

# Research on Ancestral Beliefs and the Evolution of Memorial Tablet

WU Yu-ping

Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts, Shanghai, China

ZHAO Yuan

Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, China

The main part of Chinese traditional belief is the ancestor god, which values the relationship between man and ancestor. Nowadays, the form of ancestor worship we can see is the adoration of memorial tablet. The souls of the dead are considered to be in the memorial tablet. Ancestor attached itself to the memorial tablet which had a long history of development in China. Its origin, name and writing showed the massive of traditional culture. Especially in the form. The memorial tablet had a very diverse evolution. And it recorded the history of “ancestor worship”, a culture concept that never disappeared.

*Keywords:* Ancestor Worship, Memorial Tablet, Great Tradition

Chinese people believed in ghost and gods, especially their ancestors. Everyone adores ancestors in China, it has never been changed. Therefore, the most important thing in a family organization is the custom of ancestor worship, which is the most common activity. If there is religion in China, it's the religion of ancestor worship.<sup>1</sup> For ancestor worship, it has a legal status in both the official and the civil society. And it is protected and supported. The reason that the official supports ancestor worship is based on sacrificial ancestors are beneficial to strengthen the system of blood family, and the system of blood family is an important way to keep a legitimate social order.<sup>2</sup> Obviously it helps the ruler to maintain the stability of society, so the ancestor worship is flourishing all the time in many religious activities. In addition, ancestor worship also benefits the inner unity of small families. In the modern society, people spend much time on their business, so that the relationship between relatives becomes more and more weak. Doing ancestor worship is a good moment to connect with relatives who are not usually connected.

In the book *Early Chinese History, Thought and Culture*, Alan said “Chinese religion is at least based on three basic principles: after death, people continue to exist; the power of the living and the need to get food and nourishment from the living.”<sup>3</sup> These three basic principles determined that ancestor worship must have a visual to contact the living and the dead. People and ancestors are not able to communicate directly because of the time and space. The visible, the ancestral attachment, is convenient for a series of religious activities.

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WU Yu-ping, lecturer of Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts.

ZHAO Yuan, lecturer of Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

<sup>1</sup> He Liankui, *Research on Chinese Etiquette and Custom*, Taipei: Zhonghua Book Company, 1978, p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2007, p. 62-63.

<sup>3</sup> (U.S.A), Alan, *Early Chinese History, Thought and Culture*, translation by Yangming etc., the Commercial Press, 2011, p. 2.

Actually, Western religions are the same. Jesus on the cross is as important to Christianity as Laozi's influence on Taoism.

Setting up a memorial tablet is one of the main traditional forms of ancestor worship. It can also be called memorial tablet worship. What is memorial tablet worship? It means to write the name of the deceased ancestor on the board, and after the ceremony, the soul of the ancestors is summoned in the memorial tablet to worship.<sup>4</sup> This should be a later form of the memorial tablet. In the era of the old tradition before the word appeared,<sup>5</sup> there was a long history of memorial tablet.

### Overview of the Memorial Tablet

#### Whence

When did the tablets start? What we see today is engraved wooden tablets. Before the character appeared, people usually used the gods (also called idols) to replace them. Idols were used to replace gods. It was the image of the gods by using materials such as pottery and wood. It began in primitive society. Until character appeared, people began replacing idols with memorial tablet. Idols have never disappeared, and in fact it excited with gods in many temples. In primitive society, the custom of replacing spirits with thatch people was probably popular. This custom was still found in ancient rituals. With the development of modern technology, we had the image technology. Since then, photographs had taken the place of the spear, both picture of the deceased and the memorial tablet appeared simultaneously.

In Taiwan, there was a story about the memorial tablet. Once upon a time there was a man named Ding Lan whose temper was so bad that he never showed filial obedience to his mother. His mother must bring lunch to the field every day because he liked to eat hot food. He would scold or even beat his mother if she came late. One day, when Ding Lan was on his way to work in the fields, he saw a lamb kneeling on the ground and sucking at its mother's breast. He was so moved and ashamed of his behavior that he decided to take good care of his mother in the future. His mother was late for his dinner that day. When he saw his mother running from a distance, he rushed to his mother and planned to apologize for his rude behavior. But his mother could not catch her son's meaning and thought Ding Lan would come and beat her again, so she ran away and threw down the lunch. Ding Lan waved and apologized loudly. His mother was too frightened to jump into the river. Ding Lan jumped into the river to save his mother, but only got a piece of wood. He took the wood home in sorrow, and took it as his mother's tablet. Ding Lan offered food to the wood every day, hoping his mother would come alive.<sup>6</sup> In this story, the wood was connected to the dead, and was considered to be something that the ancestors attached to.

In China, every traditional Chinese family is an altar of religion, preserving the memorial tablets of ancestors, and the home is consecrated to the gods or idols.<sup>7</sup> The ancestor worship of the small family is in their own home. People sacrifice the memorial tablet to the ancestor. Many families have main hall of a

<sup>4</sup> Li Yiyuan, *Religion and Mythology*, Taipei: LIXU Cultural Industry Company, 1998, pp. 175-176.

<sup>5</sup> The unwritten tradition here comes from the new definition of the great tradition and a little tradition of Ye Shuxian. He proposed to re-establish the traditional dividing line and abandon Redfield's cultural elitism tendency. Starting from the post-modern era and post-colonial era, we should reconsider "great" and "little" with the time scale of history, providing a pair of updated conceptual tools for the re recognition of Chinese culture under the new knowledge of archaeology. A detailed bibliography of *The study of Cultural Tradition and its Significance*, Journal of Baise University, 2012, Stage 4.

<sup>6</sup> Wei-Ping Lin, *The Image of the Han people in Taiwan: How the God is Figurative*, Ying Gui Huang, *Material and Material Culture*, Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 2004, pp. 344-345.

<sup>7</sup> C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2007, p. 31.

building, where they burn paper to sacrifice in the festival. It is not only the memorial tablet of the ancestor in the small family, but also in the ancestral temples. From the state to the family, the ancestral temples must place in the ancient gods and the memorial tablets. Especially before the western Zhou dynasty, sacrificing ancestor in ancestral temple was more important than in family. However, this situation changed during Zhou dynasty and Qin dynasty. When Zhou Dynasty and Qin Dynasty, China religious reform was the core of the internal evolution of ancestor worship. One of the most direct manifestation was the ancestor worship center gradually shifted from the ancestral temple to the family cemetery. The transfer of ancestor worship center was connected with the change of social structure. On the other hand, it determined the function, content and form of religious art.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the memorial tablet was also transferred from the ancestral hall to the individual home. Sacrificing the consanguinity were more important than sacrificing the common ancestor. However, with the popularity of the root-finding culture, the memorial is becoming more common, such as the Yellow Emperor worship and Confucius etc.

### Naming

There are several names of the memorial tablet, such as the god, the idol, the position, the memorial tablet and so on. *The Hou Han Book · the Emperor Guang Wu Emperor* said that in this month, the red eyebrow army burned the palace in Chang 'an, the capital of Xi Jing, excavated the emperor's garden, and looted and plundered in Guan Zhong. Deng Yu, the great master, entered Chang 'an, and sent the master of shifu to the throne of the eleven emperors, and placed them in the temple of emperor Gao in Luoyang.<sup>9</sup> Li Xian wrote: "A spirit tablet, the wood, feet two inches, in the central, up to four. The Lord of heaven was two inches long and one ruler was a ruler of the princes."<sup>10</sup> Here the concept was similar to the later ancestral tablets. Although there was a difference in shape between the spirit tablet and the position, the functional properties should be consistent.

Because of the special function of a spirit tablet, when war occurred, ancient people also brought with it. In the historical literature, "she" also had a relationship with the ancestral tablets, which established the basic premise for the killing at "she". Because when a country fought for something away, "she" often didn't exist. On the other hand, the "she" as a fixed building couldn't be accompanied, a spirit tablet was very suitable for replacing. As recorded in the analects of Confucius, Aigong asked Zaiwo about "she", What kind of trees should the gnome use? He replied: "Xia Shang Dynasty used with pine, cypress, chestnut tree in the Zhou dynasty. The meaning of the chestnut tree is to make the people shudder."<sup>11</sup> Mr. Yang Bo Jun 's explanation in *The Analects of Confucius* was that the gnome was called "she", but from the answer of Zaiwo, we can know that it was the owner of "she". In the ancient times, when people offered sacrifices to the land gods, they often

<sup>8</sup> Wu Hung, *From the "Temple" To "Tomb": A Key Question in The Development of Ancient Chinese Religious Art*, redacted by Zheng Yan, Wang Rui, *Art IN ITS RITUALCONTEXT—on Ancient Chinese Art by Wu Hung*, SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2005, p. 549.

<sup>9</sup> Fan Ye, *Book of the Hou Han*, Zhong Hua Publishing, 1965, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Wang Xianqian, *The Book of the Han Dynasty*, Zhong Hua Publishing, 1984, P46. A spirit tablet was mentioned in many ancient texts. *Old Tang Dynasty*: At that time, the temple was burned by thieves, only to transfer the spirit tablet to the temple of Chang 'an, and the emperor went to the temple to beg for forgiveness. Chapter 1 of <WBZD>: The woman was not afraid at all. She walked into the temple and laughed three times and cried three times. She collected the spirit tablet of the seven temples with calmness, and went to the east. [Yuan] Ke Danqiu, *The Romance of A Hairpin*: Ci Ling: If the biological mother was alive, how could she tolerate such dirt? Should go to ancestral hall to worship the mother's god. Chapter 10 of *The Scholars*: When Lu was in the hall, he was going to worship the spirit tablet of the teacher. Qu BO, *The Bridge*: We followed the demands of the bridge and followed the old customs of China, burning incense and paper, kowtowing, and burying the fallen martyrs.

<sup>11</sup> Cheng shude, *Analects Annotation*, Cheng junying, Jiang jianyuan proofreading, Zhonghua Book Company, 1990, page 2001.

made a wooden tablet called “zhu”. And we thought that this wooden tablet was where the gods attached themselves. If the country had a foreign war, the wooden tablet must be carried together.<sup>12</sup> Yang bojun’s explanation here mentioned the wooden tablet followed the army to combat, it was a premise for killing the deserter.

In *Confucius’s Words and Deeds*, it said that: “she: The land god. When the state was established in ancient times, she must be set up to offer sacrifices to the land gods and be a symbol of a country. People made a wooden tablet called “zhu” when they set up she, a kind of wooden tablet which the gods attached themselves.<sup>13</sup> Hongmai also recorded such meaning in *Five Articles Written by Rongzhai*.<sup>14</sup> Tablet instead of she embodied the ancient people to the attention of the ceremony, they would not abandon the ritual because of inconvenience, but on the contrary, they would find another way to complete the indispensable ritual.

There was a phenomenon worth mentioning. Memorial tablet disappeared for some time in the Cultural Revolution period, especially during “broken four old”. At that time, a memorial tablet was almost banned and only hung the portraits of Marx and Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao zedong. After the Cultural Revolution, a memorial tablet resumed, but in many places, people did not promptly remove the portraits of Mao Zedong, but parallel with a memorial tablet appeared in a spirit tablet. So gradually evolved the phenomenon that traditional memorial tablet and Mao Zedong portrait two symbols simultaneously appeared on the altar. So here involved that the tablets were not necessarily for paying homage to the dead. For example, there are two forms of tablets used by Zen Buddhism in the Song Dynasty. The first was the yellow paper, which helped the deceased get rid of the shackles of past karma and gain new life, the monks and nuns performed the rituals for the dead people of this tablet to help them turn over so that the dead would go to the Western Paradise soon. Survivors used the disaster relief tablets used instead of red or pink, but also the person’s salary and rank, the monks and nuns performed the rituals for the people of this tablet to ask the Bodhisattva to help this living person, making it a disaster relief, career development, everything goes well.

### Writing

The explanation of the “Zhao Mu” in the *Etymology* recorded a system of arranging about the position of the tablets in the ancestral temple: “Ancient patriarchal clan system, the ancestral temple or cemetery generations arranged in order to ancestor middle, II, IV, VI is located in the left ancestor, called ‘Zhao’; III, V, VII in the right, called ‘Mu’ ,this would separate the clan within the old and young, close and alienated.”<sup>15</sup> As for individual small families, the writing of a memorial tablets was generally divided into three vertical rows, on both sides of the left and right were written “A door in the ancestor” and “Secretary of the land of the six gods,” the words, fonts were smaller, the title was lower, the middle of the six words “heaven and earth monarch teacher”(it may also be “Heavenly Master” or “Counselor”)<sup>16</sup> Not only the larger font, but also as the

<sup>12</sup> Yang bojun, *The Translation of Analects of Confucius*, Zhonghua Book Company, 1980, p. 30.

<sup>13</sup> Wu longhui, *Confucius’s Words and Deeds*, Guangdong Education Press, 1999, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> [Southern Song] Hong mai, *Rongzhai Essay*, the volume ten of *Five Articles Written by Rongzhai*, Yuelu bookstore, 1994, p. 624.

<sup>15</sup> Guangdong, Guangxi, Hunan, Henan revised source group, editor of the commercial Press, *Etymology* (Revised), Commercial Press, 1988, p. 1424.

<sup>16</sup> The difference of the three was mainly the difference in power. Feudal society, the emperor Dominating the world, dominated everything, so people enshrined “heaven and earth monarch master.” In the era of the Republic of China, the Revolution of 1911 overthrew the emperor and was replaced by “the heaven and earth patriarchal teachers.” After the founding of New China, the working people should be the masters of the country and be replaced by “the master of heaven and earth.” Of these three writings, “heaven and earth priesthood” were most.

main part of the tablet, the word WAs powerful, top-down. This habit still remains in southern Sichuan.

When setting up the tablet, there were many specific ways to write. In traditional China, aborted and unmarried female tablets could not appear in ancestor worship activities, some even could not set up a tablet. However, with the society developed and progressed, this phenomenon gradually disappeared. The author conducted a field investigation in Suzhong region of Jiangsu. According to the different objects, the writing style of the tablets had a significant difference. Here were some examples.

The first was the children setting up tablets for parents. There were two kinds of situations here. The first was that there were people in the family who had higher seniority than parents (such as one of grandpa and grandma), when the parents passed away, “Xian Kao”(deceased father) was written on the tablet to represent the father, “Xian Bi”(deceased mother) represent the mother. The second was that when parents passed away, no one in the family who had higher seniority than parents, at the same time, there were grandchildren. At this time, “Xian Kao” and “Xian Bi” were on the tablet. “Xian” and “Xian” were used to distinguish elders alive or not.

The second was setting up tablets between husband and wife. When the husband set up his tablet for his wife, if the wife had given birth to a child, then the writing of the tablet was the husband’s surname plus his wife’s surname. If the wife didn’t have a child, then the name of the tablet was the husband’s surname, no longer appeared the wife’s surname. On the contrary, when a wife set a tablet for her husband, it was relatively simple and there was no difference whether they had child or not. It was directly “my deceased husband XX”. This also reflected the importance of the female had a child or not in traditional families.

In addition to the above two common forms, there were parents for children, siblings setting up tablets for each other. Parents set up their children’s tablets, they could address children by name. It usually was “Deceased XX” and “Deceased XX”. The tablets had certain refinement between brothers and sisters. Brother, sister for the younger brother, sister setting up tablets usually wrote “dead brother” or “dead sister”, but younger brother, sister to brother, sister could not set up tablets called “dead brother” and “sister”, brother and sister should be called “deceased brother” and “deceased sister” in order to show respect.

### **Evolution History of the Memorial Tablet**

The first worship of the Chinese people was not like the Western Judaism, and the Christianity was not idolatry, but had its own idol shaping tradition. The ancestors had a wide variety of clearly perceptible manifestations specifically.<sup>17</sup> This article mainly introduced five kinds: First, pottery; Second, jade handle; Third, “shi”; Fourth, wooden tablet; Fifth, paper tablet. These forms could basically summarize the evolution of the tablet.

#### **Pottery**

The concept of ancestors lasted for a long time, “the statues of characters found on the Original site were a clear indication of such worship. Zhejiang Hemudu Site ruins found pottery statue of seven thousand years ago. Besides, painted pottery bottles in Yangshao culture, Head statue from bottleneck were unearthed in Temple high head in Lixian County of Gansu Province, Dadi bay and the temple of mouth of Qinan County, Chai Ping of Tianshui Country and other places. Neither of these objects was used objects, the researchers thought it was

<sup>17</sup> Ye Shuxian, Jade Portrait, Jade Handle and the Ancestral Tablets - the Great Tradition of Chinese Ancestors Idol Origins of the New Understanding, *National Art*, 2013, 3.

‘related to some beliefs of primitive religion’. According to its possibility, it should be the statue of the ancestor god. “The ancestor of idols, had found relics, basically were pottery. All out of the Yellow River Yangshao culture sites statue, almost all in pots as the bottle shaped bottle for the head of the statue, and that there was a small hole on the top of the head. This phenomenon had never been understood in the past. From the analysis of site type of culture, the pottery like Xi’an Banpo ruins and generally belonged to the same cultural system. We associated the Banpo pottery burial basin cover was provided with a hole, and was for the soul passages. Therefore, the pot statue that was probably developed from pottery to the coffin. Since the bones of the dead Sheng in the pots, the soul of the deceased to pots for marriage, then, to worship the dead ancestors, naturally made pottery, containing the deceased clothing or hair becomes part of bones, the dead body was attached to the gods. As for the pot mouth plastic adult head, was more like the image. And the small holes on the top of the head, of course, were the channels for the soul to go in and out. Therefore, this kind of pottery figurines, was both ancestor soul and ancestor worship with God clan.”<sup>18</sup> The drawing of ancestor god pottery statue may be a physical form of ancestor worship. The pottery form although had a long history, but also could be traced in ethnic minorities now. Gaoshan Pingpu Siraya worship etiquette called “fan the Buddha”, called “Sirayan ancestors” as “arize”. The ancestral spirits called “safe storage in pottery pot”, enshrined in the Tribal House Club or the altar. The number and decoration differed for the tribal god pot. There were usually three, decorated with red neck, mouth plug banana leaves. The tank filled with water, and changed water at the beginning of the month or half. Usually, areca cakes and animal bones were served. By the time of the birthday of Zu Ling, the ceremonial ceremonies would be held. There would be three men holding ancestor’s pot could bless people and then prayed for ancestors, took water from the tank to the ground sway. Such showed that pots as myth Narrative symbol of the ancestors were never broken.

If pursued this pot footprint, we found that in Banpo pottery urn may be the prototype. Burying in urn burial was prevailed Banpo people, usually with taoweng or pots as coffin cover, pottery pot or pottery basin, the pottery pot in the mouth on the edge of some symbols, some people faced the fish or the deer in the wall painted pottery basin. But the pottery pot covered by the coffin and the pottery bowl have one thing in common, that was a small hole which was often chiseled at the bottom, and this small hole was for the soul to go in and out. The well-known people face fish bowl, cover and urn, the bottom of the basin also had the same function as the chisel hole, just for the soul of the deceased entry.

### **Jade Handle and Jade Article**

Jade culture played an important role in the development of Chinese civilization. The Chinese ancestors began to worship jade in the jade age. As all the memorial tablets, jade used to bear the function of contacting the soul of the ancestors. In other words, they can be transformed and embodied in the image of the jade, and the communication between the jade implements and the human.

This jade contacted the ancestor spirits function not only recorded in the written tradition, also was confirmed in the great tradition when character was not been. Such as the Han Dynasty Yangxiong’s *Yuan Lei*. Yang Xiong said that the ancestors of the soul of jade crank was a kind of GUI jade, but jade handle shaped more vivid than it was with archaeologists’ excavation also showed in front of people. Yin Dynasty ruins in Anyang unearthed ten jade handles which were associated with ancestral tables. The type of 91 Post Hill site

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<sup>18</sup> Zhan Yinxin, *Gods and Sacrifices - A Comprehensive Survey of Traditional Chinese Religions*, Jiangsu Ancient Books Publishing House, 1992, pp. 129-131.

M3:01, 91 Post Hill site M3:02, 91 Post Hill site M3:04, 91 Post Hill site M3:05, 91 Post Hill site M3:06 were all in front with red writing of “Zu Geng”, “Zu Jia”, “Fu”, “Zu Xin” and “Fu Gui” within the jade cranks. The upper half of 96 Heihe Road M5:11 presented a simplified human face.<sup>19</sup> The shapes of this jade crank were similar to the modern tablet. It also engraved with the name of ancestors, so according to the scholar’s, which belonged to the first tablet.<sup>20</sup> It said that this jade crank with a red writing and a portrait of a human being was more vivid than gallipot which just took as its model of meaning and the jade cranks paid more attention to the shapes of themselves.

## Shi

Before the Pre-Qin Period, people were sacrificed human as a symbol of God in the sacrificial activities. The cadaver had appeared in the Zhou Dynasty. He appeared on behalf of the deceased whether in the funeral or in God’s sacrificial ceremony. Xushen in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* said about this. Duan Yucai also pointed out that the cadaver was very similar to the character of God lying at a sacrifice.

In addition to the features of their appearance and lying, there was a certain statement about the wear of the cadaver. The so-called cadaver was used to replace the ancestor god in the temple worship ceremony. Zheng Xuan said, “the cadaver was a god.” And said “The cadaver was our main god, the descendants of filial piety could not see the appearance of their relatives when they were sacrificed, and they didn’t feel well. They were sacrificed to replace them with their cadavers.” The cadaver was to replace the dead ancestor by the living, so they should wear the clothes left by the dead.<sup>21</sup> With three points, the cadaver was more consistent with the dead. Thus, the sacrifice for the cadaver as a visual touch was the best way to express the people’s worship of grief.

The choice of a cadaver to sacrifice an ancestor had a set of etiquette and special attention. In the Zhou Dynasty, this was more special. That was to say on behalf of the emperor’s cadaver must act as bureaucrats by God. The cadaver must act as a representative of the other tablets by the deceased’s grandchildren, the grade distribution was very obvious. In addition, if the deceased was male, with the cadaver of a man, if the deceased was woman, with a cadaver, three years of mourning. The sacrifices of the selected cadaver must be the descendant grandson or granddaughter, died after the expiration of three years. There was no such requirement, only need to choose one can be with his grandchildren.

As a way of communication between human beings and gods, the cadaver was a respectful and banquet of the ancestors. There were other scenes of the entire sacrifice described in the Book of Songs, and at the end the record of the death of a cadaver in place of his ancestors for the blessing of his descendants was recorded. The “emperor’s cadaver” was the living prop of the ancestor. When worship began, the cadaver was instead of ancestor, enjoyed the fine food people prepared. At the end of the sacrificial ceremony, the cadaver was instead of completing ancestors blessing, then played the drums, sent the cadaver to leave. In ancient times, the cadaver was mainly used to sacrifice the ancestors, but it was also useful for the social sacrifice.

With the personalization of natural gods, there were also cadavers in the worldly mountains and rivers, but most of the “cadavers” were still peculiar to ancestors. However, with the change of the ancestor worship, the

<sup>19</sup> Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of archaeology, *Anyang Unearthed Jade*, Science Press, 2005, pp21- 26, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> About relationship between jade handle shaped and ancestral tablets can read Ye Shuxian Jade Portrait, Jade Handle and the Ancestral Tablets - the Great Tradition of Chinese Ancestors Idol Origins of the New Understanding, *National Art*, 2013, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Zhan Yinxin, *Gods and Sacrifices - A Comprehensive Survey of Traditional Chinese Religions*, Jiangsu Ancient Books Publishing House, 1992, p. 294.

corpse slowly disappeared. After all, replacing the ancestor with living things was more complicated than using the materialized props. Therefore, according to “Tongdian”, before the Zhou Dynasty, all sacrificial rituals such as heaven and earth, Jongmyo Shrine and Sajik were required to be erected. After the Qin and Han dynasties, the custom was absent from the land of China.

### Wooden Tablet

Wood tablet was the most common form. Most rural families consecrated ancestral tablets, engraved with the ancestor’s name. Every festival or ancestor’s birthday, the family would burn incense and sacrifice. Urban families generally didn’t have such wooden tablets, but still established a tablet in the cemetery for the ancestors, which written XX, and also regularly sacrifice. For the wooden tablets, all ethnic groups also had their own stress. Such as Han Dynasty people ranked for each ancestor, from now on, which formed the “ancestors”. On the contrary, Hershey’s production of tablets was relatively simple. Although they worship ancestors, they sacrificed their ancestors in different ways. They cut the wood into two puppets, about 28 centimeters, wrapped in bear skin. Flat head was male, pointed head was female, they represented the translation of all our ancestors. In Hezhe, it meant “old man”. Normally enshrined in the shelf above the Western Kang mat. When holding home sacrifice, it was placed among the ranks of the gods.<sup>22</sup> Hezhe wooden tablet was relatively simple, there was no name on the card of the deceased, but using a flat head and pointed to distinguish the gender was also more unique.

### Paper Tablet

The latest and the most common form was paper tablet. After the death of ancestors, the ancestors’ tablets would be placed at home for forty-six days, usually pasted on the wall. Until the sixth seven days, the paper tablet would be burnt with paper house. There were many reasons for the popularity of the paper tablet to replace the wood in the private sector. One was that it was easier to be incinerated. The other was that the cemetery increasingly replaced the old small family house with the urbanization intensifies. Setting up a wood brand at home was more and more inconvenient. This replacement was particularly significant in Hong Kong. This was discovered by Nelson in a field survey of the New Territories of Hong Kong. He pointed out that the paper tablet was almost exclusively the phenomenon of the New Territories. He came to the conclusion through interviews with different subjects. He said: “In my explanation, only one seemed to have a certain sociological significance: the wooden seat was too occupied.”<sup>23</sup> In the land of Hong Kong, this explanation was the most reasonable.

## Conclusion

“In different types of society, cultural rules had different restrictions on the life history characteristics of objects.”<sup>24</sup> In traditional Chinese culture, the worship of the tablet was closely linked with the ancestral worship. The card position, the origin of this “thing” and the way of writing were highlighted from the source of blood, which explained the cultural value and significance of sacrificing ancestors. From pottery to jade

<sup>22</sup> Lu Daji and He Yaohua, *Hezhen Tribe of the Original Religious Data of Various Ethnic Groups in China*, China Social Sciences Publishing House, 1999, p. 203.

<sup>23</sup> Nelson, *Ancestor Worship and Funeral Practices*, by Wu Yashi, *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, Jiangsu People’s Publishing House, 2014, p. 274.

<sup>24</sup> Huang Yinggui, *Introduction: Material and Material Culture*, Huang Yinggui, *Material and Material Culture*, Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, May 1993 (2004), p. 4.



handle to the cadaver to the wooden and then to the present paper tablets, the evolution of the tablets also allowed us to see sacrificing ancestor exciting from the era of great tradition without characters until the era of small tradition with characters.

Turning to the present, even as the passage of time, the production of tablets turned from complexity to simplicity, it still carried the function of deepening social and cultural construction and strengthening unity of the family. In particular, after the Ching Ming Festival became a national legal holiday, going home to worship ancestor became more and more important. The form of sacrificing ancestors was sacrificing at the ancestral tablets. Thus, from the past to the present, the tablets in the historical context of Chinese culture was always associated with ancestor worship. Ancestral worship ritual was everlasting, Correspondingly, the brilliant life history of the tablets also confirmed that the concept of worship of the Chinese ancestors was eternal.