between people and the land⁵⁹. The royal family and the nobles not only use incense wood to burn incense but also use agarwood to build the Hall of Distinction. Moreover, the general people were also interested in using incense influenced by Buddhism and Taoism. Thus, it has had a far-reaching impact on the use of incense and greatly promoted the development of incense culture.

A large number of books record the frequent spice trade in the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD). At the same time, various books, poems, etc. were published to describe the use of incense from the nobles to the public, such as *A History of Fragrances* 《香乘》 and *On Heavenly Perfumes* 《天香傳》. On the other hand, whether it is worshipping gods or ancestors, the use of incense as one of the offerings in the ancestral temple or worshipping rituals has indeed taken root in the hearts of the Chinese people and spread to this day.

Even though these three offerings are made from different kinds of materials, there is one common factor when people give offerings, which is fire. People have to light a fire to burn the offerings. Fire plays a crucial role in Chinese rituals; it has been a channel for people to communicate with gods or ancestors since ancient times. (Yang, 2013: P.567)

Nonetheless, I haven't been able to find any records about when and how the “Joss paper ingots, Joss candles and Joss sticks” 元寶蠟燭香 became a worshipping “combo”. However, some information was found about people who prepared Joss money, Joss candles and Joss sticks 紙錢蠟燭香 for worshipping in some novels and historical humanity books since the Yuan dynasty. For example, *Water Margin* or *Shui Hu Zhuan* 《水滸傳》, *Jin Ping Mei* or *The Plum in the Golden Vase* 《金瓶梅》, *Chicken-Foot Mountain* 《雞足山志》, etc.

⁵⁹ The original text stated in *A history of fragrances* 《香乘·沉香祭天》「梁武帝至南郊明堂，用沉香，取天之質，陽所宜也；北郊用土和香，以地於人親宜，加雜馥即何諸香為之。梁武帝祭天始用沉香，古未有也。」(ibid.)



Figure 5. The offerings given during worshipping in the Lo Pan Temple in Hong Kong

2.4 The Influence of Buddhism on the Offerings

Buddhism originated in India and was introduced to China via the Western Regions around the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC - 9 AD). Buddhism advocates that all living beings are equal. Everyone can become a Buddha, as long as people practice hard, they can become a Buddha. According to the *Book of the Later Han* 《後漢書》⁶⁰, the Emperor Ming of the Han 漢明帝 dreamed of a flying golden figure, then he sent envoys to introduce Buddhism in China, value it and build monasteries. Thus, it officially started spreading Buddhism in China⁶¹. Also, it has brought Buddhist customs about the use of

⁶⁰ The *Book of the Later Han*, also known as *Houhanshu* 《後漢書·西域傳》 was written by Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445 AD). This book records the history of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 AD) by using the biographical-thematic style and one of the *Twenty-Four Histories* 二十四史 in China (Wilkinson 2012: 626).

⁶¹ The original text stated in the “Treatise on the Western Regions”, *Book of the Later Han* 《後漢書·西域傳》 「世傳明帝夢見金人，長大，頂有光明，以問群臣。或曰：“西方有神，名曰佛，其形長丈六尺而黃金色。」 (Fan, Southern Song 1127 - 1279 AD).

offerings. For example, the incense burning ritual enhanced the importance of incense in worship. During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties (220–588 AD), religion became spiritual sustenance for people who suffered from wars. Also, the promotion by the rulers and the large-scale translation of Buddhist scriptures led to Buddhism becoming widely spread. Combining Buddhist teachings and Chinese metaphysical thought during this period led to their widespread acceptance. This situation did not change much during the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties Period (581–960 AD).

The first person whose historical record *Xin'an Gazetteer* 《新安縣志》⁶² could be found was the Buddhist monk Pui To 杯渡禪師, who introduced Buddhism to Hong Kong during the Liu Song period of the Southern Dynasties (420–588 AD)⁶³. He built the Tsing Shan Monastery 青山禪院, which is one of the three ancient monasteries in Hong Kong (History, 2012) and is considered the cradleland of Buddhism in Hong Kong. To offer to Buddha in Hong Kong, the believers can choose the “ten offerings” I mentioned previously. Furthermore, alcohol and meat are strictly not allowed to be offered.

2.5 The Influence of Taoism on the Offerings

Taoism is the religion that originated in China, advocates simple living, follows the natural way of heaven and earth and respects nature. Throughout history, Taoism can be traced back to the ancient Chinese people's worship of heaven and ancestors, as well as other sacrifices and witchcraft worship activities in primitive society. Laozi 老子 is regarded as the founder of Taoism. Taoism is a polytheistic religion that worships multiple gods. Different branches of Taoism have developed over the years, while the first founding of the “Way of the Five Pecks of Rice” 五斗米道 by Zhang Daoling 張道陵 at the end of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317 - 420 AD) marked the beginning of Taoism.

⁶² *Xin'an Gazetteer* 《新安縣志》 was written in the Qing dynasty (1644-1912 AD). This book is an ancient local chronicle that records the economic, political, cultural, social, military, etc., in the ancient Xin'an County in Guangdong Province, including Hong Kong.

⁶³ The original text stated in the *Xin'an Gazetteer* 《新安縣志》: 「遂以木杯渡海, 憩邑屯門山, 後人因名曰杯渡山。」 (Wang 1974: 225).

Taoism in Hong Kong has only a history of more than 100 years, it is a descendant of the Zhengyi Daoist 正一派 and Quanzhen School 全真派 both are main branches of Taoism in China. (Chan, 2007: 110). In addition, the “Five Offerings” are also given to the gods during worship.

2.6 The Influence of Confucianism on the Offerings

Confucianism is a thought and philosophy that originated in China from the Zhou Dynasty (1027–256 BC) and was founded by Confucius 孔子, which was derived and contained a general term for a series of social customs. It takes benevolence, righteousness, forgiveness, honesty, loyalty and filial piety as its core values, focuses on the moral cultivation of gentlemen, emphasizes the mutual support of benevolence and propriety, and attaches importance to ethics and the relationship with family. Confucian doctrine on the origin, nature, and function of worshipping and rituals is an important part of Confucian religious views. Confucianism has many documents and data recorded about the specifications of the offerings and worshipping rituals. Currently, the earliest ancient documents recorded the worshipping rituals and offerings from the Classic Confucianism books the *Rites of Zhou* 《周禮》, the *Book of Rites* 《禮記》, etc. From the *Annotations and Commentary of Zhou Li* 《周禮訂義》 describes that “the major affairs of the country are worshipping and military affairs.”⁶⁴ It was set that the worship and the military were at the same level, showing the importance of worshipping in social life. It is also seen that the emperor had already attached great importance to worship and had strict requirements for ritual offerings as early as the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770–256 BC) and the Warring States Period (475–221 BC). The *Book of Rites* 《禮記》 depicted the different rituals that would be applied towards different objects of worship. It showed that the ancients already worshipped and passed down to the later generations, which still influences the Chinese people nowadays.

In addition, Confucianism have established a ritual system for the ancestors, ghosts and gods for the descendants to follow. It believes in “serving the dead as if they were alive”

⁶⁴ The original text stated in the *Annotations and Commentary of Zhou Li* 《周禮訂義》: 「鄭引春秋傳云國之大事，在祀與戎，證此大事是戎事。」 (Wang, Song 960-1279 AD).

事死如事生⁶⁵, which means that the descendants should treat the deceased with the same respect as when they were alive. Therefore, building the mausoleum or tombs, the burial items and the offerings should all be given the same as when the ancestors were in another realm. This concept has deeply influenced Chinese worship culture.

Confucianism in Hong Kong is not popular from a religious perspective, there is no single individual temple to worship Confucius. Instead, Confucianist ideas are integrated into the lives of the people of Hong Kong. For example, Confucian ideas such as obeying parents and respecting elders are spread from childhood in schools, family and media, etc. In general, filial piety includes both life and the afterlife⁶⁶. Worshipping ancestors is a way to express filial piety⁶⁷. Moreover, Confucianism set a regulation of the offerings, with different worshipping objects giving different offerings.

During the development of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, the boundaries between the three teachings 三教 have become blurred. In the beginning, the three teachings were completely independent of each other. Later, they influenced and merged with each other and finally formed a Chinese cultural religion that integrated the "three teachings". The three teaching methods are both independent of each other and yet mutually inclusive and integrated, forming a system. It is also called "three teachings harmonious as one" 三教合一. This is particularly found in giving offers. For example, giving Joss candles and Joss sticks can be found in Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism's worship rituals in Hong Kong.

Primiano proposed the concept of "vernacular religion", stating that what really exists is "living religion", ongoing vernacular practice, and various interpretations and expressions of religion. The individual is the real "centre" of vernacular practice, and at

⁶⁵ The philosophical book *Master Xun*, also known as *Xunzi* 《荀子》 was written by Xunzi and his disciples in the Warring States period (475-221 BC). It elaborated Confucianism in the pre-Qin period, which is the most important work of Confucianism.

⁶⁶ The Confucian philosopher, Xunzi 荀子 stated in *Xunzi Lilun* 《荀子·禮論》「卒禮者，以生者飾死者也，大象其生以送其死也。故事死如生，事亡如存，終始一也。」 (Xunzi, Warring States Period 475-221 BC).

⁶⁷ In the original text stated in the *Book on filial piety*, also known as *Xiaojing* 《孝經》「孝子之事親也，居則致其敬，養則致其樂，病則致其憂，喪則致其哀，祭則致其嚴。五者備矣，然後能事親。」 (Chen, Ming 1368-1644 AD).

the individual level, all religious practices are popular and involved. According to this approach, the vernacular religion in Hong Kong originated from the interaction between various traditions, including Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, worship of nature, ancestors and other local divine and demonic entities. Among these vernacular beliefs and practices, there is a lack of a unified system. Instead, it leads to the vernacular religion becoming unique, decentralised, spontaneous and a lot non-institutionalised. This kind of “living religion” is also reflected in Hong Kong's occasions. In the worshipping rituals, the offerings and rituals of each temple are different. Everyone has a kind of customary worship ritual, which means practitioners can follow their own experience or way to give offerings and the temple staff usually does not interfere with it. This can also be found in ancestor worship.

3. Application and Interpretation of the Offerings

Giving offerings can be categorized as asking gods for blessings or wishes, expressing filial piety to ancestors and accumulating merits 積功德 (Cantonese: zik1 gung1 dak1) when worshipping ghosts in Hong Kong. In traditional Chinese culture, "merits" usually refer to the good deeds people do, such as the acts of helping others, or the behaviors that are beneficial to society and others. These behaviors not only improve the lives of others, but also, in turn, improve the givers' own realm. Chanting the Buddha, reciting sutras, and giving offerings to homeless souls are some of the ways to accumulate merits. Therefore, giving offerings in a way not only helps and comforts the ghosts but also represents a way to accumulate their own merits for an individual or a family to improve their luck or reduce their negative karma.

The offerings to gods and ancestors are quite different. Some of the interviewees who worship at the temple only give Joss sticks, while all 10 interviewees mentioned that they worshipped ancestors whom they would give Joss Paper Ingots, Joss Candles and Joss Sticks. Nevertheless, one of Kaye's beliefs is Tantric and she does not prepare anything for burning; she donates some "incense and oil money" 香油錢 instead.

3.1 The Purposes of Giving Offerings

Among 33 practitioners, only two interviewees did not have any worshipping habits, one interviewee worships ancestors only and the other one performs the "Praying for Four Corners rituals" when moving to a new home, which will be discussed in a later section. The remaining interviewees had different purposes for giving offerings when worshipping gods and ancestors. 22 interviewees' worshipping purposes are more than one.

The reasons why believers worship gods can be classified as personal, family, or universal, referring to the entire world. Generally, believers most pray for "Peace and safety" for themselves or for their family. Personal purposes include praying for blessings, good health, things going well, eliminating disasters, solving problems, working, having babies, etc. A few interviewees mentioned they visited the temple as a habit or a visit. Moreover, "pray for blessing" is the most common worshipping purpose, then by "good health". One

common habit of worshipping in Hong Kong is “a clash with Tai Sui 犯太歲,” which will be discussed later. Furthermore, family purposes include prayer for having a baby, the children’s education, and good business and safety. The most common purpose is “peace and safety for the family” 闔家平安. One interviewee mentioned that one of her purposes is to eliminate the disaster of the world.

When people go to worship and pray for blessings from the gods, it is called “praying to the gods” 求神. If the wishes come true, people have to go back to the temple to thank the gods and it is called “return to the Gods” 還神. Therefore, Hong Kong people often go to the temple to “pray to the gods” to bless for the new year at the beginning of the Lunar New Year and to “return to the Gods” at the end of the Lunar New Year to thank the gods for their blessings for the whole year. It is the same as other blessings; for example, if a couple prays to have a baby, they have to go back to the temple to give offerings to thank God for granting their wish. One of the temple staff mentioned that offerings like Joss paper ingots, Joss candles and Joss sticks, tea leaves and candies will be prepared for “praying to the gods” at the beginning of the Lunar New Year; she called it a “making blessing”, 作福. If things go well, prepare Joss paper ingots, Joss candles and Joss sticks, fruits and other items to “return to god” at the end of the Lunar Year.

It can be seen that most interviewees worship the gods because the objectives are for themselves or their families. However, one of the interviewees said that the purpose of the worship was to celebrate the birthday of the gods, and the two stated “gratitude to the gods”. Different celebrations and activities to celebrate the birthdays of different gods can be found in Hong Kong, such as the Tin Hau Festival, Lady Golden Flower or Kam Fa Festival, etc.

On the other hand, the purposes of interviewees worshipping ancestors are less about hoping for a blessing or asking for something; most of the interviewees stated that ancestral worship is expressing filial piety, following the family’s habits, visiting the ancestors, etc. The most common reason is memorialising their ancestors.

The Hungry Ghost Festival is a festival related to worshipping ancestors and homeless ghosts, expressing people’s filial piety and performing Buddhist or Taoist rituals to appease and pray for the dead to accumulate merits. Interviewee Michael stated that

offerings given to homeless ghosts are just like spending money to eliminate disasters and to avoid being harassed by them.

Some interviewees mentioned that more offerings will be given in the Lunar Calendar on the first and fifteenth days of every month 初一十五⁶⁸ no matter whether they worship at home or in the temples. In Hong Kong, some people go to a temple to worship the gods, give more offerings to the gods or have vegetable meals only on these two days every month.

Mr Ngan mentioned, *“I go to the temples to worship on the first day of every month in the Lunar Calendar.”*

Ms. Kwok said, *“I gave one more large Joss stick to all gods with three Joss sticks when she still housed shrines 20 years ago, while giving three Joss sticks on the regular days.”*

Wing stated, *“My father gives 3 Joss sticks to Tudi gong twice daily, morning and night and will give five Joss sticks on the first and fifteenth days of every month in the Lunar Calendar.”*

Even if an individual has no religion, they can still go to any temple to give offerings and pray for blessings. Since there are many gods in Taoism, Hong Kong people often listen to the opinion from family or friends and choose the temples that are efficient 好靈, which means the gods will make their wishes come true. Especially when they had specific purposes, such as praying to have babies, they did not mind spending time travelling to the most efficient temples. Interviewees Ms. Wong and Mr. Chow took almost 2 hours from their home to an island because they had heard that this is an efficient temple to pray for wishes. Efficiency is the essential reason for them to choose. Another interviewee, Jade, also stated that her friend recommended her, which is why she went to the temple, which was not near her home. However, another argument is that interviewee Ms. Chan said she heard from other people that choosing the temples near your home would be more efficient. Nonetheless, these interviewees still have the same thoughts about the

⁶⁸ The first and fifteenth days of every month in the Lunar Calendar 初一十五 is the first and the fifteenth day of each lunar month. It is also a vegetarian days in Buddhism. People regard it as a day to worship gods and pray for blessings.

efficiency of the gods. On the other hand, another interviewee mentioned that it was because of the convenient location for her.

Two interviewees mentioned that they gave offerings that were related to their dreams. Mr. Kwan is a Catholic, but he also went to the temple to worship because, for more than 30 years, he said:

“Many things were not going well at that time, and suddenly, one night, I had a dream that Kwan Tai (or the God of War) would help me. Then I started to worship Kwan Tai, and Kwan Tai really helped me.”

In another interview, Michael noted that his dream related to worshipping his ancestor:

“My uncle passed away in 2019; the 'farewell services in hospitals' were chosen 院出, which means that the deceased is directly sent to the crematorium in a hospital or public mortuary. No rituals were done, and offerings were burnt to him. However, I dreamed of him two to three years ago, somehow. In the dream, he said there were no clothes to wear underneath. My mother and I immediately bought something and burned it for him.”

People have various reasons to worship, for themselves, family or the world. They usually pray for good health, things going smoothly, etc. Some of the interviewees have no specific purpose, just a habit of worship. Furthermore, it can be categorized as repetitive worship, such as the first and fifteenth days of every month on the Lunar Calendar and a one-time worship, such as praying for a clash with Tai Sui”. Moreover, worshipping gods and ancestors is not limited to believers of other religions and non-believers. They gave offerings for different reasons and even because of dreams. Hong Kong scholar Tik Sang Liu also points out that regardless of whether people believe in the gods or not, Hong Kong people can go to any temple to pray for their wishes, and when things are done, they can return to thank the gods for blessing (Liu 2012: 425). This characteristic of worshipping "whenever necessary" shows that institutionalized religion, i.e. Taoism, and non-institutionalized religion, i.e. folk religions, can be closely bonded to people's lives but can also be in a loose relationship based on personal choice.

3.2 The Procedure of Giving Offerings

The procedure of giving offerings to gods, ghosts and ancestors is similar. Simply state that people will light up the Joss candles first, then the Joss sticks. Lastly, the Joss paper ingots will be burned in a Joss paper burner. However, believers may not give the same offerings; therefore, everyone's procedures differ. During my field trip, some believers only bought incense and nothing else. However, some believers buy all Joss paper ingots, Joss candles and Joss sticks, including three large dragon incense and the temple staff assist them during worship. Therefore, everyone's procedures are different. Nonetheless, if believers prepared all three types of offerings, the procedures generally would be the same: lighting up the Joss candles, placing the Joss incense and finally burning the Joss paper ingots. Among the 28 interviewees who went to temples to worship, only 11 interviewees gave Joss Paper Ingots, Joss Candles and Joss Sticks. However, all 28 interviewees gave Joss sticks in the temples.

3.2.1 Worshipping at Home and Temples

People giving offerings at home usually just give Joss Sticks if they have enshrined gods at home. The interviewee Mr. Yu said that he did not want too much smoke created at home. The procedure of giving offerings at home, according to Ms. Kwok, was to give three Joss sticks to each god. Starting from Guan Yin, Tian 天神 and the God of Kitchen and lastly to Tudi Gong.



Figure 6. Joss sticks and other food offerings are given to the gods who house at home

Nevertheless, the worship procedures in temples are different. Every temple has its own worship procedure, although it is not compulsory to follow their instructions. Therefore, every believer is able to go their own way based on their experiences or follow the instructions from the temple staff. Most interviewees mentioned that they would worship the temple's main god first⁶⁹. Some would go clockwise to place Joss sticks from the temple inside and then place the incense sticks outside the temple or go back to the main hall to continue worship.

However, the offering shop owner, Mr. Nam, argued that whether it goes to the columbarium to worship ancestors or temples to worship gods, people should first offer to the Tudi gong or the god of the landlord. Based on his explanation, the procedure to worship is to give offerings to the Tudi gong first, then to the homeless souls if there is an area for them. Finally, go to worship the ancestors.

Interviewee Wing mentioned that in the Taoist temple “Yuen Ching Kok”, where she worshipped, there was no area for burning Joss paper. Followed by the instruction from the temple staff, she just gave one Joss stick to each incense holder. The procedure of giving offerings in Yuen Ching Kok was to give the Joss sticks to the God of the Landlord first, then go to the Wong Tai Sin, who is housed in the main hall, and then the other vice gods.

Traditionally, people give three Joss sticks to the gods, in the Taoist and Buddhist Abbey 道觀. However, one of the Buddhist abbeys I have visited is not located on the street but housed in residential buildings without any signage. This hidden Buddhist Abbey houses the main gods from both Taoism and Buddhism, such as: Jiutian Xuannü 九天玄女, Guan Yin, Buddha, Tudi Gong and Tian. This abbey is different from other temples that requested the believers give 14 joss sticks. The worshipping procedure is giving 14 joss sticks to Jiutian Xuannü and three Joss sticks to other gods. The temple keeper explained that it was the message from Jiutian Xuannü asking for 14 joss sticks.

⁶⁹ In Hong Kong's Taoist temple, there is usually more than one God housed. The main god will be named after the temple's name; other gods will be housed as the vice gods. The main god is in the middle of the main hall, while other vice gods have houses everywhere inside and outside the temple. Each god has their own incense holder. Therefore, there is more than one incense holder in the temple.

3.2.2 Worshipping in Festivals: Hungry Ghost Festivals

In this festival, people in Hong Kong usually worship their ancestors and ghosts. The location of giving offerings in Hungry Ghost Festivals differs; some people perform this ritual on the street. Interviewee Michael shared his procedure:

“Joss candles, Joss sticks, Joss coins, squared paper clothes with different colors and rectangle-shaped Joss paper, paper clothes, reincarnation papers 往生錢, paper gold and paper silver were prepared. In addition, some food offerings were prepared, such as tofu, longan, bean sprouts and rice. We set up the food offerings, lit a pair of Joss candles and burned the Joss incense on the street. There was no procedure for burning the offerings. Also, we split the Joss coins, which were circle-shaped paper with glitter, on the street but did not burn them. It is like the coins that people threw real cents in the old times to give the homeless souls travel use. During worship, I also said, “Receive it” (收嘢啦).”



Figure 7. Participants burned the Joss paper by themselves in a Hungry Ghost Festival

The worshipping procedure during the Hungry Ghost Festival was different; interviewee Ms. Lee's family had a different approach, her worship objects were the gods and ancestors, but did not include ghosts. Her family prepared offerings like roasted pork, fruits, wine, Joss papers, Joss candles and Joss sticks. Firstly, they worshipped gods who were enshrined at home by giving three pairs of Joss candles respectively at the front door for Tudi Gong, at the kitchen for the kitchen of god and at the window where no shrine was placed. Then, the next part was burning two packs of ancestors' paper bags, but Joss candles and Joss sticks were not placed on the street.

3.2.3 Worshipping Rituals: The Clash with Tai Sui

Another purpose for worshipping God is because of the clash with Tai Sui 犯太歲⁷⁰. Offending Tai Sui is derived from the traditional Chinese zodiac numerology, saying that in a particular year, your zodiac earth branch and the current year Tai Sui conflict may affect the overall fortune. Different types of Tai Sui have different effects on the zodiac fortune, which may affect changes in career, wealth, health and even relationships in a bad way. Therefore, people have to "pray Tai Sui" 攝太歲 to resolve this problem. The interviewee, Ms. Leung, shared her experience about the "return to god" because she had a clash with Tai Sui 犯太歲 and returned to Tai Sui at the end of the Lunar Calendar Year in 2022. She went to Wong Tai Sin temple, which is very systematic; the temple staff gave her Joss sticks and she just followed the instructions. She gave three eco-friendly Joss sticks to three Tai Sui respectively, including the god who is responsible for managing the Tai Sui, considered the main god. Then, the Tai Sui, who is one on duty that year and finally the Tai Sui is related to her birth.

3.2.4 Worshipping Rituals: Praying for Four Corners rituals

When people move to a new home or a company to a new venue in Hong Kong, "Praying for Four Corners rituals" 拜四角 when moving to a new home, they pray that everything will go smoothly and people who live in this home will be safe. Interviewee Ms Chan,

⁷⁰ Tai Sui is a star in ancient Chinese astronomy and astrology, which has the same orbit as Jupiter but in the opposite direction. It later evolved into a god in Taoism and folk beliefs. In Chinese folk beliefs, people believe that when Tai Sui moves to a certain zodiac sign, it will be unfavourable to that zodiac sign, and things will go wrong that year, there will be big changes in life, or mood swings will be greater. This is the so-called "clash with Tai Sui" (Chen 2007: 7-38).

who moved to a new home in 2024, stated that this was the second time she had performed this ritual. Therefore, she followed the suggestions from two offering shop owners, including the one she bought offerings last time when she moved home. Firstly, it was to pick up a day 擇日 by Google for a suitable day to worship. Then she also checked the calendar, which stated “suitable or not suitable” 宜/忌, “worship” 祭祀 or “not suitable for major events” 大事不宜, to pick the good days and avoid bad days for her moving. The results showed that she performed this ritual better in the morning or completed the whole ritual before 5. After picking a good day, she prepared five kits of paper offerings for the “praying for four corners rituals”. The offerings shop owner also briefly told her the procedure. Other offerings were required: five pieces of fatty pork and five pears. When she went to the butcher shop and told the staff she would perform the ritual, he cut five pieces of fatty pork and one piece of fatty pork was the biggest. She stated:

“The ritual procedure is to allocate all the offerings from the middle and four corners, where counting from the entrance in a clockwise direction of the home. For example, in my home, one corner is in the living room, two corners are in the master bedroom, another bedroom and the remaining corner is in the kitchen. The biggest fatty pork was placed in the middle of the home. Starting from the middle, I lit up a pair of Joss candles and three Joss sticks in the middle, then started worship while I bowed and held the Joss paper ingots and said Tse’s family (her husband’s surname) had already bought this home. Today, we are here to perform the ritual and pray for the whole family’s safety and round 家宅平安, everything goes smoothly and good health. Then, repeat the same step in a clockwise direction in each corner. When all the Joss candles and Joss sticks burned, we packed and threw all the offerings and went down to find an area that was allowed to burn the paper offerings.”

The whole ritual was about 30-40 mins. All the fatty pork and the fruits were thrown away after the ritual.

3.2.5 Worshipping Ancestors in a Cemetery

Ancestral worship is a part of the folk culture in Hong Kong. Among the 10 interviewees who mentioned that they worship ancestors, nine said they worship ancestors yearly at the Ching Ming Festival and five of them also worship their ancestors during the Double Ninth Festival, which means that they are worshipping ancestors once to twice a year. A few interviewees stated that they also worship the Mid-Autumn Festival or Hungry Ghost Festival. In Hong Kong, people can arrange for the deceased to be cremated or buried. Therefore, worshipping ancestors is roughly divided into cemeteries or columbaria.

Interviewee Michael worshipped his ancestors, who had been buried in the cemetery. Usually, his mother brought two sets of offerings, one set for “Houtu” or the God of the Earth 后土 and another set was for his ancestors. Their procedure was to worship Houtu first, then their ancestors.

3.2.6 Worshipping Ancestors in the Columbarium

Mr. Ha mentioned that his ancestors rested in a columbarium shrined with Confucianism, Buddhist and Taoist gods. Therefore, when he worshipped his ancestors, he simultaneously worshipped the gods Guan Yin and Dizàng 地藏. The procedure was also to light up the Joss candles and Joss sticks, then burn the Joss papers. However, he pointed out that first, they worshipped the gods, then the ancestors. If the gods are on the same ranking, such as Guan Yin and Dizàng, they are of the same class of bodhisattva. He would make offerings to them at the same time. If he sees Guan Yin first, he will give the offerings to Guan Yin first and vice versa. According to the ranking, Tudi Gong would be the last one to worship.

Another interviewee Kay stated that her family was a very traditional family. Men and women respond to different duties, such as cleaning the photo on the columbarium niche and lighting up the candles. While setting up the offerings will be the responsibility of women. Men must be the first group to give Joss sticks; then women will be the second.

There are various situations about worshipping in Hong Kong, people gave different offerings according to the worship objects and purposes, then they would give different offerings. There is a procedure when worshipping in temples, but it is not enforced strictly.

If there are gods' houses in the places where ancestors live, people worship gods first, then ancestors.

3.2.7 During Worshipping: “Talk” to Gods

Some interviewees pointed out that they would “talk” to gods 稟神 during worshipping, which means asking the gods for something like blessings, good health, etc. After placing the Joss candles, they usually hold the Joss sticks or Joss Papers and say what they want the god to bless them. Some interviewees would say it out, but some say it in their hearts. Interviewee Ms. Chan shared the content when she prayed to the god, including naming the main god first, followed by saying the worship year, month, date and the worshipper’s information like the name, birthday, birth year, and residential address. Finally, people start what they are asking for.

Interviewee Ms. Cheung also shared her thoughts on her “pray to God” rituals: “I remembered I kneel and say my name and my husband’s name (to God), our Chinese Zodiacs⁷¹. Also, the specific purpose of worshipping god, which was having a baby in the Year of the Dragon, went smoothly.”

Both the content when praying to gods is similar; the believers have to say it as precisely as possible and let the gods understand their objectives, which enhances the probability of making their wishes come true.

3.2.8 During Worshipping: Gestures and Expressions

Gestures when giving offerings, people either stand or kneel; some of the interviewees will place them in front of the forehead, the face or their heart. Three interviewees mentioned that they would kneel to the gods if there were some cushions in temples; nine interviewees stated that they would kneel. Five interviewees stated they are at will, which means they are not so strict about the gestures. The design of the temples also influenced

⁷¹ The Chinese zodiac is a way of recording years in which one animal is used to represent each year, 12 years as a cycle. Every person has an animal as their zodiac sign in the year they were born, which is a folk method used by the Chinese to calculate age. The twelve zodiac animals in order are rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig.

the gesture of the believer. In Ms Wong's interview, they mentioned whether there is a cushion in the temples, they would kneel if it does and vice versa.



Figure 8. People kneel when giving offerings in the Hungry Ghost Festival

3.3 Taboos

When worshipping, the taboos of worship vary from person to person. In Hong Kong, taboos are generally not written down in ancestor worship or temples and people mostly pass them on by word of mouth. The word “taboos” come from the Polynesian Islands in the central Pacific Ocean, firstly recorded by James Cook “...; which word has a very comprehensive meaning; but, in general, signifies that a thing is forbidden” (Cook & King, 1784: pp.286) It means that something is not allowed to do. Sigmund Freud further explained that: “For us the meaning of taboo branches off into two opposite directions. On the one hand it means to us sacred, consecrated: but on the other hand, it means, uncanny, dangerous, forbidden, and unclean. The opposite for taboo is designated in Polynesian by the word *noa* and signifies something ordinary and generally accessible. Thus something like the concept of reserve inheres in taboo; taboo expresses itself essentially in prohibitions and restriction.” (Freud, 1918: 30). In this sense, the taboo is forbidden to approach "sacred" things or "unclean" things. Otherwise, one will be punished in some way. I remember when I was a child, I went to the temple with my family to worship the gods. After I lit the incense, I wanted to blow out the flame with

my mouth, but my family didn't allow me to do so. The reason was that it is believed that the human mouth is the gateway for humans to create verbal karma; therefore, the mouth is unclean. Joss incense is offered to the gods; it would be disrespectful to the gods and would blow unclean air onto the Joss sticks if I blow it with my mouth. My family told me not to do so. Otherwise, I would offend the gods and could be punished by the gods, like bringing bad luck.

Therefore, the concept of taboos is also found in Hong Kong's vernacular rituals; 25 out of 41 interviewed believers stated they had taboos when worshipping, 10 of them were aged 40-49 and 15 were females. Among them, 10 of the interviewees have a university degree or above. Taboos can be categorized as being aware of the "use of the words" like do not say nonsense and "do not speak foul language"; "dressing" like "do not wear clothes too sexy", "wearing something not too colourful when worshipping ancestors" and "take off the cap before entering the temple". Ms. Chan mentioned that when she performed the "praying for Four Corners" rituals, avoiding moving home in July (i.e. Hungry Ghost Festival) on the Lunar Calendar was taboo. The remaining 16 interviewees out of 41 stated they had no taboos when worshipping, six of them were aged 40-49 and eight were males.

In Chinese folk beliefs and Taoist customs, it is said that when women have their period, they are considered "unclean". They cannot give incense, participate in temple worship, or even enter temples to worship; otherwise, it is believed that they will bring bad luck. Nine interviewees mentioned that females could not worship gods or ancestors during menstruation; six of them completed primary school and secondary school, respectively and five of them are aged 40-49. All the temple staff that I have interviewed stated that women cannot worship gods, cannot enter the temples and cannot touch any incense holder because of dirt when having a period. If, for some reason, the woman has to enter the temple, use a pomelo leaf to clean her hands and do not touch anything related to the gods. Nonetheless, Mandy, the Hungry Ghost Festival organiser, said it does not matter. Wing also believed that gods were kind and generous and would not mind such things.

On the other hand, the two Hungry Ghost Festival organizers stated that they do not have any taboos generally. Mandy, the organizer of Shaukeiwan Nam On Fong Residents Association, hosted one of the Hungry Ghost Festivals in Hong Kong, stating that they

do not have any taboos, but rather it is a restriction that no “meat offerings” are given in the first two days of the festival. Another Hungry Ghost Festival hosted by the Ping Chau Chung Yuen Jiao (Yu Lan) Festival, one of the organisers, Mr. Lam, said that they did not have any taboos or restrictions; he believed that the most important thing when worshipping was the “heart to gods”. No matter what kind or the amount of the offerings, the most important thing is to be sincere to the gods.

Although some of the interviewees stated that generally they pay attention to something when worshipping, the general principle is not to offend the gods and ancestors and to be respectful during worship. In the temples I visited on my field trip, none of the taboos were written down to prevent people from making mistakes. These taboos are mostly passed down verbally or by various social media platforms. There is no gender distinction in terms of having taboos. However, according to the interviews conducted, older generations usually have more taboos to pay attention to. Some people believe that taboos should not be crossed. At the same time, some people believe that gods are very reasonable and will not be angry about so-called taboos. The most important thing in worship is the "sincere". As long as people have a “sincere” mind and respect the gods, there are no taboos.

3.4 Before and After Giving Offerings

Most interviewees mentioned that nothing changed after worshipping, but their minds and hearts were more peaceful and they felt satisfied. Ms. Chan mentioned that worshipping god is a Chinese psychotherapy. Mr. Tsui used the term “Placebo” in English to describe his psychologically comfortable feeling. While four interviewees mentioned that something changed after worshipping. Mr. Ngan said that before worshipping Kwan Tai, everything was not smooth. However, things changed when he started worshipping and succeeded in many things. Sometimes, he prayed for good health or other things and believed Kwan Tai was helpful.

Jade said, *“It was not so smooth before worshipping, but it became smooth afterwards.”*

Ms. Tse said, *“Nothing had happened already, which means it was smooth.”*

Mr. Wu said, *“Asking for a blessing when my wife’s business was not good. The indication from the gods would be good in two months. Then it happened.”*

Although there are still taboos in worship, they generally behave themselves and do not offend the gods. There is no written taboo, it is usually passed down by word of mouth. According to the interviewees, they did not experience any changes after the worship, but they felt more peaceful in their minds. Worship can be regarded as a kind of psychological therapy.

4. The Awareness and Transformation of the Offerings in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong's Taoist temples and the columbaria, the believers usually gave three pieces of Joss sticks. However, the two Buddhist monasteries I have been to in Hong Kong also provide the niche placement service, which means that people also burn the Joss papers for their ancestors inside a Buddhist monastery area. Only lamps are lit in front of Buddhist statues, flowers and fruits are placed on the table in front of the statue, and no Joss paper is offered to Buddha.



Figure 9. Only flowers and food offerings are given to Buddhist deities

Among 17 believers who had given Joss paper ingots, eight did not know the meaning of the Joss paper ingots. The most common answer is money, which four interviewees answered. Three interviewees believed this was a gift. The remaining interviewees stated that it is tradition and one said Joss candles were money and gifts.

Among 33 believers, 12 stated that they do not know the meaning of the Joss sticks. The answers vary. Three said offerings and the other three interviewees said that Joss sticks are food for ancestors, which are the most common answers. Two interviewees said it is a tradition, two said it is a custom, another two said it means respect and two said it is a

gift. The remaining answer is a communication device, purifying the heart. One said that three Joss sticks represent Heaven, Earth, and humans, and it is a common practice to give Joss sticks when going to the temple.

Among 21 believers who offer Joss candles, 10 interviewees stated that they do not know the meaning of Joss Candles. The answers are also very different; two said it is guidance from the ancestors, two interviewees said it is like a light to inform the gods of the arrival of the believers. Other answers, such as a gift, let the deity know who is here and what wishes the believers bring to the gods.

Some interviewees relied on the shop offering owners, who told the shop owner their purposes and the offering object, the owners would give them what they should buy for the worshipping rituals. However, among the four interviewed shop owners, two of them could not answer the meaning of the offerings. On the other hand, all the shop owners offering would tell the customers the procedure of the worship rituals or if they need to buy additional offerings. For example, I have observed a customer who moved into a new house and needs to perform the “praying for four corners rituals”; he told the customer to buy five sets of fatty pork and other fruits, as well as the procedure of the rituals. Thus, this is another example of the offerings and worship rituals spread by word of mouth.



Figure 10. Offerings shop in Hong Kong

4.1 The Transformation of the Offerings in Hong Kong

There are various Joss sticks nowadays, some printed with Chinese characters. One temple staff member told me it was because of the business. He said the fancier Joss sticks can sell at higher prices than the traditional Joss sticks. Joss paper ingots and Joss candles are less transformed.

Whenever I watched the videos showing the renovation of apartments in these 10-15 years, people no longer left a cabinet for placing shrines or ancestors at home in Hong Kong. In addition, when I visited my friends' houses when they moved out of their original families, they did not put them in either. Interviewee Ms Kwok said they used to house ancestors at home; however, more than 20 years ago, they were no longer placed at home and moved to a nunnery. It is because the apartments in Hong Kong are too small, with no room, also the younger generation does not feel like taking care. Moreover, she said that the ancestors' urns moved to the columbarium; someone takes care of them, giving them Joss sticks every day.

Home renovation and moving home are a chance for people to reconsider how to handle the gods and ancestors' shrines at home. Interviewee Larissa mentioned that after moving house, her uncle moved out, who was the one who took care of this, and they no longer place any ancestors at home.

Since the environmentally friendly issues, laws, and regulations in Hong Kong have been changed, most temples have had to follow strict instructions to burn Joss papers, which means believers are not allowed to burn paper themselves. People have to pass them on to the staff to burn. Moreover, most temples do not accept paper offerings that they do not provide or sell. According to the interview with Mr. Ha, he said he used to burn the Joss paper himself in the columbarium for his ancestors. However, one person jumped into the burner a few years ago, and the staff has burned the columbarium since then.

Burning Joss Paper became difficult; interviewee Kaye said her company performed a ritual because of moving to a new office location. However, she could not find anywhere

to burn the paper offerings. Finally, she gave the red packet 利是⁷² to the temple staff to help burn the offerings.

This difficult situation not only happens in the believers but also in the Taoist and Buddhist Abbey 道觀, which is located inside the building without any burner. The interviewee and believer, Mr. Wu, helped the staff burn Joss's paper.

These rules and regulations changed how people in Hong Kong worshipped. Usually, when the descendants burn the Joss paper for their ancestors, they would also say to them, “receive it”, to hope their ancestors listened and picked up the offerings, which is also shown in the previous interviews. Nonetheless, the descendants no longer burn the offerings by themselves and do not tell their ancestors to receive them.

⁷² “Red packet”, also known as “Lai see”, is placing money in a red envelope as a gift symbolising good luck, success and prosperity. Giving away red packets is common in Chinese festivals, especially during the Lunar New Year Festival, to represent wishes for success in everything and good fortune.

5. The Offerings in Macau

During my day trip to Macau, I visited three Taoist temples and three offering shops. Even though the tight schedule, two interviews were conducted, one from the offering shops called Tai Seng Chi Lio Hong 大聖紙料行 and another one was the temple deacon Timothy from Loi Wo Temple 女媧廟. However, no local people visited the shops and temples, because some just took photos while other visitors spoke Mandarin.

Tai Seng Chi Lio Hong 大聖紙料行 Ms Chan said that people in Macau usually give offerings on the first and fifteenth days of the Lunar Calendar. During festivals, people will give offerings to higher-ranking gods. Joss paper is also divided into worshipping objects, such as paper gold and silver for ancestors; Tudi Gong has its own paper clothing and Kwan Tai also has its own paper clothing. Macau's people also enshrine gods at home, such as the God of Heaven 天神, Tudi Gong and fewer people enshrine the God of Kitchen, Five Dragons Landlord, God of Heaven, Guan Yin, God of Wealth and Tin Hau.

She also mentioned that the Joss paper ingots, Joss Candles and Joss Sticks are the main offerings during worship. The meaning of giving three Joss sticks represents harmony between heaven, earth and man, which has an infinite meaning. Also, giving a pair of Joss Candles, double is a good omen. Joss paper Ingot are for worshipping gods. The procedure of giving offerings differs from each temple; it is better to ask the temple priest. The changes in offerings in Macau are minor. All the believers, regardless of age, come to worship.

Furthermore, the gestures and expressions are different when worshipping in Buddhism and Taoism. Buddhists are more pious, that is, to kneel and prostrate. When worshipping in the temples, she stated that one should not step on the temple's threshold, be aware of the clothing, not wear slippers, be respectful and have piety.

There used to be incense factories in Macau, but they are usually produced in mainland China nowadays. However, there are still a few paper offering shops that make incense. Joss paper ingots and Joss Candles are rarely heard of being made in Macau; they are all made in China.

There are no taboos for women's menstruation in Buddhist monasteries, but there are taboos in temples. For example, a woman cannot go to the temple before the baby is one month old, because of the dirt. People also cannot go to the temple after the 100th day of the funeral. If people have to go, they can wash their bodies with pomelo leaves or wrap themselves with two pieces of pomelo leaves to clean themselves.

Another interview from the temple keeper of Loi Wo Temple 女媧廟, Timothy stated that there is a worshipping procedure, but not a strict enforcement for the believers. Traditionally, the procedure starts from indoors and then outdoors. Firstly, worship the main god house inside the hall, 門官, Tudi Gong 地主. After that, worshipping the God of Heaven 當天, another Tudi 土地, Shigandang 石敢當, which is outside the hall. There is something special in this temple; Shigandang is also considered a god of this temple.

As this temple is located on the path to the most famous tourist spots in Macau, all the people who came to worship were tourists during my observation because they spoke Mandarin but not the vernacular language, Cantonese. According to Timothy, the Macau people, such as the nearby restaurant owners, also came to worship.

The offerings are similar to those of Hong Kong's Taoist Temple, such as Joss paper ingots, candles, and sticks. The Macau government has regulations prohibiting burning the offerings inside the temple; this temple burns the offerings outside.

A characteristic of this temple is a large bowl in the front of the main god's table containing water, pomelo leaves and money; it wishes all believers good fortune, which I have not seen in Hong Kong's Taoist temples.



Figure 11. A big bowl contained pomelo leaves, coins and water, next to the main god houses in the Loi Wo Temple, Macau.

The number of Joss candles and Joss sticks is the same as in Hong Kong, a pair of Joss candles, meaning good things come twice. 18 Joss sticks are given in all six incense holders, meaning that each has three Joss sticks, and it is a tradition to give three Joss sticks in this temple. Also, the Joss paper ingots are just like people's wallets to hold money.

Timothy also believes that the worshipping culture in Hong Kong and Macau has changed a little over time, while Macau has relatively minor changes. Hong Kong people came from everywhere; therefore, different organizations host the Hungry Ghost Festivals, such as the local (i.e. Cantonese) and Chaozhou, which cannot be found in this kind of variety of organizations in Macau. He further said the Loi Wo Temple held the Hungry Ghost Festivals beforehand and there would be a *Ulkāmukha Pretarāja* 大士王 made by themselves. However, they did not have a big burner and lacked money. Therefore, no more Hungry Ghost Festivals were held by them. Compared to Hong Kong, there were fewer Fujianese and Chaozhou people in Macau. However, there were more local people, such as those from Guangdong Province. Therefore, Macau's religious sects were simpler, while Hong Kong has a thriving variety of religions and rituals in various forms and styles.

“The Manufacture of Incense Sticks” is on Macau's Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage. However, no Joss sticks are made in Macau nowadays, since making Joss sticks requires a large area to produce them. He has no impression of Joss candles being made in Macau. However, Joss paper ingots and other Joss papers were made in Macau in the old days. Timothy made their Joss paper clothes for the gods using the rubbing technique. He further mentioned that different gods have paper clothes, just like Hong Kong.

After conducting two interviews in Macau, I found similarities and differences between the offerings given in Hong Kong, such as the worshipping objects, which also included gods, ancestors and ghosts. However, the Hungry Ghosts Festival scales in Hong Kong are larger than in Macau. Furthermore, the worship procedure at Loi Wo Temple differs from that of Hong Kong's Taoist temples. Nonetheless, the believers do not strictly follow the procedure in both cities.

Conclusion

This study examined the origin, application, interpretation, awareness and transformation of the offerings, including the Joss paper ingots, Joss candles and Joss sticks in Hong Kong and Macau. Furthermore, this research focuses on three main aspects of the definition and the origin, exploring what, when, why, and how Hong Kong people give offerings during worship and explores these offerings in Macau.

The offerings have been used to worship gods, ancestors and ghosts since ancient China and related artefacts have been unearthed in archaeological sites and ancient books. Its usage and meaning have changed throughout history because of its integration with Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. From a Buddhist perspective, there is no burning Joss paper practice; however, the meaning of Joss paper differs in material, pattern, and appearance, depending on the objects, levels, and purposes in Taoism. Common purposes include replenishing the treasury, repaying life debts, praying for blessings, eliminating disasters and rewarding, etc. From a temple staff in Hong Kong, he explained the function of Joss paper ingots like a wallet to hold money.

Joss candles have various meanings from a Taoist perspective, providing light to dispel darkness, shining through the heavens, and reaching down to the nine netherworlds of hell. Moreover, lighting enables the souls in the underworld to see a way to escape from the underworld and ascend to heaven. On the other hand, the symbolic meaning of "lamp" is "brightness". Anything illuminating darkness falls within the "lamp" offerings, including candles. A "lamp" means to dispel darkness and bring up the light in Buddhism.

Joss incense can help practitioners reflect on and remind themselves of their cultivation and understand the principles and implications of Buddhist scriptures through the process. On the other hand, burning incense allowed Buddhist disciples to resist worldly temptations and strengthen their beliefs. Furthermore, in Taoism, Joss sticks is similar to Joss Candles, believers have to light up the Joss Candles and Joss Sticks first during worship. Joss Sticks connect the heart, express the faith and wishes to the gods, and feel the true spirit. In addition to the significance of the five offerings, incense also plays an important role in Taoist rituals. The use of incense varies in different rituals to burn

incense, including offerings to the gods, sending messages, resurrection of the souls, purifying the body and mind, removing dirt, getting rid of evil and praying for others.

The reasons why believers worship gods can be classified as personal, family, or the entire world. Generally, believers most prayed for “Peace and safety” for themselves or for their family. Personal purposes include praying for blessings, good health, things going well, eliminating disasters, solving problems, working, having babies, etc. A few interviewees mentioned they visited the temple as a habit, a visit, “good health”, the children’s education, and good business and safety. The most common purpose is “peace and safety for the family”. One interviewee mentioned that one of her purposes is to eliminate the disaster of the world.

The purposes of interviewees worshipping ancestors are less about hoping for a blessing or asking for something, expressing filial piety, following the family’s habits, visiting the ancestors, etc. The most common reason is memorialising their ancestors.

The taboos are forbidden to approach "sacred" things or "unclean" things. Otherwise, one will be punished in some way. For example, blowing out the flame when lighting the Joss sticks was not allowed when I was a child worshipping in the temples with my family. If I did so, I would offend the gods and might be punished by the gods, such as having bad luck. Some interviewee stated that they had no taboos when worshipping. It can be categorized as being aware of the “use of the words” like do not say nonsense and “do not speak foul language”; “dressing” like “do not wear clothes too sexy”, “wearing something not too colourful when worshipping ancestors” and “Take off the cap before entering the temple. In Chinese folk beliefs and Taoist customs, it is said that when women have their period, they are considered "unclean". They cannot give incense, participate in temple worship, or even enter temples to worship. One temple staff stated the same and further explained that women cannot worship gods, cannot enter the temples and cannot touch any incense holder because of dirt when having a period. However, some interviewees mentioned that it does not matter and believed that gods were kind and generous and would not mind such things. There are no taboos if people have a “sincere” mind and respect the gods.

Most interviewees mentioned that nothing changed after worship, but their minds and hearts were more peaceful and satisfied. Few interviewees mentioned that worshipping god is a Chinese psychotherapy and used the term “Placebo” in English to describe their psychologically comfortable feeling. Moreover, some interviewees mentioned that something changed after worshipping. They mentioned that things go well after worshipping, or something like no news is good news.

Comparing the offerings and worshipping rituals to Hong Kong and Macau, there are similarities and differences between them. For example, people in these two cities worship the same gods, such as Tin Hau; they worship ancestors and ghosts in the Hungry Ghost Festivals. However, due to the smaller population in Macau, the scale of the Hungry Ghosts Festival is smaller than in Hong Kong. Furthermore, the worship procedure at Loi Wo Temple differs from that of Hong Kong’s Taoist temples. Nonetheless, no one enforced the procedure strictly in both cities.

Even though people have their explanation, procedure and quantities of the offerings, they give offerings based on occasions and objects. However, I believe that these kinds of differences can be considered as “living heritage”, like what Primiano said, religion is lived in everyday life (Primiano 1995: 45). which means Hong Kong people still give offerings that were inherited from their ancestors, continue these vernacular practices and pass them down to the next generations.

Besides this, this study did not conduct interviews with those under 29 and did not cover offerings in business sectors such as restaurants and mahjong shops. Also, my field trip did not include some festivals, such as Tin Hau’s and Ching Ming festivals. Also, more believers tend to go to the temples to worship the gods in the beginning and the end of Lunar New Year to pray for blessings and return to the gods; therefore, it might be good for the interviewer to conduct interviews and participant observation. Moreover, the field trip in Macau should stay longer to conduct more interviews and participant observations. Furthermore, there are many more Joss papers to be studied, such as the paper gold, paper silver, “Hundreds of solutions”, and clothes for various gods. These parts are worth researching.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Fieldwork sites and dates in Hong Kong and Macau

Date	Location
19 June 2024	Man Mo Temple at Sheung Wan 上環文武廟
20 June 2024	Lei Yue Mu Tin Hau Temple 鯉魚門天后廟
24 June 2024	Three Mountain Kings Temple at Ngau Chi Wan 牛池灣三山國王廟
6 July 2024	Kwan Tai Temple, Sham Shui Po 深水埗關帝廟
7 July 2024	Tin Hau Temple at Peng Chau 坪洲天后廟
7 July 2024	Peng Chau Lung Mo Temple 坪洲龍母廟
8 July 2024	Tin Hau Temple at Cha Kwo Ling 茶果嶺天后廟
9 July 2024	Papier-mâché offering shop next to Wong Tai Sin temple 黃大仙廟衣 紙舖
9 July 2024	Sik Sik Yuen Wong Tai Sin Temple 黃大仙廟
12 July 2024	Yaumatei Tin Hau Temple 油麻地天后廟
13 July 2024	Tam Kung Temple at Shau Kei Wan 筲箕灣譚公廟
13 July 2024	Shau Kei Wan City God Temple 筲箕灣誠隍廟
15 July 2024	Papier-mâché offering shop nearby Po Fuk Hill Cemetery 沙田寶福山衣紙舖
15 July 2024	Po Fook Hill Cemetery 沙田寶福山
18 July 2024	Lo Pan Temple 魯班先師廟
3 August 2024	Sam Tai Tze & Pak Tai Temples 深水埗三太子廟
3 August 2024	Kwan Tai Temple, Sham Shui Po 深水埗關帝廟
5 August 2024	The Yu Lan Festival organized by Shaukeiwan Nam On Fong Residents Association 筲箕灣南安坊坊眾會廣府盂蘭勝會
7 August 2024	Cheung Fei Temple at Shau Kei Wan 筲箕灣張飛廟
7 August 2024	The Yu Lan Festival organised by Shaukeiwan Nam On Fong Residents Association 筲箕灣南安坊坊眾會廣府盂蘭勝會

7 August 2024	Wing Lee Co. (Papier-mâché offering shop) 筲箕灣榮利紙業
9 August 2024	Peng Chau Kam Fa Temple 坪洲金花廟
9 August 2024	Peng Chau Seven Sisters Temple 坪洲七姐廟 (七姐誕)
10 August 2024	Ten Thousand Buddhas Monastery 萬佛寺
13 August 2024	Western Monastery 西方寺
18 August 2024	Tin Hau Temple in Peng Chau 坪洲天后廟
18 August 2024	Ping Chau Chung Yuen Jiao (Yu Lan) Festival 坪洲中元建醮
19 August 2024	Chiu Kiu Yu Lan Festival of Kowloon City 九龍潮僑街坊盂蘭勝會
23 August 2024	Chun Shing Hong (Papier-mâché offering shop) 俊城行紙紮紙舖
24 August 2024	Yuen Ching Kok 元清閣道堂赤松黃大仙廟祠
27 August 2024	(Macau) Tai Seng Chi Lio Hong: 大聖紙料行
27 August 2024	(Macau) Na Tcha Temple 哪吒廟
27 August 2024	(Macau): Loi Wo Temple 女媧廟
29 August 2024	Po Kwong Buddha Hall 普光佛堂 at Chung Ah Mansion

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Appendix: 2.1

The questions to the believers

1. Name:
2. Gender: Male / Female /Others:_____ / Prefer Not to answer
3. Age: 10-19 / 20-29 / 30-39 / 40-49 / 50-59 / 60-69 / 70 or above
4. Education Attainment: Primary School or below / Secondary School / College / University or above /
: _____
5. Place of birth:
6. Place of residence:
7. Occupation:
8. Belief: Buddhism / Taoism / Folk religions / Others: _____ / No belief
9. Place, date, and Time of worship
10. Number of worshippers and with whom.
11. Why do you choose to visit this temple?
12. How many times have you worshipped? Please state how long you have been worshipping.
13. When did you worship for the first time?
14. How often do you worship?
15. What is the purpose of worshipping?
16. What offerings have been prepared?
17. How much have you spent on the offerings?
18. Where have you bought the offerings?
19. Why did you buy these offerings?
20. How did you know to buy these offerings? Who told you to do so?
21. Why did you buy these offerings?
22. Do you know the meaning of these offerings?
If you do, please state the meanings:
24. Please tell us the procedure for worshipping.
25. Is there any special gesture or anything to say? (For example: do we put our hands on our forehead when offering incense? Bowing? What about burning joss candles and joss paper ingot?)

26. What about the quantity of offerings given? (For example, the difference between using 1 joss stick and 3 joss sticks; are the candles a pair? Do you know the meaning
27. Do you know any taboos during worship?
28. If things go wrong, what would you do to?
29. Do you feel any differences before and after worshipping?
30. Are there any statues of gods or ancestors enshrined in your home?
31. Did you worship gods or ancestors at home when you were a child?
32. If there were offerings when I was a child but not now, why are they not being offered at home now?
33. What offerings items will be used for worship at home?
34. Others:

Appendix: 2.2

The questions for the offering shop owners

1. How long have you been working in this industry?
2. What products does this store sell?
3. Please describe in detail when and why this temple was established.
4. Why was the shop open here?
5. Who usually comes to visit?
 - I. locals/tourists
 - II. Gender
 - III. Age
6. When do most people buy the offerings? When is the off-season?
7. Are the offerings sold in this store made in Hong Kong?
 - I. If so, can you tell us the company's information?
 - II. If not, where is it manufactured?
8. Hong Kong used to be a major producer of joss sticks; how many Hong Kong
9. manufacturers are still making them?
10. Were joss paper ingots and joss candles previously made in Hong Kong?
 - I. If so, can you tell us the company's information?
 - II. If not, where is it manufactured?
11. What products are included in Joss Ingots, Joss Candle and Joss Sticks?
12. Please state the meaning of the following offerings:
 - a. Joss paper ingots
 - b. Joss candle
 - c. Joss sticks
13. Please state what we should prepare to give offerings.
14. When should we use "Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, and Joss sticks"? Is there any quantity limit? (For example, the difference between using 1 joss stick and 3 josses sticks; are the candles a pair? Any meaning about the quantity?)
15. Why is there an offering combination as Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, and Joss sticks?
16. Is there any special gesture or anything to say? (For example: do we put our hands
17. on our forehead when offering incense? Bowing? What about burning joss candles and joss paper ingot?)
18. Please state the taboos of worshipping.

19. If something goes wrong while worshiping, is there any remedy?
20. Have you ever heard of the changes experienced by visitors after worshipping?
21. Please describe the transformation of these offerings.
22. Please describe the transformation of worship.
23. What do you think of the development of these offerings?

Appendix: 2.3

The questions for the temple keepers

1. How long have you been working in temple-related work?
2. Please describe the work of the temple keeper.
3. Please describe the temple where the gods are.
4. Please describe in detail when and why this temple was established.
5. Who usually comes to worship?
 - i. locals/tourists
 - ii. Gender
 - iii. Age
 - iv. Reason for visiting
6. Are the offerings sold in this store made in Hong Kong?
If so, can you tell us the company's information?
If not, where is it manufactured?
7. Hong Kong used to be a major producer of joss sticks; how many Hong Kong manufacturers are still making them?
8. Were joss paper ingots and joss candles previously made in Hong Kong?
If so, can you tell us the company's information?
If not, where is it manufactured?
9. Please state the meaning of the offerings:
 - I. Joss paper ingots 元寶
 - II. Joss candle 蠟燭
 - III. Joss sticks 香
11. Please state what we should prepare to give offerings.
12. When should we use "Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, and Joss sticks"? Is there any quantity limitation?
13. Why is there an offering combination of Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, and Joss sticks?
14. Please state the procedure for worshipping.
15. Is there any special gesture or anything to say? (For example, do we put our hands on our forehead when offering incense? Bowing? What about burning joss candles and joss paper ingots?)
16. Please state the taboos of worshipping.

17. If something goes wrong while worshipping, is there any remedy?
18. Have you ever heard of the changes experienced by visitors after visiting the temple?
19. Please state the transformation of these offerings.
20. Please state the transformation of worshipping rituals.

Appendix 3: Interviewee Records

Name	Gender	Age Group	Education Attainment	Occupation	Objects	Purposes	Offerings given
Mr. Ngan	Male	70 or above	University or above	Retired	God: Kwan Tai	Pray for blessings, peace and safety for the family and good health	Joss Sticks
Ms. Chan	Female	30-39	University or above	Retired	God: Kwan Tai	Eliminate disasters and solve problems	Joss candles, Joss sticks
Ms. Lee	Female	50-59	University or above	Retired	God: Tin Hau	Pray for blessings from Tin Hau, a habit	Joss sticks
Temple staff							
Ms. Chui	Female	30-39	University or above	Office worker	God: Tin Hau	Visiting	Joss sticks
Ms. Wong	Female	30-39	University or above	Office worker	God: Tin Hau	Pray for peace; things go well; and to have a baby	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Ms. Cheung	Female	30-39	College	Accountant	God: Lung Mo	Pray for the baby to be born healthy and safe	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Temple staff							
Mrs. Wong	Female	40-49	Secondary school	Company owner	God: Tudi Gong	Praying for blessings	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Mr. Lee	Male	40-49	Secondary school	Factory Management	God: Wong Tai Sin	Things go well	Joss sticks
Offering a shop near the Wong Tai Sin temple: Ms. Law							
Mr. Wong	Male	50-59	Secondary school	Unemployed	God: Tin Hau	Provided a positive message	Joss sticks

Name	Gender	Age Group	Education Attainment	Occupation	Objects	Purposes	Offerings given
Mr. Chueng	Male	60-69	College	Retired	God: Tin Hau	Praying for peace	Joss sticks
Mr. Tsui	Male	30-39	University or above	Office worker	God: City God	Peace and safety for the family; Good health	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Jade	Female	40-49	University or above	Clerk	God: Tam Kung	Praying for peace	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Ms. Wong	Female	40-49	University or above	Social Worker	God: Tam Kung	Praying for children's education	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Temple staff							
Mr. Tang	Male	50-59	University or above	Clerk	God: City God	Pray for blessings	Joss sticks
Ms. Leung	Female	40-49	Secondary School	Clerk	God: City God	Praying for good health to family members	Joss sticks
The Offering shop near the Po Fook Hill (Columbarium): Mr. Nam							
Mr. Chan	Male	30-39	University or above	Programmer	Ancestors	Visiting the ancestors	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
The musician in traditional Taoist worship rites 醮師: Mr. Fok							
Ms. Tse	Female	50-59	Secondary School	Clerk	God: Lo Pan	Praying for peace for husband; peace for husband's colleagues	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks

Name	Gender	Age Group	Education Attainment	Occupation	Objects	Purposes	Offerings given
Mr. Hau	Male	40-49	Secondary School	Unemployed	God: Kwan Tai	Peace and safety for the family	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Mr. Yu	Male	40-49	Secondary School	Engineering	God: Kwan Tai	Praying for business smooth; All staff works' smoothly; Pray for working safe	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Mr. Keung	Male	50-59	Secondary school	Property Management	God: Kwan Tai	Praying for his daughter's family	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
The Hungry Ghost Festival organiser Yu Lan Festival, organised by Shaukeiwan Nam On Fong Residents Association 筲箕灣南安坊坊眾會廣府孟蘭勝會: Mandy							
Ms. Wong	Female	70 or above	Primary school	Retired	Ancestors and ghosts (In the Hungry Ghost Festival)	Hope ancestors are good; Peace and content for self; custom; follow family's tradition	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Cheung Fei Temple: Volunteer Granny							
Temple staff							
Wing Lee Co. (Papier-mâché offering shop) 筲箕灣榮利紙業							
Peng Chau Seven Sisters Temple (The Seventh Sister's Birthday Festival) : Volunteer Mr. Tang							
The Buddhas Monastery staff							
Ms. Yeung	Female	40-49	Secondary school	Office worker	God: Tin Hau	Peace and content; good health	Joss sticks
Ping Chau Chung Yuen Jiao (Yu Lan) Festival 坪洲中元建醮: Mr. Lam							
Michael	Male	40-49	University or above	Social welfare sector	Ghosts (in the Hungry Ghost Festival)	Custom and to eliminate disasters	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks

Name	Gender	Age Group	Education Attainment	Occupation	Objects	Purposes	Offerings given
					Ancestors	Commemorate ancestors, follow the family's habit	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Mr. Wu	Male	40-49	University or above	Adventure-based trainer	God: Jiutian Xuannü and Guan Yin	Praying for wishes to come true; peace of mind and content, efficient	Joss sticks provided by the Taoist Abbey
					Ancestors (in Hungry Ghost Festival)	Blessing the family's safety and round	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Wing	Female	40-49	University or above	Accountant	God: Wong Tai Sin	Ask about career prospects	Joss sticks provided by the temple
					Ancestors	Commemorate ancestors, express filial piety	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Chun Shing Hong (Papier-mâché offering shop) 俊城行紙紮紙舖: Mr. To							
Ms. Chan	Female	40-49	Secondary school	Retail	Not specific	Peace and safety for the family; gratitude to the gods	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Mr. Ha	Male	40-49	College	Accountant	Ancestors; God: Tudi Gong; Guan Yin; Dizàng	Originally, worship ancestors, since there is a god's house in the college, so worship the gods also	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks

Name	Gender	Age Group	Education Attainment	Occupation	Objects	Purposes	Offerings given
Ms. Lee	Female	40-49	University or above	Quotation Manager	Taoist gods	Praying for blessing	Joss sticks
					Ancestors	N/A	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Larissa	Female	40-49	University or above	Social worker	Ancestors	Tradition, custom and visiting ancestors	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
Ms. Kwok	Female	60-69	Primary school	Housewife	God: Tin Hau	Praying for safety and round and good health. At the beginning of the year: Blessing The end of the year – return the God Middle of the year – the birthday of Tin Hau	Joss sticks
					Ancestors	Commemorate ancestors, follow the family's habit	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles, Joss sticks
(Macau) Tai Seng Chi Lio Hong 大聖紙料行: Ms. Chan							
(Macau) Loi Wo Temple: The temple deacon, Timothy							
Po Kwong Buddha Hall 普光佛堂 at Chung Ah Mansion: The temple keeper, Ms. Lam							
Kay	Female	40-49	Secondary school	Clerk	Buddhist deities	Peace mind and content; Return the bad thing in her former life	Nothing
					Taoist gods	Peace and calm; eliminate	Joss paper

Name	Gender	Age Group	Education Attainment	Occupation	Objects	Purposes	Offerings given
						the disaster of the world	ingots, Joss candles and Joss
					Ancestors	Hope her ancestors have a good life	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles and Joss sticks
Ms. Leung	Female	30-39	College	Social Worker	God: Wong Tai Sin	“Return to the God”, thank god for blessing	Joss sticks arranged by the temples
					Ancestors; God: Tudi Gong, Guan Yin,	A happy activity	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles and Joss sticks
Ms. Chan	Female	30-39	University or above	Office worker	Praying for Four Corners rituals	Moving home	Joss paper ingots, Joss candles and Joss sticks

Appendix 4: Annotated Timeline of the Development of the Offerings in Chinese

History

Dates	Dynasties	
10,000-2,000 BC	Neolithic	<p>Joss candles: torches 火炬 were found in ancient China; there were no “candles” 蠟燭 and the Chinese character was used “燭”, which is the same one to describe torches. The purpose was to light it during the night.</p> <p>Joss sticks: Worshipping practice burned woods and created smoke to give offerings to heaven, named “sacrifice by burning” 禋祀, was found in the archaeological sites.</p>
2000 - 1500 BC	Xia 夏	<p>Joss paper ingots: worshipping ancestors since the Xia and Shang dynasty; shell currencies and the imitated money made from wood, bones, stones and clams have been found in the tomb.</p>
1600 - 1027 BC	Shang 商	
1027 - 256 BC	Zhou 周	
	Western Zhou 西周 1027 - 771 BC	<p>Joss candles: torches were used in funerals for lighting purposes. Furthermore, the torches were called hemp-made torches, 麻燭. Materials used include reed as the middle part, wrapped with cloth and spread with beeswax.</p> <p>Joss sticks: The system of ritual and worshipping objects was developed and classified. The rituals, offerings and methods of giving were different for different objects.</p>
	Eastern Zhou 東周 770 - 256 BC	
	Spring – Autumn Period 春秋 770 - 476 BC	
	Warring States Period 戰國 475 - 221 BC	
221 - 207 BC	Qin 秦	<p>Joss candles: Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇 (259 – 210 BC) used “mermaid cream” as one of the materials to produce torches, which would last for a long time in his mausoleum. Torches were used during worship and materials like wood, reed, hemp and beeswax to produce torches.</p>

206 BC - 220 AD	Han 漢	<p>Joss paper ingots: Joss paper money, i.e. the real and imitation currencies, was given during worship at the burial, but not burned.</p> <p>Joss sticks: The opening of the Silk Road led to the introduction of many spices, such as agarwood and rosemary. “Agarwood”, one of the materials blended in Joss sticks. Burning incense in worship rituals due to the introduction and influence by Buddhism. Then Taoism and Confucianism followed the same practice</p>
	Western Han 西漢 206 BC-9 AD	
	Xin 新 9-24 AD	
	Eastern Han 東漢 25-220 AD	<p>Joss paper ingots: The innovation of papermaking by Cai Lun</p> <p>Joss candles: The earliest candle holders were found in Eastern Han tombs, which proves that candles already existed.</p>
220 – 280 AD	Three Kingdoms 三國	Joss paper ingots: Joss paper appeared
265 – 420 AD	Jin 晉	
	Western Jin 西晉 265-316 AD	
	Eastern Jin 東晉 317-420 AD	
420 – 588 AD	Southern and Northern Dynasties 南北朝	Joss paper ingots: only for ancestors, but also to worship gods and ghosts, which were offered as money and began to burn Joss paper rather than be buried.
	Southern Dynasties 南朝 420-588 AD	
	Northern Dynasties 北朝 286 – 588 AD	
581 - 617 AD	Sui 隋	
618 - 907 AD	Tang 唐	<p>Joss paper ingots: The practice of giving Joss money was introduced to the emperor; burning Joss paper money was popular.</p> <p>Joss candles: have become essential items to use for worship and funeral rituals.</p>

		Joss sticks: burning incense began to become popular among the public.
907-979 AD	Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms 五代十國	
	Five Dynasties Period 五代 907 – 960 AD	Joss paper ingots: started the development of many styles of Joss papers
	Ten Kingdoms 十國 960 – 979 AD	
960 - 1279 AD	Song 宋	
	Northern Song 北宋 960 - 1127 AD	
	Southern Song 南宋 1127-1279 AD	
1279 - 1368 AD	Yuan 元	
1368 - 1644 AD	Ming 明	
1644 - 1912 AD	Qing 清	Joss paper ingots: the variety of and the classification of Joss papers found

Resüme

Ohvriesemed Hong Kongis: ohvripaberid, küünlad ja viirukipulgad

Esivanematele, jumalatele ning vaimudele pühendatud ohverdamisrituaalidel on Hiina kultuuris, pikk ajalugu. Konfutsianistlike ja taoistlike traditsioonide ning välismaise budismi levikul on ohverdamisviisid ning -materjalid palju muutunud.

Joss paper, Joss Candles ja Joss Sticks (ohvripaberid, ohviküünlad ning viirukipulgad) on rituaalides kõige enam kasutatavad vahendid. Annetused mängivad olulist rolli erinevates olukordades, mis on seotud jumalate, esivanemate ja kindlate vaimude kummardamisega taoistlikes ja rahvapärastes religioossetes tavades. Enamasti on nende vahendite kasutamine akadeemilistes uurimustes kahe silma vahele jäänud.

See lõputöö uurib, kuidas on seotud religioossed tavad ja ohverdamised Hongkongi inimeste igapäevaelus nii ametlike tseremooniate ja rituaalidega. Uurimistöõ põhineb autori poolt läbi viidud välitöödel, et uurida ohvriandide ja jumalateenistuste eripärasid ja olukordi Hongkongis ja Macaus.

Märksõnad: ohvriannid, kummardamisrituaalid, rahvakeelsed tavad, riitused.

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Ka Man Lo

21/05/2025