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Ritual as Ideology in an Indigenous
Chinese Christian Church

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CHAPTER VII

RITUAL AS IDEOLOGY

Examination of the 1966 split in the Local Church illustrates the relationship between changes in the church's organization and ritual. As noted in Chapter II, Sparks' visit had undermined the ongoing dialectic between world view and experience by challenging the boundaries defining the organization. Once the dissidents left, it was up to Witness Lee to rebuild the church organization on which this world-building dialectic is based. How he did this comprises the subject matter of this chapter.

As stated before, in referring to the history of the bitter split which occurred in the Local Church, individuals on either side supplied information which tended to justify their respective positions. An analysis of the types of information recalled provides insight into the fundamental causes of the disagreement. In general, those who left attacked Lee's manipulation of power within the church as well as other personal behavior. In addition, much attention was paid to what were considered heretical ideas and strange developments in the church ritual after the split. On the other hand, supporters of Lee concentrated on many of the dissidents' desire for personal status that led them to

forsake the only true church. To them the proof of God's support for their position lies in the reality of their own successful growth when compared with that of the other group whose Taipei membership is merely several hundre. This may be the reason for the Local Church brethren's general silence regarding details of the split--discusaion could only injure their position by introducing the issue to the more than half the members who have been baptized since the split. Thus, revelation of such events is carefully controlled, as by Witness Lee in a sermon to young brethren at a special meeting (February 12, 1972). This sermon, as well as three articles written with respect to the split in Hong Kong, is my main source for the pro-Lee position. For the opposite side, I have depended on interviews, a public letter (Shr, 1970), and the Hong Kong magazine article referred to in Chapter II (Lu, 1973).

Despite the different information supplied by each group, there are certain points of agreement regarding the dispute. All parties noted that it was tragic and upsetting and had an adverse effect, during its duration, on church growth and unity. Many of the individuals who left the church ranked high in the leadership hierarchy of the church. Because of this, there was much confusion among the brethren regarding the reasons for the conflict. One informant remembered that

immediately after the split, attendance at church meetings floundered and many brethren not directly involved wandered about to other church services. Moreover, while the dispute in Taiwan has been finalized and the situation among the various parties is somewhat stable, its effects still linger in Hong Kong. There it has taken on even more drastic aspects, with groups opposing Witness Lee "occupying" church buildings and forcing Lee to turn to the courts for resolution. Given the world view of the brethren, one can imagine the effect of taking spiritual disagreements to secular courts for resolution.

Those interviewed, to whichever group they belonged, agreed that Sparks' visit marked the point in which disagreement began within the Local Church. For those who broke with Lee, however, this visit served merely as a catalyst for quarrels in which underlying tensions became manifest. One informant noted that even before Sparks' visit, he had become concerned with Lee's overemphasis on Nee's concept of the principle of locality. He said that when he questioned Lee, Lee responded by stating that the worker was very young and "what could he know about things such as this." This picture substantiated the overall one of the early years in church development in Taiwan in which Witness Lee maintained close scrutiny and control over all the co-workers, viewing the relationship as one similar to

that between father and children. Time and again various informants recalled the strictness with which Lee directed them in their early training.

This strictness was maintained over the years and as the various co-workers and elders grew within the church organization, they matured and began to question absolute parental authority. One informant has suggested the great importance placed in Chinese churches on authority and discipline (Yu, p.I, 1974); thus, Sparks' prestige and background as a spiritual leader made him a logical alternative to Lee as a source of inspiration without the direct control involved. In stating the three reasons for his own leaving the church, one ex-worker in the Local Church was able to summarize the basic points of disagreement between Lee and the dissidents. They were: church ground, preaching, and positional authority. As will be shown in the ensuing discussion these three elements are not only closely related but also were mentioned with different emphasis by the opposing factions.

"Church ground" (Jyau Hwei Li Chang, 教會立場) is the literal translation for a church's organizational base; in the case of the Local Church that ground is the principle of locality. The nature of church organization has been previously mentioned as the focal point of disagreement between Lee and T. Austin-Sparks. On Taiwan the brethren within the Local

Church had been discouraged from close contact with Christians of other denominations. Lee argued that the ground for building the church was prescribed in the scriptures as being that of locality. Any other basis for church organization was considered non-scriptural and thus damaging to the unity of the body of Christ. Universal church unity could only be achieved by restoring the church on the basis of independent local churches maintaining contact and fellowship through the offices of apostle and workers, much like the situation during Paul's time. On the other side of the argument, it was maintained that Lee carried the doctrine of locality to its extreme and was using it to create a denomination such as those that already exist. As such it was not furthering the cause of Christian unity but rather disrupting it. One individual mentioned that while working with Nee on the mainland, he had many friends in other Christian denominations, but while in Taiwan, his contacts were exclusively with Christians within the Local Church. The Local Church shunned (and does to this day) any participation in ecumenical organizations, and this was seen as being in direct contradiction of the spiritual unity of all Christians. Many of these younger co-workers were in agreement with Sparks' statement that the Local Church had been working on too narrow a ground for the growth and spiritual development of Christianity

in Taiwan. In effect the dissidents saw Lee as creating an exclusive church on a doctrinal basis rejecting people with different spiritual feelings.

Preaching: Immediately following Sparks' departure, Lee expressed his displeasure with the latter's ideas in meetings with his co-workers in Taipei. Nevertheless, several of the co-workers and elders had been impressed with Sparks and began meeting together to read the latter's works. The core of this group was at the Third Assembly Hall. When Lee discovered that such meetings were taking place, he was very angry with the culprits. He felt that they had been meeting behind his back and in doing so were challenging his authority as church apostle.

In addition several of the co-workers heeded Sparks' advice to begin preaching among Christians of other denominations. They were either reprimanded or relieved of their positions as co-workers. Moreover, to insure that those sympathetic to Sparks' ideas would not be able to disseminate them among other church brethren, Lee began to demand that all speakers for the church follow an outline distributed by Lee instead of using their own ideas. To many of them this contradicted the notion that preaching should be spontaneous, according to direction by the spirit.

Positional authority: While the first area of disagreement was discussed in theoretical terms, the problem of authority within the Local Church was revealed in terms of information specific to personalities within the church. The first group of arguments which we will examine regard the person of Witness Lee himself. Several instances were noted in which the integrity of Lee was questioned. One dealt with finances within the church; the other with Lee's personal moral standards. It should be noted here that this information comes exclusively from those who left the church and there is little information regarding this aspect on the other side. Nonetheless, it was reiterated by several sources (without coaching or leading questions by me). After Sparks left Taiwan, Lee used church funds to go to the United States and England where he visited the church group of Sparks, who according to my informants was not aware of the great hostility Lee felt toward him. Later Lee discovered that his wife had cancer. After returning to Taiwan, he decided to go to the United States to seek medical assistance. At this point, the rather blurred boundaries between church and personal wealth first caused friction. Some members wondered if the church would provide funds for their wives should the need arise for them to go to the United States. It was decided that Lee's wife's contributions to the church warranted making such an exception. The treatments, however,

were not successful and she soon died. Within a year, Lee's reputation was not enhanced by his marriage to a sister whose previous simple appearance soon changed to one affected by jewelry, make-up, and a fancy coiffeur. The remarriage within one year of the death of his first wife was considered in bad taste and some members began to complain that Lee, who often expounded on the need to de-emphasize matters of the flesh, had perhaps lost his spirituality. A church sister noted that this opposition had been countered by reference to the consequences of Aaron's and Miriam's criticism of Moses' marriage, the former was stricken with a skin disease. The analogy suggested that like Moses, Lee was only responsible to the Lord and no one had the right to interfere with his personal decision. This argument reflected the view that Lee as modern day apostle of Christ held a position above the rest of the members and was thus responsible only to God for his actions.

In the area of finance, a second problem arose when large sums of money were given to Lee's son for investment purposes in the United States, whether for personal or church gain is disputed. When challenged for using church funds for private gains, Lee allegedly replied that the money had been given to him personally by overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and that nothing illegal or immoral had occurred.

Other complaints regarding the authority of Lee were also mentioned. In the early 1950s, a clinic was established by the church, headed by a Chinese within the church with the assistance of two Western doctors who belonged to the Local Church in Taipei. Disagreement arose regarding the participation of one of the latter. The ultimate result was that the clinic was closed and the structure built for its use became a living quarters for young brethren attending university in Taipei.

Another case mentioned was that of a marriage between two church co-workers. Without seeking Lee's approval these two individuals were married. This apparently angered Lee. Whether he opposed the marriage or was merely angry because they did not first consult him is unclear. The result was that although the two initially remained within the church, their stipend as co-workers was cut in half and this caused them great difficulty. The brother who had introduced the couple was sent to Hwalien (on the east coast of Taiwan) as punishment; later, after helping Lee with a manuscript, he was recalled to Taipei. Here it was noted that one of the methods used by Lee in maintaining the loyalty of his co-workers was his control over their residence and other rewards. His closest followers were given the more prestigious positions in Taipei. Moreover, in the training meetings led by Lee, everyone had a set place according to how well they had performed the previous year. It was noted that

Lee would sometimes move someone from the first to last row in one year, causing the individual to lose face in the eyes of his fellow workers. If an individual had done exceedingly well, he would be moved to the editorial room and placed in charge of church publications. Moreover, while the church claimed that stipends to co-workers were distributed according to anonymous contributions by the membership, these often were not enough to maintain the co-workers' livelihood. Therefore, unspecified funds were distributed among the workers. One informant noted that Lee himself would decide the amount, place it in an envelope to be given to the elder at the First Assembly Hall who serves as the church's accountant. The result is that Lee used his economic stranglehold over the co-workers to assure their loyalty.

One of the prime targets of those who disagreed with Lee was the reality of decision-making within the church. It was repeatedly pointed out that the ideal picture painted was one in which the elders of a local church met to discuss problems, prayed together, and reached a consensus on action. However, it was maintained by these individuals that in actuality Lee and several elders and co-workers closest to him made the decisions and presented them to a group of elders who were expected to offer their "Amens." The effect was that one could not clearly perceive Lee's direct role in the process of

decision-making for the announcements and innovations were made only by his representatives among the elders. In 1960, Lee had gone to the United States where he began establishing churches with the main headquarters in Los Angeles. It was during this period of 1960-1966 that much of the rebellion against his authority was taking place in Taiwan. His means of maintaining control over the development of the church in Taiwan was through close correspondence with top lieutenants who as elders could control the meetings (Shr, 1970, 8). These men also informed Lee regarding activities deemed rebellious.

The final aspect of church organization discussed by those who left the church was the ideal of independence of each local church under the authority of its elders. While the co-workers are considered to be under the authority of the apostle, the elders are in charge of management of local church finances and activities. The spheres of responsibility were confused, however, by the fact that several individuals held positions both as co-workers and elders in various local churches. Two cases relate the nature of this contradiction. Once the dispute began among members in the Taipei Church, the church in Tainan was confused and desired to maintain an independence. In letters sent to church headquarters, they requested that no one be sent from Taipei. Nevertheless, one of Lee's lieutenants was

was sent to Tainan which led to dissension among the brethren there. This also tended to point out to the elders in Tainan that their independence from control by Lee was merely nominal. A further example involved a brother who before the split was considered by many to be second in command to Witness Lee. He described the situation in Taiwan and noted that he was bothered by the fact that he no longer felt he could follow Lee. I heard a tape made by this brother in 1970. In it he said that he had a premonition that Lee might kick them out of the church:

In 1965 there was to be a special meeting in Taipei as Lee had returned again from the United States. (We) discussed what we would do if he kicked us out; what about our work and livelihood? Lee returned and pulled us to Taipei. I sat on the second row and felt all right, but Lee attacked me for doing bad things. I felt Lee misunderstood and wanted to talk to him about the problem, feeling that in personal matters we could compromise but not in spiritual matters. When I went to see Lee, he was very cold and didn't let me talk. Lee said I must leave but I didn't understand and thought perhaps he meant for me to leave the room. He can tell me not to be a co-worker but has no authority outside of my sinning for refusing to let me be an elder. But the Lord did not want me to argue. Lee said that as a friend, he thought it would be better for me to go to another church for I did not follow him. For example, he said that I didn't sing the songs he wrote. (I didn't realize that these hymns were doctrine.) I asked Lee to state publicly that I would be leaving and that since the house in back of the church was my own to wait until I found another before forcing me to leave. Then I thanked Lee for past help and said good-bye. The second night of the meetings, he didn't allow me to attend. Later

he went south and told everyone so that I felt I could not return there although the brethren there wanted me to remain. At the time other brethren were also kicked out.

All of these events taken together paint a picture in which the ideal of local church autonomy and spiritual control of church life became clouded by the appearance of the absolute authority of Witness Lee in matters pertaining to church organization and doctrine. Fission of this sort also existed in the Exclusive Brethren Movement when differences between strong-willed leaders could not be reconciled. Evidently this has carried over to the United States where there have been splits within various local churches since the inception of the churches (Yu, 1974). This may have been due to the existence of local church-type churches before Lee's travel to the United States. He later absorbed these groups into his own (Lu, 1973, 56).

Finally, there is a definite relationship between the nature of positional authority and success of church organization as can be seen in the case of the Local Church and the splinter group, the Christian Assembly. One informant who belonged to neither group (Yu, 1974) stated that after the split there were many disagreements among Christian Assembly leaders that prevented their working together within the same church. Many of these co-workers are now involved in their own individual

evangelical work or in Christian seminaries (both in Taiwan and the United States) rather than work within the church. That this occurred in the Christian Assembly and not in the Local Church was due to the fact these workers had co-equal status with no agreed-upon leader. This was not the case with Lee in the Local Church and thus his organization flourished. The need for one leader above all was considered a prerequisite for the success of any Chinese organization. It might be added that, in the context of the family analogy, as long as the father lives, a traditional extended family might remain cohesive; once he dies, however, the brothers usually divide the household.

The sequence of events which led to the formalization of the split started in the cities of Kaohsiung and Tainan and spread to Taipei. Some of the former workers within the church who had been relieved of their positions by Witness Lee came to Taipei in 1966 and a meeting of one of the jya was secretly transferred to another house. This was discovered after a co-worker went to the regular meeting place to see if the meeting was taking place. Lee informed the members involved that he considered their actions to be a revolt against his leadership and the split subsequently occurred in Taipei. Several months later a group of brothers who had left the Assembly Hall Church met and decided on the need for their own church

building and the Christian Assembly (Ji Du Tu Hwei Swo, 基督徒會所) came into being.

Of those brethren who left the church, most joined one of two groups. The first was the previously mentioned Christian Assembly, whose Taipei membership now approximates (on the rolls) about 500 brethren, in contrast to 20,000 for the Taipei Local Church. The second church is known as the New Testament Church (Syin Ywe Jyau Hwei, 新約教會). With its headquarters in Hong Kong, this group was started in Taiwan in 1965 with the visit of its apostle, Ruth Chang. Its initial growth was directly related to the dissension in the Assembly Hall Church taking place at that time. The overall organization of this group is similar to that of the Assembly Hall Church; like the latter, it uses locality as the basis for organization and the church in Taipei is known as the Taipei Church. The feature which distinguishes the church from the Assembly Hall Church is the use of speaking in tongues, virulently attacked by Witness Lee in special meetings held in Taipei in January of 1972. I would suggest that allowing such tongue-speaking within the church would provide another vehicle for competitors to Lee's supremacy as the most spiritually advanced member in the church. While the New Testament Church is quite small, its members' past connection with the Assembly Hall Church

must have influenced Lee to spend several hours attacking its doctrine and leader. The death from tongue cancer of Ruth Chang-s mother was attributed to the heresy of tongue-speaking. Moreover, she was alleged to have stolen the organization of the New Testament Church during her contacts with the Assembly Hall Church brethren in Southeast Asia. In addition to these two major churches, some adherents began to attend other smaller churches, while some leaders left Taiwan for America or Hong Kong.

The effect of the split on church attendance was only initially devastating. Lee began to use his publications to legitimize his position. One of the prime means was the publication of materials regarding his successes in establishing churches in the United States, seen to be a manifestation of the Lord's favor to Lee. Moreover, successful attempts were made to contact many reluctant brethren and to bring them back into the fold. Soon after the split, a special meeting was held by Lee at the First Assembly Hall, attended by approximately 2,000 people (p.1). Here he primarily discussed the doctrinal aspects of the split and the new road which the church must travel. At these meetings he emphasized three things: living in the spirit, preaching the gospel, and remaining in the church ground. The informant on these meetings who is still a member of the Assembly Hall Church stated that he felt that the latter was

the most important but that Lee needed to deal with the other two so that people could not say that he was only interested in keeping people within the Local Church. It was further noted that these three points were published and distributed abroad in other languages, among them Japanese and English. It was at this time that the name LOCAL CHURCH gained prominence over the one most used previously, Jyau Hwei Jyu Hwei Swo. Other changes in the church structure and ritual soon took place, creating a church quite distinct from the one which had existed before the split. Soon after the split the Seventh and Ninth Assembly Halls were added and a great effort was made to increase membership throughout Taiwan. Although official figures are not available, it has been estimated that the Assembly Hall Church in Taiwan had doubled its membership since the split and now totals approximately 40,000 brethren throughout the island.

The effects of the split were not felt in Hong Kong until about 1967. By then, the splinter group had a base in Taiwan and the Philippines and members of this group went to Hong Kong for fellowship with brethren in the Local Church there. They were refused communion; there was apparently both physical and verbal altercation between opposing sides and the main assembly hall there was "occupied" (word used by Lee's supporters) by opponents of Lee (1970b). The incorporated name of Lee's

group in Hong Kong is Christian Stewards (Lee has been accused of stacking the executive board of this group in his favor; Lu, 1973). In an outline of church history which I was allowed to glance at in the church in Hong Kong, it was noted that before April 1, 1967, all the brothers were of one accord. But at that time, one of the elders "with ill intentions caused by influences from troublemakers in Taiwan, joined in league with them, made secret schemes within the church by encouraging factions. The discord that year was over admitting a Taiwan troublemaker to the Lord's supper." As the situation in Hong Kong worsened, it became necessary for the opposing sides to publish arguments in their own support. In 1970 letters between Witness Lee and the dissidents were exchanged. The position of Lee was that regardless of certain differences among members, the only foundation for church organization is that of locality and members in disagreement must not leave the church body. The only solution to such problems is to "deng hou ju" ("wait for the Lord"), i.e., to wait for the spirit of Jesus to give the members a feeling to let them know which position is correct.

In the dissidents' letter (Shr, et al., 1970) compiled by members from both Taiwan and Hong Kong, the first portion was devoted to noting certain heretical teachings in the writings of Witness Lee. One was Lee's encouragement after the split

of a second baptism ("mai dzang", burial). Furthermore, Lee's leadership was discredited by claims of his misinterpretation of Watchman Nee's works. His attempt to place emphasis within the trinity on the spirit rather than the son was viewed as anti-scriptural. It was further stated that Lee had misused Nee's concept of the Local Church, which merely connoted that Christians within a locality should cooperate in the spirit of brotherhood. Finally, Lee's ritual innovations in encouraging the members to call out the name of Jesus in a loud voice were viewed as attempts to keep up with modern-day trends of using psychological means to create a revival atmosphere.

Lee's answers to these charges were contained in the publication of three leaflets. Two concerned themselves with the attacks on Lee's so-called heresies (Lee, 10/7/70; 10/1/70); the other was a series of letters from churches throughout the world supporting Lee's behavior (Lee, 1970a). He commented upon these attacks as being worthless as his detractors merely took his words out of context. He explained that the second baptism occurred first in Los Angeles at a special meeting in 1968. There in a sermon he had suggested metaphorically that we need to be buried again; one brother had been moved to take him literally and "buried himself" again in water. While Lee was surprised at this action, he did not feel he could oppose it because it must have come from the spirit.

As there is nothing in the Bible that says one can be baptized only once, he accepted this as valid--as long as it did not become a fixed rule. Just as the Israelites passed through the Jordan River and Red Sea (seen as analogous to baptism) so brethren can, if they feel moved, be baptized more than once (Lee, 10/1/70,9). Moreover, Lee asked that emphasis be placed on the general belief in Jesus Christ rather than specific doctrine. This, he stated, is consistent with Paul's tolerant attitude expressed in Romans 14:1: "As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him but not for disputes over opinion...." Thus, individuals should not argue over doctrine but accept each other as brethren in Christ (Lee, 10/1/70, 13).

Overall, both groups used the same argument in attacking the opposition: the dependence on man rather than on the Lord for guidance. To the Christian Assembly this entailed Lee's seeking personal dictatorial control over church organization and meetings. In a similar vein, Lee saw the dissidents' as using human logic and discussion as a substitute for spiritual inspiration; thus, he ends his criticism of his detractors by reference to Ephesians 4:13-14: "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine,

by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles."

Lee further answered all accusations by publishing a series of letters from various local churches, among which is that of the Los Angeles church recorded below:

AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE CHURCH IN LOS ANGELES

TO THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF THE CHURCH

IN HONG KONG:

October 12, 1970

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

We have recently seen a translation of a letter written and published by Brother James Chen to the saints of Hong Kong, in which it is alleged that Brother Witness Lee is "establishing his own totalitarianism by means of the structure of his own work to control the meetings in various places, and that there is a "centralized control of both workers and finance", As the elders of the church in Los Angeles, where Brother Witness Lee has done and continues to do much work, we wish to testify that this is a naked lie and a gross deception. Brother Lee absolutely does not control the meeting here and is not even aware of many matters of the church life. While we greatly value his fellowship and frequently seek his counsel, we can testify before the Lord that from the very beginning of the church here, he has never held or kept anything in his hand. As for finances, there is absolutely no kind of centralized control. It is a fact that Brother Lee knows very little of what transpires in the church here in regard to the finances and exercises no control.

We also wish to testify as co-workers together with Brother Lee that there is no kind of structure, organization, or any control in the work. We work and move together in prayer, in fellowship, and by the guidance and presence of the Lord. Sometimes a burden for a move in the work is initiated and voiced not through him, but through us, and he frequently seeks our counsel and fellowship before acting.

We give this testimony with the earnest prayer and desire that innocent children of God will not receive these slanderous reports regarding a servant of the Lord without becoming aware of the facts of the case. The fact is that

these reports are absolutely ungrounded and untrue. We are witnesses to this. The Lord will vindicate Himself and His servant.

Yours in the Lord Jesus,

Samuel I-Lung Chang
William E. Mallon
John C. Ingalls
James Barber
(Lee, 1970a, 5)

The problem with using all of these 1970 documents as evidence of the actual cause of the split is that they were written several years after the conflict and some of the attacks on Lee's theoretical heresies (e.g., calling to the Lord, burial) were based on the latter's writing after the time of the split. When I spoke to members of the Christian Assembly, they made little reference at first to these doctrinal questions but rather emphasized the problems over church organization. Thus, with the exception of the doctrinal disagreement over cooperation with other Christian denominations, much of the attack leveled at Lee's teachings may have occurred as an attempt to draw Local Church members into the Christian Assembly by discrediting Lee's leadership.

The Church as Sect

Although the brethren shy away from such terms as "sect" in describing the nature of their church, an overview of attributes ascribed to sectarian movements by Wilson (1966) seems to place the Local Church squarely within the sociological framework of

sect. Attributes common to sectarian movements are also applicable to the Local Church:

1. Sects seek to regulate the pattern of their members' lives in particular ways (Wilson, 208).

The Local Church seeks to socialize the brethren through activities and testimonies into certain behavioral patterns conforming to group values.

2. Sects are normally lay movements, which practice their religion without an established professional ministry (Wilson, 208).

Local Church emphasizes lay control at the local level in the hands of the elders. The co-workers help guide the brethren under the direction of the elders.

3. Sects reject distinction between lay and ministry. All men should be equally committed and commitment must be total (Wilson, 209).

All brothers and sisters are part of the church family.

4. The sect usually condemns the cultural disposition of the secular society, or at least withdraws from them (Wilson, 209).

5. The sect represents itself as a community and fraternity.

6. The sect provides a total reference group for the individual who belongs (Wilson, 211).

Part of the thought reform process involves getting the new member to think of his life in terms of the church's world view and activities.

7. The sect affords a coherent community organization, a stable pattern of order (Wilson, 212).

8. Sects emphasize the priesthood of all believers. They frequently reject or disregard the status system of the wider society and are thus ideologically opposed to the creation of distinctive statuses in their own organization (Wilson, 213).

In the preceding chapters we have seen instances of each of the above features. While we can readily identify the Local Church as a sectarian movement, we can go one step further by distinguishing it as conversionist. Within this framework, starting from Wilson's analysis below, we can begin to understand

more clearly facets in church development as they occurred after the split in 1966.

the conversionist sects...were sects relying on revivalism for recruitment, emphasizing a change of heart as the condition of salvation, generally reasserting traditional moral values and religious imagery, and doing so, initially with intense emotionalism and expressiveness. Lay involvement in them was not so much a matter of lay government as freedom of expression and the absence of ministerial decorum and order. As these groups were stabilized and as they adjusted to the new condition of salvation that they proclaimed, so the emotionalism diminished. As their members gained in wealth and social respectability, so their disapproval of the wider culture declined. Having expected salvation in another world by conversion, the often first discovered the "kingdom of heaven" in the sect through socialization to high moral standards, they attained salvation in the wider world where they were no longer so insecure. The paradox of the conversionist sect has often been that having promised its votaries social mobility after death, it has provided it for them in real life--but by means it had not envisaged. Faith in God has been, at least in the past two centuries, a frequent indirect means to earthly salvation. Social adjustment has been a latent function of the conversionist sect. (Wilson, 1970, 235-236).

The above tendency in conversionist sects toward denominationalism provides some basis for understanding the nature of the conflict between Lee and the splinter group, later known as the Christian Assembly. The key problem which led to the split was disagreement over exclusiveness of the Local Church vis-a-vis other Christian denominations. At stake was the world view which clearly differentiated the Local Church from both denominational Christianity and the secular world. Lee felt that once his

co-workers began to have extensive fellowship with other churches that the perception of the exclusive nature of the Local Church would soon be lost. The result would be similar to that which I perceived as having occurred within the Christian Assembly. In the latter, there seems to be a general acceptance of the legitimacy of other churches as well as a lesser tendency to view the outside world as fraught with evil. The attitude within the Christian Assembly may be succinctly stated by the daughter of one of its elders, who was also an elder in the Taipei Local Church before the Split: "If God had wanted us only to live the church life, he would have had us born in church!" While I was not able to get a strict account of the makeup of the Christian Assembly, informants in the Local Church noted that it was composed of individuals of some social standing and with much background in scriptural study. The rejection of exclusiveness and greater participation with members of other Christian churches suggest that the Christian Assembly brethren have a greater tolerance of the wider culture and have accepted their role as one denomination among many Christian denominations in Taiwan.

At the level of ritual, this denominationalist quality of the Christian Assembly is reinforced. During my first visit to their meetings, I was struck by an awareness that had I not earlier known of the past connection between the two groups,

it would be difficult to perceive any historical link. In the span of five years, the meetings of the two groups had become quite distinct. The vibrancy and enthusiasm exhibited in Local Church meetings—popular hymns, calling out the name of the Lord, constant testimonies--are contrasted to the rather staid service of the Christian Assembly. Here the meeting begins with a prayer usually led by an elder or co-worker. There is very little participation in this prayer by those assembled except occasional Amens. Next a hymn is sung; this hymn is chosen from a large hymnal which was used by the Local Church before it was reorganized by Witness Lee. Then a Bible passage is chosen to be read and a long sermon is given by one of the church workers. Sometimes, one or more individuals might comment on the content of the passage but this is rather limited. A final hymn and prayer are offered and the meeting is concluded.

In 1972 the church began having Bible study meetings on Thursdays and one aspect that was noteworthy was the reluctance of most of the members to speak up. Later it was commented to me that this was because many of them were not clear on the meaning of the passage and felt reluctant to speak without a clear understanding of the passage read. Thus, the burden of speaking at these meetings fell to the church workers. The organizational effect is to put much of the responsibility

for evangelical activities on the shoulders of the co-workers within the church. Thus, membership in the church is still primarily composed of those who once belonged to the Local Church.

The significance of this comparison is that it suggests the need for maintaining a certain emotional level in church services if brethren are to be committed to conversionist goals. This is particularly true in a non-Christian society where the majority are basically hostile to Christianity. That emotional level allows the members to overcome many of the fears and inhibitions which might prevent them from carrying out their evangelical activities. Because the conversionist goal is viewed as a gradual one, there is a need to create an atmosphere of continual enthusiasm (much like that of permanent revolution on the mainland). The self-perception on the part of the brethren of the Local Church as a unified and harmonious body directed by Jesus' spirit was a key in maintaining the level of enthusiasm. When the power struggle developed, this perception was undermined. The reality of the Local Church's highly developed structure was revealed, thus hindering the ability to carry out with efficiency the organizational goal of conversion. What must concern us here is the means by which the church organization was revitalized so that its conversionist goals could be maintained.

The Use of Ritual

To reiterate from Chapter V, the world view of a religious group serves the functions of providing the group with a map for perceiving its boundaries as well as furnishing individuals within the group with certain motivations on which to base their behavior. When the reality of such a world view is threatened by conflicting presentations of reality, its ability in serving as a format for the accomplishment of organizational goals is undermined for it no longer orders the world in a way in which behavior can be directed. Before the split, Sparks' visit touched off events which disrupted both the church's organization (plausibility structure) and the dialectic between world view and experience on which its world-building process was based. Because the criterion of locality for church organization closely defined the overall boundaries of the brethren's world view, his criticism had undermined the church from both standpoints. When his alternative was accepted by some young brethren, disagreement among the leaders rendered asunder the reality of a unified and harmonious church body. No longer did the brethren perceive the Local Church as directed by Jesus' spirit rather than by the machinations of human rationale. The distinctiveness of the Local Church in contrast to other Christian bodies could no longer be supported in reality. There was little unity to provide a basis for carrying out the organizational goal

of gaining new membership. The halting of evangelical activity made it difficult to maintain the view expressed in the world view of the spirit (the Local Church) slowly gaining control over the forces of the mind and flesh (denominations and secular world). With the boundaries expressed in the world view blurred, there was no foundation for building up a strong church. It was thus necessary for Lee to reemphasize the boundaries of church life in order to restore church unity and solidarity for the accomplishment of his organizational goals. The prime means for restoring the boundaries expressed in the world view is ideology which to reiterate I am defining as a systematic set of ideas for creating and utilizing organization in order to reach certain goals.

In considering ideology from this standpoint, it is best for us to begin from the source of this set of ideas, Witness Lee. In every Local Church his figure looms large; it was under his leadership and direction that the Local Church has attained its high level of growth throughout the world. It was Witness Lee who was the focal point of the split on Taiwan, as well as the central figure in Hong Kong and the Philippines. His authority and the brethren's perception of his role as church apostle thus become the crucial aspect if one is to understand the use of ideology in the Local Church today.

To grasp the reasons for the successes of the Local Church

as an evangelical organization, one must have the experience of seeing Witness Lee in action, i.e., leading one of the large special meetings of 10,000 brethren. Both his supporters and opponents alike admit to his great leadership qualities. I participated in two weekly special meetings at which he was the main speaker--10,000 people nightly for a week was the estimated attendance. (The first of these meetings was held at the First Girls' School; the second time it was held at the Sun Yat-sen Memorial). His magnetism as a speaker could be felt throughout the auditorium. Brethren acted as if under his spell; elders of the church were made to perform stunts as Lee spoke and acted out his messages. On the first night of the special meeting in the First Girls' School, we all faced Lee, who sat on a podium from where he spoke. The next day, because of a dearth in enthusiastic participation by the brethren, he had the chairs placed in a semicircular arrangement and microphones placed throughout the auditorium to enhance eye contact and encourage both participation and a sense of unity among the brethren. This again points to the importance Lee places on space as symbolizing and influencing behavior, as is the case with the design of church buildings, also initially blueprinted by him.

In addition to this absolute factor of Lee's forcefulness as a speaker and as an organizer, there are several factors

which make the group in Taiwan receptive to his influence. His successes at organization, particularly in the United States, give him almost charismatic powers in the eyes of other brethren (or at least place him beyond criticism in his status as church apostle.) His interaction with the brethren takes the form of that between teacher and pupil, roles recognized by both Lee and the brethren alike. This relationship entails one of respect and dependence on the part of the pupil with the teacher carrying the burden of guiding the latter. If we reassess the original analogy of Jesus: us::father: son:: teacher: pupil by expressing it in more mundane terms, we might replace Jesus with Lee. The possibility for doing this became evident to me when after Lee's first visit I went to a church meeting where the brethren were pray-reading Lee's sermons. Lee as teacher is representative of the same superior/inferior relationship that is found in that between Jesus and the brethren. This is not to say that the brethren consider Lee to be God, only that they recognize his closeness to Jesus and the complete inspiration directing his every word. This leads them to confuse him symbolically with the deity in the ritual of the meetings, and thus to relate to him in a way analogous to that of their relation to Jesus.

Lee's guidance of the brethren thus takes on certain qualities similar to the way the members perceive Jesus as directing them. One of the main themes expressed by the brethren throughout

the length of my stay was the fear of being alone--the fear of not being in the right place when Jesus returns. The right place for the pupil/child is in the home with the teacher/father. The threat of leaving the child alone is a frightening one and one that is often heard on the streets of Taipei. Lee too threatens—that he will not return from America to teach the brethren and give them his latest inspiration. It is interesting that this fear of missing Jesus when he returns was expressed most openly in the meetings before Lee's first visit when the brethren had been made aware that he would return only if they showed (in numbers of conversions) that they were deserving. This was also the approach that Lee had taken with the dissident co-workers whom he had reared. They were his children/pupils; the relationship was never considered to be an equal one. At one special meeting when Lee noted that in church everyone is a child ("hai dz," 孩子), he scolded one young brother who had the audacity to suggest in testimony that Brother Lee too was a child. Lee's prestige came from his success in building up the church in Taiwan and the United States; even young Americans looked to him for guidance (an enormous compliment in Taiwan). If the brethren then felt that they owed Jesus so much, then likewise they considered their debts to Lee to be great.

In the Local Church Lee is both prophet and priest in

Weberian terms. He has a status given in the Bible as apostle and certain responsibilities attached to that status. Nevertheless, he is considered to have the inside track on inspiration and ability to guide the rest of the brethren in church building. It is his responsibility to translate the transcendental goal of salvation into pragmatic terms. His major limitation is that he cannot use written rules and admonishments, for these would contradict the spontaneity and naturalness of the church meeting by emphasizing human control over church direction. Now, in reassessing the situation in the Local Church throughout Taiwan before and after the split in 1966, we may see how Lee ~~rebuilds the church in light of the restriction against direct injunctives.~~

As pointed out before, the Local Church may be viewed as an organization, one of whose goals is increasing the numbers of those who accept Christ as their savior. The success of gospel activities is important in reinforcing in actual experience the reality of the world view that Jesus' power is overcoming the outside world. Likewise, the church ritual is an important means of solidifying the group and maintaining the perception. When the power struggle developed, there was no means by which to unify and organize the group for action as Jesus' army and the marches soon ceased. In addition the perception of a church directed by Jesus and not by men was undermined. There

was a confusion among the brethren as they saw the young leaders feuding with the apostle. One informant noted that few of the brethren attended services and many had begun to attend other churches. On Lee's return from the United States, once the split became final, he began immediately to revamp his forces. One thing was in his favor: the splinter group had split away from the church but had not retained church property which was still in the hands of the Local Church. This fact cannot be underestimated. In the split which occurred in the Philippines, supporters of Lee had left the buildings in the hands of his opponents, adversely affecting their capability to regroup. One brother who had left the Local Church said that Lee had learned from this experience and had thus made every effort to assure that if a split did occur in Taiwan, church buildings and property would remain in his hands. He further said that this had been a factor in Lee's success at regaining much of the lost membership for the occupation of buildings carried much weight in supporting the legitimacy of his claims. I questioned this individual as to the reasons for Lee's greater success at gaining and retaining members than the Christian Assembly. He stated that Chinese are very conservative and attached to their home grounds and that because the home grounds were in Lee's hands, this had an overriding effect in encouraging brethren to return. Thus, he concluded

that the importance of PLACE to Chinese in general gave Lee an advantage once the split had been finalized. The situation in Hong Kong is another case in point for there the dissidents physically took control over church property and forced Lee's supporters out—the result that Lee has taken the case to the British courts in order to regain access to the church meeting hall.

After the split, Lee was faced with the problem of restoring organizational unity and control while at the same time re-enforcing a world view that de-emphasized the importance of organization in hierarchical terms. Certain changes were made to restore organizational effectiveness and mend the boundaries of the world view. These changes were guided by a particular set of ideas which we have defined as ideology. As the split was being finalized, articles appeared in Hwa Yu Jr Shr which emphasized the need for each co-worker and the brethren in general to obey authority if there is to be unity of the church. These articles written in 1966 provide an overview of those ideological features that Lee considers most important for the success of church organization:

April, 1966: The co-workers must first learn to obey authority; then they must teach other brethren to do same; after everyone trains his spirit to obey authority, then it becomes natural.

May: relates circumstance of Noah and sons and their

seeing his nakedness rather than cover him up; this was an experiment to see if sons obey him (could nakedness refer to Lee's own financial and marital mistakes?)

June: you don't necessarily obey person but rather you must obey position (thus, David did not kill Saul because latter was anointed by God).

July: we need to have a place where God can build his kingdom; if obey, then kingdom will arise; thus, we mustn't have rebels in our midst but must completely obey God.

August: if you obey the representatives of God, then you will be able to touch God.

September: there are two types of directions from God; one is direct revelation (not too many), the other is indirect through the more advanced brethren. You don't need to go through process yourself but you still can enjoy the richness of Christ.

October: watch out for rebellious ones who use reason. If want to know which brother can have authority, look to see if he speaks reason and has his own opinion rather than obey. Satan doesn't fear our work but fears our obeying.

December: you must obey leader but if you feel that order is different from God's, you don't have to carry it out. Must still, however, recognize and obey leadership.

The above paraphrases express Lee's initial concern for the breakdown of particular principles on which organizational authority rests. In the long run, however, his means of using ideology had to be incorporated into the ritual of the church meetings so that these principles seem to be naturally inspired by Jesus' spirit. In the case of asserting his own position, Lee used ritual means which stated symbolically the proper

relationship and correct world view on which this behavior was to be based. As in the case with traditional Chinese education, the brethren memorized the ritual from the teacher; even if they did not at first understand they would follow his lead and afterwards they would grasp the significance of their ritual act.

Because, according to several informants in the Local Church, the meetings of the Christian Assembly remain essentially the same as those of the Local Church before the Split, we are able to note the changes in ritual instituted by Lee after the split. To reiterate the basic format of these services: hymn and prayer led by a church elder or co-worker who stood in front of the assembly; reading of Bible passages by one of the church leaders; some contribution to this explanation by other brethren; final hymn and prayer. Despite some participation by all members in the church meetings, the burden of responsibility fell to the co-workers whose positions as teachers and spiritual guides was reinforced. From an organizational standpoint, this had given the co-workers and some elders a base that was independent of the apostle Witness Lee.

Hence, Lee's first move after the split was to de-emphasize the future role of the co-workers in sermonizing on the scriptures. His experience led him to conclude that existence of preachers leads to splits and thus much of the sermonizing should be

replaced by more prayer-reading in groups, where all can develop the same outlook (Hwa Yu Jr Shr, 12/68, 265-266). The use of reason (dau li, 道理) was discouraged as a means for understanding the teachings of Jesus and complete dependence on the spirit of Jesus was to be the mainstay of the new ritual patterns. The speakers' area was moved from the front of the meeting hall to the center, resulting in two groups of brethren facing each other. This not only offered an easy access to the microphones for every member but created through constant eye contact a spirit of unity and continuity in church service. The brethren were encouraged to pray-read the Bible, allowing them to ingest and digest the spiritual word. Any aberration from dependence on these words was considered to be an attempt to replace Jesus' all-encompassing influence with that of man himself. The ritual of the Local Church was limited to calling out the name of Jesus, letting his spirit enter into one's own, singing and pray-reading hymns and biblical passages, and finally offering testimonies on the individual's revelations in communication with the spirit of Jesus. To prevent co-workers from establishing a base where the meeting depends on their long speeches, they have been moved around so they do not get too established in any one area. Overall, the thrust of the meetings was natural spontaneity.

Rational interpretations of passages were discouraged as brethren were urged in testimonies to speak from their feelings as directed through fellowship with Jesus. The testimonies became stylized as highly emotionalized expressions of the theme of the meeting. A new hymnbook was compiled using the melodies of popular songs and vernacular lyrics which expressed themes such as the church as family, the success of Jesus' army, and living the church life.

The outcome of these ritual changes was to increase the amount of participation of all church brethren and thus de-emphasize the existence of church hierarchy. By placing a greater emphasis on individual testimonies rather than on teaching of scriptural truth, the position of the co-workers as teachers and leaders was decreased and the possibility for would-be pretenders to Lee's position of authority declined. Each new aspect in church ritual—calling out the name of the Lord, eating and drinking the Lord's words in pray-reading, living the church life--was introduced by Lee during special meetings which he led in Taiwan or the United States. Moreover, the effect of this increased participation extended to instituting changes in activities within the church. Members were pressed to express their feelings in the context of the church's world view and thus learn to perceive the church body as the only

haven secure against the havoc in the secular world. Each of them was urged to take personal responsibility in gaining converts and in aiding members within the group. Closed social networks among the brethren were maintained in order to assure complete psychological dependency on the church/Jesus.

While spontaneity and freedom must be manifested in church meetings, there is also a covert control over direction of the meetings. The theme of the meeting provides the link between the brethren and between them and Jesus. Once the biblical passage is read, the brethren are encouraged to rise and express their feelings on the passages. Should the testimonies stray from the original theme, the co-workers will often, as good shepherds, shift the group back to the original theme by suggesting a related hymn or giving a testimony of their own. Yet the fact that this occurs in a ritualistic atmosphere of spontaneity de-emphasizes the subtle direction by the co-workers and reinforces the perception that the church is imbued with and directed by Jesus only. Moreover, these ritual changes toward spontaneity and movement symbolize the continual change taking place within the church and individual. This continual change, brought about by inspiration through Lee, represents the latter's attempt to utilize his power and maintain in Weberian terms the charismatic stage of church life (Gerth and Mills, 1958, 245-252; Bendix, 1962, 308-328).

His control comes from exercising his power as apostle to interpret correct ritual procedure. This became clear at one large special meeting when he attacked the tendency of the brethren merely to spout out his suggested slogans and turn the meetings into staid custom and habit. Thus, knowing the slogans and rituals (e.g., calling out the name of the Lord) are not enough; the brethren still need guidance from Lee if the ritual is to lead to a successful spiritual meeting.

Finally, the closed meetings of the elders, co-workers and deacons combined with the openness of church public meetings tends to render a perception of the actual organizational hierarchy as relatively insignificant as a factor in church life. The atmosphere of *gemeinschaft* within the church is contrasted favorably to the highly organized denominational religions; unity and harmony with church boundaries is posed as an alternative to secular society. The boundaries as expressed in the world view of the Local Church and broken during the split have been mended by ideological change in the form of new ritual patterns. The ritual of the church meetings and other activities such as the love feast and gospel march closed the gap between the ideal community of brethren and the reality of church hierarchy manifested during the dissidence. Ritual served as a mediator not only between this hierarchy and a sense of community but in terms previously used, between

AFTERWORD:

THE LOCAL CHURCH IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

One of my main objectives in undertaking a study of a marginal Chinese group was to provide a basis for what I consider to be an unfortunate situation in Chinese anthropology: isolation from other areas of the discipline and failure by those outside the China field to use more effectively the case of China as a model for general theory. In the preceding pages, I have attempted to show the applicability of Berger, Geertz, and Wilson to the analysis of one element in present-day Taiwan society and thus discourage the tendency toward insularity so common to a field of study as complex as that of Chinese culture.

As I continued to stay among the brethren, I became aware of another feature of far-reaching consequence. If and when anthropologists have access to extensive participant-observer fieldwork on mainland China is an unanswered question. My own feeling is that we shall be one of the last groups of scholars allowed to examine the crucial questions regarding the changes in culture and behavior in China since 1949.

While the thrust of this work has been to view the relation of ritual and organizational changes in the Local Church, there has been throughout an implied comparison with the mainland

case. This short section is not meant to be an all-inclusive comparison of organization and ideology in the Local Church and on the mainland. It is, however, an attempt to suggest directions for future inquiries in Chinese anthropology and sociology.

Most generally, the brethren's concept of freedom (group not individual) may be suggestive of a similar rationale behind patterns of political authority and decision-making used in China today. Here some conclusions drawn by Solomon on Chinese leadership and authority patterns coincide with my own regarding behavior within the Local Church. Solomon notes that today in China there is an attempt to use an emotionalized style of politics while controlling such emotional responses by institutional forms so that they can be directed toward purposeful action (Solomon, 1971, 514-515). In addition to the dependency on both Mao and Lee for doctrinal guidance, there is also the obvious parallel of church methods of incorporation to the process of thought reform on the mainland. The function of syau pai in the church also suggests certain comparisons with small group sessions ("hsiao tsu," syau dzu, 小組) in China as described by Whyte (1974). In both cases the group rituals serve to sensitize individuals to conform to group patterns of behavior and accept the overall world view as well as provide a communication channel for the upward and downward flow of

information. Finally, there is the attempt in both to encourage thorough self-analysis: self-criticism on the mainland and Local Church testimonies, in which brethren often criticize their pre-baptism personal weaknesses or recent failures to be subservient to Jesus.

Moreover, during my research, I discovered organizational and ideological developments in the church similar to those described by Schurmann (1971). His definition of ideology struck me as applicable to events in the church and I consequently was able to consider the Local Church in organizational terms similar to Schurmann's treatment of government and party on the mainland. Related to the question of the relationship between ideology and organization is a suggested analysis of both the Cultural Revolution and the events in the Local Church after the split in the context of revitalization cults. Both represent attempts by single leaders to revitalize an organizational structure that no longer supported their world view. In the two cases, Mao and Lee are charismatic leaders who used young people to overcome entrenched power of other leaders. This middle tier of "experts" and their tools of dogma were to be de-emphasized. In its place, there was to be a reliance on the spontaneity of applying Marxism-Leninism (as interpreted in the thoughts of Mao) on the one hand, or total direction by the spirit (as revealed by Lee) on the other.