Confucianism and Taoism in Folk Religion:  
China, Taiwan and the Ryukyu Kingdom

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What underlies all ideologies in China is the concept of “Qi.” Qi is physical and at the same time social; it connects members of a “kinship group”, which is a patrilineal group with the same family name who are descended from the same ancestor. Ancestor worship as well as the idea of “filial piety” are also rooted in the concept of Qi, and the idea is that a “sympathy” of Qi is generated between the ancestors who are worshiped and descendants who worship them, which blesses the descendants and enables them to thrive. Ancestor worship and filial piety are not inherent in Confucianism, but they are common to both Buddhism and Taoism. However, the bureaucracy that was begun by the elite who passed the Keju (imperial examination system) in the Northern Song Dynasty dramatically changed the status of the Shih Tu-fu class (ruling upper class, the literati class) such that the kinship system that had survived since ancient times was reorganized and strengthened, resulting in the formation of the ritual system of kinship in Early Modern Age Confucianism and the basic structure of Shih Ta-fu society in the Ming and Qing Dynasties and later. If we look at characters that appeared in novels and their actions, we see that the reality was that not only the general public, but also the bureaucrats in the Shih Ta-fu class who had taken on Confucianism, relied on supernatural powers. For example, “Feng Shui” is a way of selecting sites where excellent “Qi” is flowing and was used to find appropriate locations for graveyards and residences. The Shih Ta-fu class became very enthusiastic about Feng Shui, hoping to enhance the prosperity of their own kinship group as well as their own advancement and success in the world. These examples suggest that in Confucianism, the public and the private, or the official stance and actual reality were quite far from each other. The reality was that people’s actual lives were dependent on the world of Taoism.