Chinese Religion in Malaysia

Chinese Overseas

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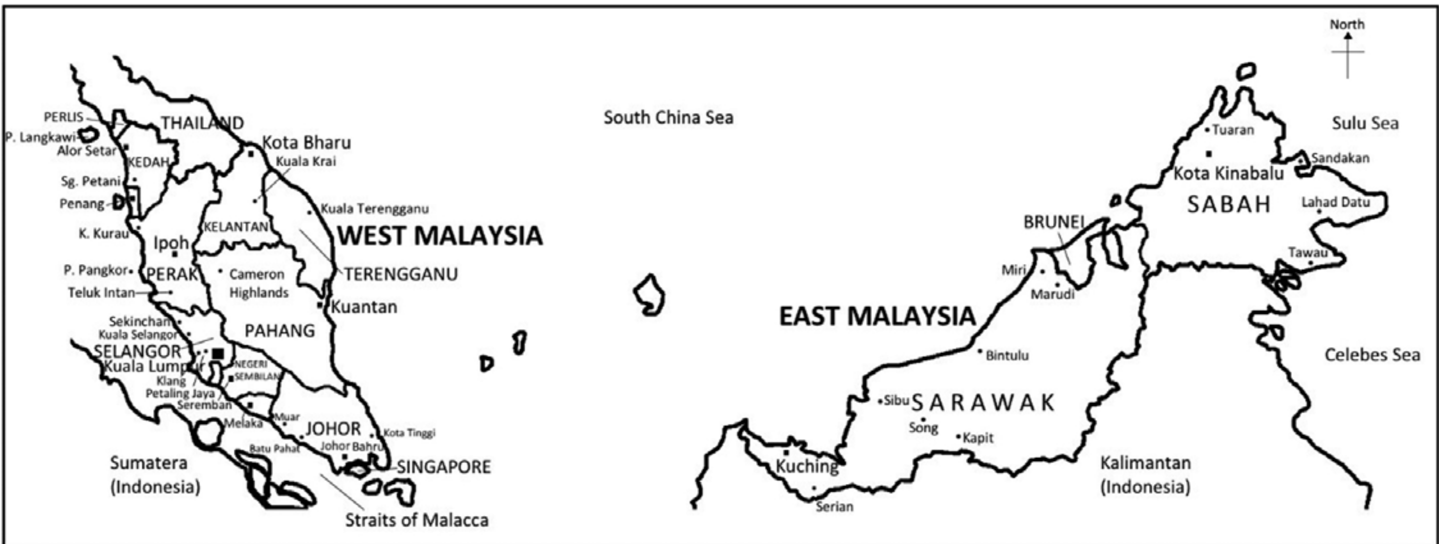

Map of Malaysia

Chinese Religion in Malaysia

Temples and Communities

By

Tan Chee-Beng

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Cover photo: Altar of Dabogong accompanied by Da Er Ye and altar of Tiger God at stage right front of Sanjiao Tang in Kuala Lumpur. (September 2016, Author)

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Preface

I began my study of Chinese beliefs and practices in 1977, when I did a one-year anthropological research among the Baba in Melaka, Malaysia. The one-year research laid the foundation of my study of the Chinese Religion in Malaysia. I observed domestic worship and temple worship and did so throughout the year, closely watching festivals and the worship of ancestors and deities. Since then I have studied temples and Chinese beliefs and practices in different parts of Malaysia. While traveling throughout Malaysia to study Dejiao (locally known in English as Moral Uplifting Societies) in 1981 and 1982, I was also able to visit many other temples, of which I paid special attention to *shantang*, or charitable halls. The classification and analysis of Dejiao societies was published in 1985 (Tan 1985). After research on *shantang* in Chao-Shan, China, in July 2008, and in Singapore and Malaysia in May 2009, I wrote an article on my findings (Tan 2012). With the data collected over the years, there has been much work in analyzing them, but some updating has proved in order. I thus carried out further investigation of Chinese temples in Malaysia in 2013. I should like to acknowledge the Sun Yat-sen University *bairen jihua* research startup fund (project no. 23000–3281302), which supported this update study. I thank my former graduate student and present colleague Dr. Duan Ying for helping to manage the fund, including his part in tending to the extremely tedious process of making claims at the university. Because of him, I've been spared the frustration so many academics in China have to endure.

There are countless individuals to thank, but I should like to mention Ms. Wu Mun Yu, who helped me in my investigation of temples and Taoist priests in Kuala Lumpur; and Mr. Tan Keng Yah, who helped me in my investigation of Chinese temples in Johor Bahru and other regions in southern Johor. Ms. Kwoh Shoo Chen helped me to arrange contacts in Penang and I wish to register my thanks, too. My brother-in-law Stephen Chung Guo Ling drove me to visit temples in Kota Kinabalu and Tuaran in Sabah, while my brother Tan Kok Yeong drove me to the various Chinese temples in Batu Pahat district in Johor, and I thank both of them. My wife Guan Swee Hiang accompanied me on my numerous trips to temples throughout Peninsular Malaysia in the 1980s, and I am grateful. My former graduate student Miss Luo Jiting helped draw the map of Malaysia, which indicates the major cities and towns mentioned in this book, and I thank her. I should also like to thank the anonymous reviewer for his or her professional comments, from which I have benefited. Lastly, I am grateful to all individuals whom I have interviewed or talked to informally

about deities and temples in Malaysia and Singapore. This is only a small step toward writing a comprehensive description of Chinese Religion in Malaysia. I have decided to focus on temples here, but I hope to be able to follow up with a second volume on festivals and domestic worship. There is still much room to study the rather complex traditional Chinese beliefs and practices in Malaysia and Singapore.

TAN Chee-Beng
Kuala Lumpur, June 2017

Technical Notes

Transcription

For Putonghua (Mandarin) I use the pinyin system. While the standard Chinese is called Putonghua in China, it is referred to as Huayu (literally "Chinese language") in Malaysia and Singapore. In this book, I use Mandarin in English. The Hokkien (Minnan) transcription follows the system used in Putonghua Minnanyu Cidian 普通话闽南语词典 (Putonghua and Minnan Dictionary); this was compiled by the Department of Chinese Language and Literature of Xiamen University, and published by Fujian Renmin Chubanshe in 1982. Thus, the Hokkien transcription differs from the nonstandardized usage in Malaysia. For example, the god Dabogong is generally written as Tua Peh Kong or Toa Peh Kong but is transcribed in this book as Duabehgong, and the nonstandardized form *tangki* for spirit medium is transcribed here as *danggi*.

Malaysia

The names Malaya and Malaysia are both used in this book. Before 1948 the term *Malaya* generally included the island of Singapore. When the Federation of Malaya was established in 1948, Singapore was excluded. In 1963, the Federation of Malaya, together with Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore, formed Malaysia; but in 1965 Singapore left Malaysia to become an independent country. Before 1965, *Malaya* was also used loosely to cover both the Malayan Peninsula and the island of Singapore. The Chinese of the two regions were so culturally intertwined that it was difficult to draw a boundary between them when it came to food, religion and other aspects of culture. Thus, I use the term *Malayan* to cover both Malaysia and Singapore in the reproduction and recreation of Chinese culture in these two countries.

Currency

The Malaysian dollar (MYR) was fairly stable from 1971 to 1990, being around US$1 to $2.5 *ringgit* (Malaysian dollars). I began my research on the Chinese in Malaysia in 1977. The rate from 1976 to 1980 was around US$1 dollar to 2.3 MYR; from 1981 to 1985, it was 2.4; and from 1986 to 1996, it was fairly stable at 2.6. During the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1998, the rate averaged 3.4,

and from 1999 to 2002, the Malaysian dollar depreciated to 3.8 (Daquila 2004: 24). In January 1998, the Malaysian *ringgit* was at its worst, 4.71. The Malaysian currency had been rather unstable in the 2010s: the rate was around 3.28 in December 2013, 3.33 in 2014, mostly at 4.30 in December 2015, and at 4.126 on 24 September 2016. On 26 June 2017, the rate was 1 US to 4.29 MYR.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Chinese popular religion stretches over millennia and varies from one region of China to another, though all Chinese worshipers share many practices. Chinese migrants brought the popular religion abroad with them, reterritorializing the religious practices in different parts of the world. This was especially so in Southeast Asia, where there has been a long history of Chinese migration and concentration. Malaysia and Singapore, with the highest population ratio of the Chinese overseas, both present promising conditions for the study of Chinese popular religion. For one thing, they have allowed Chinese religious practices to enjoy a continuous existence, one without major political disruption. Political policies have had their effect at times, but overall the Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore have been free to practice their traditional religion. By contrast, consider China's violent disruption of worship during the Cultural Revolution.

Of course, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau also allowed religious practice without disruption. But in Hong Kong and Macau, the population is mainly Cantonese; in Taiwan, it is mainly Minnan and Hakka. Meanwhile, Malaysia and Singapore have become home to the Minnanren (Hokkien), Hakka, Teochew (Chaozhou people), Cantonese, Hainanese and more. The two neighbors contain religious practices that in China would have to be hunted down province by province, across a vast nation. Each major town of Malaysia is home to religious practices that can be traced to different regional origins in China. In fact, a single temple may be home to deities of different speech-group origins.

Yet this fascinating terrain for the study of the traditional Chinese Religion is yet to be explored more fully. The early in-depth study by Allan Elliot (1955) on spirit-medium cults in Singapore, and the one by Maurice Freedman (1957) on Chinese marriage and funeral rites in Singapore, have remained highly informative. More recent studies include Cheu (1988) on the Nine Emperor Gods, DeBernardi (2004, 2006) on Chinese Religion and society in Penang, Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman on Baitiangong (see Ackerman and Lee 1988) and Tan Chee-Beng on Dejiao (Tan 1985). There are also some edited volumes (e.g., Cheu, ed. 1993; Clammer, ed. 1983; Tan, ed. 1990). In recent years, there have been a number of new publications in Singapore (e.g., Chan 2006; Dean 2012, 2015, Goh 2009; Hue 2012; Kuah-Pearce 2003; Tong 2004, 2007). Some general works like those of Leon Comber (1954, 1955, 1958) are informative. There are useful articles and book chapters (see Tan 1989, 150–154), and mention should

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be made of the great contributions of Marjorie Topley to the study of Chinese Religion in Malaya, including Singapore in the 1950s (see DeBernardi, ed. 2011). There are also articles published in Chinese—for example, the relevant chapters in Su (2004, 2009, 2010)—and an excellent MA thesis in Chinese written by Choo Chin Tow (1968).

What Is Chinese Religion?

Chinese Religion in this book refers to what is called Chinese popular religion in China. This second term, *Chinese popular religion*, is based on the more appropriate *minjian zongjiao*, which literally means "religion among the masses." The English term *Chinese popular religion* has become more popular than *Chinese folk religion*, or *minsu zongjiao*. The terms are used to refer to the complex of Chinese beliefs and practices involving the worship of ancestors, deities and ghosts, in contrast to Buddhism and Taoist Religion (*daojiao*). Chinese popular religion has been the subject of a significant number of works in Chinese, English, Japanese and other languages. Among the earlier major western works are those of J. J. M. De Groot (1892–1910, see 1976) and Marcel Granet (1922, see 1975); they provide a good picture of Chinese popular religion in late imperial China. Wing-tsit Chan (1953), a noted Chinese philosophy scholar, and C. K. Yang (1961), a sociologist, also provided their insights regarding the popular religion. Wing-tsit is known for his differentiation between the "masses," who worship many deities, and the "enlightened" (mainly but not necessarily the intelligentsia), who worship few deities or none. Yang classifies the religion of China into "diffused" (such as ancestor worship) and institutional, with institutional religion being organized like Taoist Religion.

After 1949 many foreign anthropologists, mainly Americans, studied Chinese popular religion in Taiwan and Hong Kong (see, for instance, the volume edited by Wolf [1974] and monographs such as Jordan [1972] and Weller [1987]). In the volume edited by Arthur Wolf there is an article by Maurice Freedman (1974) that discusses the sociological study of Chinese religions. In fact, there are now many works on the Chinese popular religion in Taiwan, including those by Taiwanese scholars such as Liu (1983), Wang and Li (2000), Chang (2003), Lin (2015) and many others. After the opening up of mainland China since 1978, there has been a number of historical and general works on the Chinese popular religion (e.g., Dean 1993; Weller and Shahar 1996; Lopez 1996; Feuchtwang 2001; Lagerwey 2004a; Lagerwey 2004b; Hou and Fan 2001; Overmyer 2003; Yang 2008; Lagerwey 2010; Duan 2012), but there is still a shortage of ethnographic studies on Chinese popular religion on the mainland (e.g.,

Chau 2006). It is beyond our scope here to survey the works studying the popular religion in mainland China or on Taiwan. But all these works are relevant to the study of the Chinese Religion of the Chinese overseas.

The term *religion* is really a matter of definition, and not all cultures identify a separate institution called religion. With the globalization of Christianity following colonialism, the definition of religion has become Eurocentric; even some elites and governments in countries that are not Anglo-American view religion in the image of Christianity. Religious beliefs and practices are not seen as constituting a religion if they lack a church organization, a Sunday service, and a scripture like the Bible. Both China and Indonesia, for example, recognize only institutional religions like Buddhism, Christianity (with Protestantism and Catholicism as separate religions), and Islam.[1] In China, the religion of most of the Chinese, the popular Chinese Religion, is officially regarded as superstition rather than religion. Muslims also tend to see religion in terms of the Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions. When I taught an anthropology course on religion at the University of Malaya in the 1980s, some of my Malay students, who were Muslims, often used the phrase "those who are yet to have religion" (*mereka yang belum ada agama*) to refer to non-Malays who were not Muslims or Christians; those put in the category could be found in the Chinese, Indian and Orang Asli (aboriginal) communities.

In fact, followers of traditional Chinese Religion often find it difficult to say what their religion is. Religious practices form part of social life, with no separate label to set them apart. Once the Chinese had no specific term for religion, the modern *zongjiao* being introduced from Japan. The Chinese term *jiao*, for "teaching," covers education, culture and religion, as Wing-tsit Chan (1953, 140) points out. The Chinese can speak of *sanjiao* (Three Teachings) comprising Ru (Confucianism), Shi (Buddhism) and Dao (Taoism), and do not distinguish which of these traditions are religious and which are not. While Buddhism is regarded as a religion, Chinese scholars generally do not see Confucianism as a religion. As to Taoism, Chinese scholars distinguish between *daojia sixiang* (Taoist philosophy) and *daojiao* (Taoist Religion), and so Dao in the Three Teachings really comprises both the Taoist system of philosophy and Taoist Religion. Most people today accept the common anthropological understanding of religion as having to do with symbols and rites tied to communication with deities, spirits, ancestors and ghosts—what Spiro (1966) has described

1 In China, the five officially recognized religions are Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism and Catholicism. In Indonesia, there are also five official religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism and Hinduism (Hindu-Bali). Confucianism was at one time recognized as the sixth religion, but lost that status in 1978.

as "superhuman beings." Despite his functional view of institutions as "instrumental means for the satisfaction of needs" (Spiro 1966, 96), Spiro's definition of religion is quite useful: "an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings" (Spiro 1966, 96). This is, of course, an anthropological definition: the interaction is culturally patterned, and the superhuman beings are culturally postulated. He avoids the word *supernatural* and instead speaks of "superhuman beings," meaning "any beings believed to possess power greater than man, who can work good and/or evil on man" (Spiro 1966, 98).

The Chinese popular religion is actually the complex of Chinese indigenous beliefs and practices that most ordinary Chinese observe in their daily and festive life, including honoring ancestors and worshipping gods and goddesses and even ghosts. Considered as religion in the anthropological sense, it is diffused, to use C. K. Yang's term (Yang 1961, 294); that is, like many religions outside the Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions, it is part of people's social life rather than forming a separate religious institution. It has no separate label nor is it necessarily seen as an organized system, although some cultures describe their religions as old practices, traditional customs and so on. For convenience, anthropologists call such religions according to the people's ethnic label: Iban religion, Miao religion and so on. In this sense, the Chinese popular religion is really Chinese Religion, but it is one implanted with many influences from the Three Teachings and China's long development. Because, in Taoism, China also has an indigenous institutional religion, the term *Chinese Religion* may be confusing. Accordingly, one speaks of *minjian zongjiao*, meaning "Chinese folk religion" or "Chinese popular religion."

In Malaysia, Chinese folk religion and the Chinese variety of Buddhism are the two Chinese religious traditions to be found. Taoist practices may be seen as part of the Chinese folk religion, although today there is an attempt to make *daojiao*, or "Taoist Religion," the label for Chinese popular religion, as we will discuss. Thus, in the context of Malaysia, I shall use *Chinese Religion* to refer to the Chinese popular religion, meaning the traditional faith. Furthermore, in local Chinese writing the traditional religious beliefs and practices are often referred to as *huaren zongjiao*, or "Chinese Religion." This usage, in multiethnic Malaysia, underlines the ethnic contrast between these religious beliefs and practices and those of the Malays, Indians and other groups.

Approaches

The Chinese Religion in Malaysia is studied in its local context, but one cannot ignore its cultural roots in China. Some aspects of the Chinese Religion in

Malaysia developed locally, but not all. Many features of the symbolism and rituals of the popular religion in China are relevant to understanding practices in Malaysia. This remains the case as the popular religion in mainland China evolves under the influence of globalization, including influences from Southeast Asia and Taiwan.

This study will pay attention to what I regard as two important dimensions of religion, the symbolic and the organizational. God or deities are beings made divine as symbols of worship. In this respect, Jesus in Christianity and the deities in Chinese Religion are all symbols of worship. Some Chinese worshippers may not know the identity of a god, but as an accepted symbol of worship this is sufficient. What matters is whether a god is *ling*, efficacious. In viewing god as a symbol, we can identify two types: god as a representational symbol and god as an ideological symbol.[2] As a representational symbol, the being or thing symbolized as god is a source of hope for fulfilling the human desire for peace, harmony, prosperity, health and so on. As an ideological symbol, god is used to further ideological control and political mobilization. To the extent that religions influence human behavior, gods as symbols are all ideological in one way or another. The category of god as ideological symbol is used to refer to a religion in which the symbol of god can be easily invoked to promote exclusive membership (believers versus nonbelievers) and sectarianism. In the Chinese Religion, the symbol of god is more representational than ideological, although the values of brotherhood and loyalty associated with the worship of Guandi are used by Chinese triads to bind members together. Even in this context, the worship of Guandi by the triads and the police in Hong Kong is more representational than ideological, as those outside the law and those enforcing it both worship the deity for brotherhood and protection.

Chinese Religion is a complex that involves both individual and communal worship, at home and at temples. The organizational dimension of the popular religion in late imperial China has been well analyzed by C. K. Yang. The local temples in China organized temple fairs and communal festivities. Chinese migrants used the symbol of Chinese deities to bring people of similar speech groups together and to organize local communities. In Malaysia, the organizational aspect of Chinese Religion has remained significant, as we shall see. This book is thus a study of religion as a mode of organization, although such a study does not deny that religion is also a tradition meaningful to individuals who participate in worship and religious celebrations that are communally organized. Early Chinese migrants brought with them their knowledge of deities and rituals as they migrated overseas and recreated this knowledge, as in the

2 Here I discuss god as a symbol, though this approach is not to be confused with Clifford Geertz's famous definition of religion as a system of symbols (Geertz 1966).

case of the Chinese in Malaysia. Individuals mentally store culture as knowledge that can be put into practice; in the process of practice, they reproduce that knowledge, or reinterpret and recreate it to produce a reinvented form of culture. Migrants relied on their cultural tradition to interpret or reinterpret their new social and geographical environments, and we shall see how the Chinese migrants in Malaysia recreated their Sino-Malayan earth god. In other words, as migrants experienced multicultural influences and learned new cultural information, they interpreted this new experience and knowledge from their own tradition of knowledge. The chief exceptions would be the migrants who had been totally uprooted culturally; for example, African slaves in the Caribbean evolved a new process of cultural formation called creolization, as analyzed by Sidney Mintz (2012). This book is guided by the ideas that culture is knowledge, and that individuals are active agents in interpreting and practicing culture, such as religious thought.

Of the deities brought over by a settlement's inhabitants, the one that became patron was the one that drew the most worshippers early in the settlement's life. Organizing the celebration of the deity's anniversary day, or birthday, became the focus of a settlement's common life, with the celebration itself ritually bringing the community together. The people bring their tradition to life through worship and the organizing of religious celebration, and in doing so they feel a sense of community. With this belonging, they win a sense of what kind of humans they are. In the case of Chinese migrants, this means a sense of being Chinese. Our study of Chinese Religion is also a study of a mode of expressing identity.

From the description I've given of my approach, readers will no doubt feel the presence of Durkheim. While this great scholar of religion has been criticized for his evolutionary view, he remains influential in his analysis of religion and society, even though he goes so far as to say that the totem is more than a symbol, that it's also representative of the clan and that worshipping the totem actually means worshipping one's clan (Durkheim 1915/1965, 236). His analyses of totem (god) as symbol, of the sentiment and religious force it evokes during collective celebration, and of religion's way of taking "a foothold in reality" (Durkheim 1965, 257) are all important. From my study of Chinese Religion in Malaysia, it's evident that having a god as a focal point brings to life a community whose members otherwise must imagine it; for example, there is the way that money for the communal religious celebration is contributed by each household in a region that is "protected" by a patron deity.

Of the early anthropologists influenced by Durkheim, E. E. Evans-Pritchard remains the most significant. This is for his analysis of religious thought and social order, as expressed in his study of Nuer religion. While acknowledging

Durkheim's contribution to the sociological analysis of religion, Evans-Pritchard criticizes him for making society into a god (Evans-Pritchard [1956]1974, 313). Evans-Pritchard considers religious thought to bear "the impress of the social order" (Evans-Pritchard [1956]1974, 115). As we shall see, this point is relevant to our understanding of the organization of the Chinese pantheon. Since Durkheim and Evans-Pritchard, social studies have benefited from the agency theory, which stresses that individuals exercise agency and aren't passively influenced by structure.

A more recent anthropologist deserves attention for his integration of value, agency and society. David Graeber's study of value is relevant to the study of religion, especially in our study of religious tradition as a value. When Chinese migrants in Malaysia reterritorialized the Chinese religious tradition, they showed the value it had to their cultural life. In practicing their religious knowledge, they reproduced and recreated their Chinese tradition while establishing their community. Graeber's comment is relevant here: "Value, I'll suggest, can best be seen in this light as the way in which actions became meaningful to the actor by being incorporated in some larger, social totality—even if in many cases the totality in question exists primarily in the actors' imagination" (2001, vii). Through communal worship, the Chinese belong to a totality; they relate themselves to their community. At the same time, the communal celebration brings the community to life, making it more visible. Scholars are familiar with Benedict Anderson's analysis of nation as an imagined community (Anderson 1983). In fact, all human communities, big and small, are imagined in the mind of individuals, even though people of a village or town live in specific geographical areas. A community is not a concrete entity that can be seen and measured. It is through religious celebrations that a Chinese community in a locality is made visible. From Durkheim to the present, anthropology has come a long way, and so has our understanding of culture, religion and community.

The Chinese in Malaysia

According to the 2010 population and housing census, there were 28,334,135 people in Malaysia, of which 91.8 percent (26,013,356 people) were citizens and 8.2 percent (2,320,779 people) were noncitizens. Of the 26 million citizens, 67.4 percent were *Bumiputera* (indigenous people, mainly Malays), followed by 24.6 percent Chinese, 7.3 percent Indians and 0.7 percent Others. The majority of the citizens were Malays, numbering 14,191,720 people. They were followed by the Chinese (6,392,636 people), Other *Bumiputera* (3,331,788; mostly Iban in Sarawak and Kadazan in Sabah), Indians (1,907,827 people)

and Others (189,385 people). The percentage distribution by religion roughly reflects the ethnic composition: Islam (61.3 percent), Buddhism (19.8 percent), Christianity (9.2 percent), Hinduism (6.3 percent), Confucianism/Taoism/Tribal/Folk/Other traditional Chinese religion (1.3 percent), Unknown (1 percent), No religion (0.7 percent) and Other religion (0.4 percent).

To understand these statistics, one needs to know a bit about the nature of religious affiliation among the Chinese. Very few Chinese identify their religion as Confucianism or Taoism or even folk religion, hence the low percentage in that category (only 1.3 percent).[3] In Tan (1995) and Tan (2000b) I have examined in some detail how the Chinese identify their religious affiliation. The Chinese who follow their traditional religion do not have a separate name for their belief and practices; in this they are unlike Christians, Muslims and followers of other "institutional religions," but they are similar to many indigenous peoples like the Iban and the Orang Asli (aborigines in Peninsular Malaysia). The Chinese may describe their religious identification as either *bai shen* or *bai fo*, meaning "worshipping deities" or "worshipping Buddha/Bodhisattva," since the Buddhist deities (notably Buddha and Guanyin) are commonly worshipped by followers of Chinese Religion. When asked for a specific label by the census taker or asked to fill in religion in a form, most Chinese find it convenient to use the label "Buddhism," since it is a well-known label that they do not mind identifying with. After all, they worship Buddha and his fellow Buddhist deities, although they worship other deities as well. Thus, the 19.8 percent Buddhists in the census include most of the Chinese Religion followers, with the rest mostly Indian and Thai Buddhists (generally Theravada tradition) and Chinese who are strict followers of Buddhism of either the Chinese Mahayana tradition or the Theravada tradition. Christianity, as a census category, includes mostly Chinese but also Indians and non-Muslim indigenous peoples. Most Indians are Hindu followers. The Chinese Religion followers in the census are to be found in the categories Buddhism, "Confucianism, Taoism and Tribal/Folk/Other traditional Chinese religion," Unknown, No Religion, and Other Religion. We can say that most Chinese in Malaysia identify with Chinese popular religion, that smaller percentages identify as strictly Buddhists or Christians, and an even smaller percentage as Muslims. There are also Chinese who follow Baha'i and other faiths.

The majority of the Chinese in Malaysia are Hokkien, followed by the Hakka, Cantonese, Teochew, Hainanese, Hokchiu (Fuzhou) and Kwongsai (Guangxi). Other Chinese speech groups with small populations (less than 1 percent of

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3 See *Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristics: 2010*, Population and Housing Census of Malaysia, Department of Statistics, Malaysia.

the Chinese population) include Henghua, Hokchia and others (Tan 2000a). In this book, I follow the transcription of the labels as generally used by the speech-group associations. For example, Teochew can also be spelled Teochiu, but the associations of this speech group generally use Teochew. The usage of Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese are retained, as they are well-established usages in English. The Cantonese refers to Yue speakers from Guangdong, known in Hokkien as *gonghu lang* and in Cantonese as *kwangfu yahn* (广府人, Guangfuren in Mandarin), a usage from the past that referred to people from Guangzhou Prefecture. Hakka is, of course, *kejia* pronounced in its dialect, and the Hakka homeland in Chinese is in Guangdong and western Fujian, although most Hakka in Malaysia are descendants of migrants from Guangdong. The Hainanese, not surprisingly, are descendants of Chinese who migrated from Hainan Island.

Hokkien are Minnan (southern Fujian) people, but in Malaysia they use the term *Hokkien*. This term is derived from the name of the province Fujian as pronounced in Minnan dialect (i.e., Hokgian) and transcribed as Hokkien in Malaysia and Singapore. The descendants of migrants from eastern Fujian are rather small in number and they have been referred to separately as Henghua (Xinghua) people, Hokchiu (Fuzhou) people and Hokchia (Fuqing) people. In other words, in Malaysia the label Hokkien, although meaning Fujianese, refers to the Minnan speakers only, and Hokkien are what the Taiwanese and those in mainland China refer to as Minnanren, or Minnan people (southern Fujian people).

Organization of the Book

As noted, this book emphasizes Chinese Religion's significance to the organization of local Chinese communities in Malaysia. It tries to be as informative as possible about Chinese temples and deities in Malaysia. It pays attention to the deities' historical origins in China and to their local development in Malaysia, with an eye to the influence worked by the structure of traditional religious thought and by the reinterpretation in Malaysia arising from complex intercultural encounters and local perceptions of the supernatural in relation to social life.

Chapter 1 begins with a description of religion and early Chinese migrants' settlement in Malaysia. Communal worship and religious celebrations were and still are important rites of social renewal; consider the Wangkang celebrations of the Chinese in Melaka in the past, and the continuing religious celebration of Roufo Gumiao Temple in Johor Bahru. Communal worship took

place even before a communal temple was established, and the ethnographic examples about the communal worship of the localized Chinese in Kelantan highlight the significance of such worship. The communal significance of the Chinese popular religion in China has been noted by scholars, and in Malaysia the early Chinese migrants used religion to organize their local communities. Today the communal celebrations continue to serve as rites of renewal while projecting local Chinese identities.

Chapter 2 describes the diversity of Chinese deities and temples, taking advantage of the many temples all over Malaysia that the author has visited. While it is not possible to describe all deities in the Chinese Religion, sufficient examples are provided to give a sense of their vast number and wide range. These factors are related to the encounters of different Chinese speech groups in Malaysia, and indeed many deities are associated with certain speech groups. Chapter 3 on temple services provides some details of how temples serve the religious needs of local Chinese. While a few scholars have described spirit mediums as providing some of these services, their roles are more significant than these, especially in establishing and promoting temples. Temples need to be promoted, and this is especially so with the privately established temples. Even historical communal temples need to promote themselves to ensure continuous communal support. In this respect, the religious economy model is generally relevant, provided one takes into consideration the local economic and political factors. The analysis of spirit mediums and temple services highlights the appeal of the popular religion to lower-income worshippers, who hope to obtain divine blessings to improve their livelihood. The desire for *hengcai*, or “windfall fortune,” is very strong among many of these people, and temples generally capitalize on this desire to provide relevant services and thereby income for the temple or temple keepers.

Aspects of Chinese Religion in Malaysia have acquired many local characteristics, as discussed in Chapter 4. The localization is not just due to non-Chinese influences; for example, the description of the worship of the traditional Chinese earth deity Tudishen as Dabogong shows that this change was due to cultural interaction between different Chinese speech groups in Malaysia. Popularly known in Hokkien and Teochew as Duabehgong, this deity has become the patron deity of many communal temples in Malaysia. The Chinese Religion depicts earth god (and city god) as a divine position to be filled by different personalities, allowing the deification of Chinese pioneers as Dabogong. Chinese worshippers are seen as active agents in interpreting and reinterpreting their new religious experiences in Malaysia, guided by the structure of their Chinese religious thought. Thus, the local territorial spirits, including Muslim saints, are incorporated into the Chinese religious order as

Nadugong. Nadugong worship is not merely Malay influenced, it is Chinese incorporation of the local as a new element in the Chinese pantheon. Therefore, Nadugong worship is Chinese despite having Malay and other local features.

Pudu, known in Malaysian English as the “Hungry Ghosts Festival,” provides the best example of religious activities’ communal significance. In the roster of Chinese celebrations, this one is second only to the New Year. For individuals, the festival is very much linked to the expression of filial piety: to propitiating wandering ghosts, to remembering ancestors. For the community, the festival is a moment of renewal, a moment of cleansing, an occasion to pray for peace and prosperity. In Malaysia, the festival has also become associated with philanthropy, with donations being collected for charity and the promotion of Chinese culture, especially education. Entwined this way with the cultural life of the Chinese, religion maintains its stubborn relevance.

Chinese Religion centers on temples generally called *miao*, each of which is organized separately. Over the long span of Chinese history, a number of syncretic organizations have grown out of the popular Chinese Religion. They are based mainly on *sanjiao*, or Three Teachings, these being Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism (although some organizations have added Christian and Islamic elements, and thus claim five religions, *wujiao*). The rites are mainly Taoist, the teachings a rearrangement of Confucianism, Taoisim and Buddhism. The resulting new religious identity exists within the complex of Chinese popular religion. Its members generally remain part of the wider popular religion, and Chinese deities are incorporated into the offshoot. Most of these offshoot groups are to be found in Malaysia. Chapter 7 analyzes Dejiao and the highly successful charitable halls called *shantang*, relying on the author’s long-term study and observation. A common feature of such denominations is the emphasis on doing charity and philanthropy. This chapter provides an opportunity to revisit C. K. Yang’s idea of institutional religion, and further shows the importance of philanthropy in linking religion to local Chinese communities.

Finally, to describe Chinese Religion in Malaysia we must address the issue of *daojiao*, or Taoist Religion, in Malaysia. Contributing to a topic on which very little has been written, Chapter 9 describes Taoist priests and Taoist organizations in Malaysia, and analyzes the trend by some Chinese individuals and organizations to label the popular Chinese Religion in the country as *daojiao*. The main motivation for this trend is political, to organize the temples throughout Malaysia in order to better deal with the Malay-dominated government when seeking concessions such as land for graveyards and temples.

The book’s conclusion discusses the main features of the Chinese Religion and looks at some new developments. The Internet and other points of contact

between similar religious beliefs have led to the creation of more translocal and even national organizations dedicated to the worship of particular deities. Chinese Religion is doing more and more for the communities' transnational connection with China. With the ease of more globalized connection today, there is also more mutual religious influence between the various transnational Chinese communities.

CHAPTER 2

Temples and Local Communities

Migration, Settlement and Deities

Some of the early Chinese migrants brought their patron deities along with them when they settled overseas. In my interviews with knowledgeable older informants, I was often told that a particular deity worshipped in a region was originally brought from China by an early immigrant, and that the deity was originally worshipped in someone's home until a small temple could be built. Mazu, also known as Tianhou (Empress of Heaven), the imperially sanctioned sea deity, was important to sailors and migrants. She was prayed to for safe voyage, and her statues were carried aboard. This played a part in the spread of Mazu worship in Taiwan, Southeast Asia and elsewhere. In fact, the famous Ming admiral Zhenghe's voyage was preceded by praying to Mazu, as can be noted from the epigraphic record at the graveyard of Muslim saints (*shengmu*) in Quanzhou, Fujian. Even some early European travelers noted the presence of altars on board Chinese junks. As early as the eighteenth century, the Dutch admiral J. S. Stavorinus observed in the East Indies (today's Indonesia) that the Chinese always brought along an "idol" from China, that "they never begin to land any part of the cargo, until the image of this idol, which is made of gold, and is about four inches high, has been sent on shore out of the junk; both on board, and on shore, they continually burn lights and incense, and in the evening some silver papers, before the idol" (Stavorinus 1789/1969, 288).

I have learned a lot about religion and early Chinese settlement in northeast Peninsular Malaysia. For example, in the old Chinese settlement of Tirok in Terengganu, the worship of Guangze Zunwang at the village temple can be traced to a migrant with the surname Koh (Xu in Mandarin), who brought the deity's statue from China. The deity was installed at Koh's house until a small temple was built at the riverside of the village (Tan 2002, 101). In Terengganu, the forerunner of the Hainanese Association was Tianhou Gong, the Mazu temple, which was built in 1895 (Tan 2002, 29). In fact, the forerunners of many Chinese associations in Malaysia were temples, indicating that a local temple was among the earliest institutions to be established by a given community of Chinese. That was along with a *yishan*, or public cemetery, the two institutions both being tied to the Chinese Religion and its ancestor worship and festival celebrations. Religion mattered from the very beginning of Chinese migration and settlement. It was part and parcel of Chinese social life. For the early

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migrants, to be Chinese meant to observe certain religious symbols and rituals. At the minimum, the dead needed to be attended to and buried, and this involved conducting religious rites. *Yishan* was not just for the dead. It was also an early site of religious worship, for the shrine (and later a temple of the earth god, locally called Dabogong) was built for the god to watch over the cemetery. Thus, old Chinese cemeteries remain important sites for historical research, as Zeng Ling has shown in Singapore (Zeng 2003, 2005; Zeng and Zhuang 2000).

The worship surrounding the communal deity—that is, the patron deity of the local community—is not just religious, it is also social and political. In the period of the early Chinese settlement, the worship provided the organizational life of the local society, and the celebration of the deity's birthday brought the whole community together. The major early Chinese temples in Melaka, Penang and Singapore (Cheng Hoon Teng in Melaka, Guangfu Gong in Penang, and Tianfu Gong in Singapore) were also Chinese political centers. The temple in Melaka was Cheng Hoon Teng, which is the Hokkien pronunciation of Qingyun Ting (literally Blue Cloud Temple). The oldest Chinese temple in Malaysia, it was built in the seventeenth century by Kapitan Tay or Zheng Fangyang (1632–1677) (Yeh 1936, 81; Tan 1988, 32–33). The patron deity in the main hall is Guanyin, while the altar to the stage left honors Guandi, and the one to the stage right[1] honors Mazu. Kapitan was the title of the Chinese leader appointed by colonial authorities (Dutch or Portuguese), and Cheng Hoon Teng was the political center of the Chinese community headed by the various Kapitans. The Chinese Kapitan system was abolished after the British took control of Melaka from the Dutch in 1824. After that, the President of Cheng Hoon Teng, called *dingzu* (*tingzhu* 亭主, President of the Temple, written as Teng Choo in English in Malaysia), became the head of the Chinese community in Melaka. The Teng Choo system lasted until 1915 and the death of the last Teng Choo, Tan Jiak Whye, who was a grandson of the famous Tan Kim Seng (1805–1864). Since then the temple has been managed by a board of trustees (Tan, Cheng Lock 1973).

Guangfu Gong in Penang and Tianfu Gong in Singapore were both the major communal temples and administrative centers of the Chinese in the two Straits settlements. The former, dedicated to Guanyin, was founded in 1799. Singapore's Tianfu Gong was founded in 1838 by the leaders of various speech groups; its patron deity was and remains Tianhou, with Guanyin and Guandi being coworshipped (cf. Yen 1986, 11).

1 In Chinese ritual context, stage left is a more honored position than stage right.

Not all early communal temples have become well-known historical temples. Some of those that survived are known chiefly to the local population. Today, Zhenxing Gong (镇兴宫) in Kota Bharu, capital of Kelantan, is a well-known historical temple that honors Mazu. However, the earliest communal temple of the early Chinese community in northeast Kelantan is actually Shengchun Gong (圣春宫) in Kg. Tokong of Ketereh, which was already in existence in 1871 (Tan 1982, 46). As the Chinese settlement expanded in Kota Bharu, Zhenxing Gong was established so that worshippers did not have to travel a long distance to the rural settlement where the original Mazu temple, Shengchun Gong, still exists.

There are many temples in Batu Pahat, a major town on the coast of Johor state. However, a temple in a remote village in an oil-palm estate, more than 20 kilometers from Batu Pahat, still attracts many worshippers from the town. This is Shuangqinggang Shuilong Gong (双青港水龙宫) at Parit Kassim. It is a Dabogong temple, and there is no Chinese settlement nearby today. The temple faces the confluence of rivers from Parit Sulong and Tongkang Pechah, which flow into Batu Pahat River, past the town of Batu Pahat, and then into the sea. The Hokkien thus called this place Samcegang (三叉港, Trifurcate Port), and they refer to the deity and the temple as Samcegang Duabehgong (Sanchagang Dabogong in Mandarin, or 三叉港大伯公). Here lies the historical and ritual significance of the temple. Today access to the temple is by road, but in the past it was by river, and the Chinese migrants considered the location strategic; accordingly, the Dabogong temple was built there to bless safe voyage. It was said that the well-known Chinese pioneer of Batu Pahat, Lin Shifen (林士份, Lim Poon) himself brought the statue of Dabogong to build the temple there (cf. *Xinzhou Ribao*, 24 February 2010, p. 4). The historical significance and efficacy of the deity explain why the remote temple is still known and visited by many Chinese worshippers in Batu Pahat. Many worshippers travel here during the temple festival, when there is a custom of releasing live fish into the river. A Malay villager who lived nearby reported that some Chinese released truckloads of the fish, including expensive freshwater fish like *patin*. These, of course, died in the seawater.[2] The worshippers had ignored the fate of the fish when performing this ritual of *fangsheng* as an act of merit.

2 Investigated on 2 May 2016. Some Malay villagers would come to scoop up the fish that had been released, which annoyed the Chinese worshippers. My Malay informant pointed out that the freshwater fish would die anyway.

Communal Worship

Each local Chinese community in Malaysia established a communal temple, a public temple that belongs to a Chinese speech group or to all the local Chinese irrespective of speech groups. Where there were various speech groups, each major group might have its own separate temple, or they might all share. Today, in each town and village where there are Chinese in numbers, we can find at least one Chinese communal temple. From my trips to different parts of Malaysia, I have learned to gauge the prosperity of the local Chinese by the scale and elegance of the local temple. A modern Chinese temple might have begun as a small building, even something like a hut. But as the local Chinese prospered (or at least a considerable number of them did), a new temple might be built or an old one renovated. In fact, the local communal cult might have begun with no temple at all.

Let me return to my research in northeast Peninsular Malaysia. In northern Kelantan, there are highly localized Chinese communities of what I call Peranakan-type Chinese; they speak a localized version of Hokkien and the Kelantan Malay dialect, while many also speak the local Thai dialect. Their forebears were among the earliest Chinese settlers in the region. Among some of these communities, we can still find some villages holding annual communal cults but without temples. Each of these temple-less communal cults focuses on the patron deity of its village. The celebration of the communal cult in conjunction with the birthday of the patron deity is called *ang kong su*, with *angong* being the local Hokkien term for grandfathers, and *su* meaning "affairs" or "event," but the local people also call their deities, affectionately, *angong*; thus, *angong su* may be interpreted as "deity's affairs" or "deity's event." It is the celebration of the birthday of the communal patron deity. A committee comprising *loozu* (*luzhu* 炉主) and *taoge* (*toujia* 头家) is in charge of organizing the religious and communal celebration. *Loozu*, literally "head of the incense pot" or "censer master" in Hokkien, is the chairperson of this religious affairs committee, while *taoge* are the committee members. The word *taoge* also means the owner of a shop or firm. Business people, having the money to pay for communal events, were the routine choice to be on committees.

At the annual celebration, a new *loozu* and committee members are elected via the throwing of two divination blocks; these elucidate "yes" or "no" answers from the deity. The new committee is in charge of organizing the following year's event. The *loozu* keeps the deity's altar at home for the year, and so his home becomes the ritual center of this community without a temple. Other than ritual activities, the celebration includes a communal feast and also an evening of social events. Instead of the Chinese opera—which uses Hokkien,

Teochew or other Chinese dialects not followed by the Peranakan-type Chinese—the localized Chinese pay for performance of Thai dance drama, the *menora*. In the past, the Malay shadow show called *wayang kulit* was performed, too. This is an interesting aspect of acculturation and religion among the Peranakan-type Chinese: even the Chinese deities have to get used to the local Malay and Thai dialects that the local Chinese worshippers have become comfortable with. (See Tan [1990] for an ethnographic description of the communal worship in northeast Kelantan.)

Today most Chinese communities in Malaysia have at least a communal temple.[3] But our discussion of the temple-less communal rite in Kelantan reminds us of the significance of the communal rite in the early days of Chinese settlement, and of how the rite could be organized. The religious committee of *loozu* and *taoge* remains the most basic organizational structure of a communal cult, even now with temples and their modern management structure. Temples in Malaysia, as in all public societies, need to be registered and are required by law to have a proper system of management. (And public temples do register; as religious institutions, they don't have to pay taxes.) A public Chinese temple has an official management committee elected by members, but it also has one or more informal religious committees of *loozu* and *taoge*, which are elected by the deity in charge via divination. For convenience, I shall henceforth refer to the informal committee as the *loozu* committee. For example, there is a *loozu* committee for the celebration of the temple's patron deity, and there may be another *loozu* committee in charge of Zhongyuan Jie or the Hungry Ghosts Festival. The temple's management committee is in charge of the overall management of the temple and performs both social and political functions. By contrast, a *loozu* committee attends to a specific religious celebration, especially that of the patron deity's birthday and communal worship.

The celebration of the birthday of the community's patron deity is in fact a rite of communal renewal, of expressing the desire for peace and prosperity. This is expressed in the common Chinese phrases *xiaozai qifu*, *hejing ping'an* (消灾祈福、合境平安), meaning "ridding misfortunes and praying for blessings" and "peace throughout the community." This is the basic wish of communal worship, and the communal deity—that is, the deity chosen to be the

3 In Bukit Rambai, where I did my doctoral research in 1977, the local people still performed their communal worship at the open-air shrine of Dabogong under a big tree, while the space where the temple was to be built was mainly used for holding feasts and other temple events (Tan 1990). This open-air shrine existed before a temple was built and is another example of a temple-less communal cult.

patron deity of the community—is in charge of keeping the community free of misfortunes, ensuring peace and blessing the community. While Durkheim was mistaken in equating the totem with the community itself, he was insightful in seeing the connection between the totem and the clan—that is, the symbolic function of the symbol. It is through celebrating the birthday of the communal deity that the Chinese worshippers express their wish for healthy and peaceful living. The divine symbol is a vehicle for expressing desires; it does not represent the community nor equate with it. The reason society makes a god into a symbol isn't to have a picture of itself; it's to have a vehicle for expressing communal and personal desire for good living.

This wish for peace and good living was expressed by early migrants seeking a better life in a new land. The desire for security and success featured far more intensely in communal worship than it does today, when the Chinese populations are generally not threatened by epidemics or scarcity of work. Some cities also staged processions every few years, these being part of large-scale celebrations or other events of communal worship that were added to the annual communal celebration. A well-known example was the Wangkang Festival in Melaka, which involved the worship of *ongya* (*wangye* 王爷).

Wangye belief was and still is popular in southern Fujian, as in Quanzhou. The Minnan migrants spread this cult to Taiwan and Southeast Asia. The *wangye* were ghosts, one version of their story tracing them to the spirits of scholars killed on the order of an emperor in China, who later bestowed on them the title *wangye* (dukes, royal lords) to pacify them. A specific *wangye* may have his own myth of origin, as in the case of Chifu Wangye, a Tang dynasty magistrate who saved his people by befriending a god of plague and then swallowing the god's plague powder; hence his face became black (Zheng Zhiming 1988; Kang Bao 1997). The *wangye* belief is popular in some old Hokkien communities in Malaysia, especially in Melaka and among the Peranakan-type Chinese in Kelantan. In Melaka, there are five famous *wangye*, namely Zuhu Ongya (Zhufu Wangye 朱府王爷), Hoon-Hoo Ong Yah (Wenfu Wangye 温府王爷), Lihu Ongya (Lifu Wangya 李府王爷), Dihu Ongya (Chifu Wangye 池府王爷) and Behhu Ongya (Baifu Wangye 白府王爷).

The Wangkang Procession in Melaka was a communal cleansing ceremony to cast away evils, to keep epidemics away, and to ask for divine blessing for peace and prosperity. According to Tan Seng Tee (1933, 24), it began in the mid-nineteenth century at Kandang, and it took place every five years or so until 1880; then there was a lapse of eleven years before another procession took place in 1891, when there was an outbreak of cholera. After that it was held every fourteen years until the last big one, in 1933; this is well described in *The Malacca Guardian: Wangkang Memento*, 26 November 1933.

The Wangkang Festival was a major event that lasted several days and involved carrying the five *wangye* statues in procession. *Wangkang* literally means “royal barge” or “royal junk,” and each Wangkang Festival involved making a replica of a junk measuring eighteen feet by nine feet, which was beautifully decorated (Tan S. T. 1933, 25). The festival ended with the burning of the loaded junk, which had been filled with all kinds of provisions at the Portuguese Settlement seaside (Tan S. T. 1933, 25). Since the 1933 festival, no others had been held until 7 February 2001, when Yongquan Dian (勇全殿), which houses Chifu Wangye, organized a modified version (Soo 2005, 105–117). Today Yongquan Dian organizes an annual procession of all the five *wangye* on the fifteenth day of the first moon, which is the last day of the Chinese New Year celebration (For a report, see *Sin Chew Daily*, 25 February 2013, p. 9). During the pioneering days, *wangye* processions won popularity by catering to the communal wish for prosperity, a wish sharpened by unsettling conditions and the threat of disease. *The Sarawak Gazette* of August 1888 reported that the Hokkien Hong San Si (Fengshan Temple) in Kuching had organized a huge procession that involved burning a *wangye* barge (cf. Liu Fu 1993). The *Gazette* also reported on a boat procession in 1908 (SG 1908).

A long-established communal religious celebration that has persisted to this day is the annual *youshen* (游神), or “parade of deities,” organized by Roufo Gumiao (柔佛古庙, the Johor Old Chinese Temple). This was established in the late nineteenth century, with a plaque in the temple dated 1870. The temple is sponsored by the five major speech groups in Johor Bahru: the Teochew, Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese and Hainanese. Each speech group is represented by a patron deity in the temple. Giving their names in the order that the deities are invited to sit in their respective sedan chairs for the annual communal procession on the twentieth day of the first moon, they are Zhao Dayuanshuai (赵大元帅) of the Hainanese, Huaguang Dadi (华光大帝) of the Guang-Zhao (广肇, Cantonese), Gantian Dadi (感天大帝) of the Hakka, Hongxian Dadi (洪仙大帝) of the Hokkien, and Yuantian Shangdi (元天上帝) of the Teochew. Devotees of the respective communal associations accompany their respective patron deity. When returning to the temple on the twenty-second day of the first moon, the sequence is reversed, with Yuantian Shangdi taking his seat at the temple first.

Yuantian Shangdi, also called Xuantian Shangdi, is the pantheon’s main deity, given the dominance of the Teochew in Johor Bahru. In fact, Roufo Gumiao is also known as Da Laoye Gong (Temple of the Great Lord), with *laoye* being the affectionate address of the Teochew for Yuantian Shangdi. At the main altar table, the statue of Yuantian Shangdi is flanked by that of Huaguang Dadi (at stage left) and that of Zhao Dayuanshuai (at stage right). The statue

of Hongxian Dadi is on a separate altar table at far stage left, while that of Gantian Dadi is at far stage right. Zhao Dayuanshuai is the well-known Chinese God of Wealth (Caishen Ye), also known by the name of Zhao Guangming (赵光明). Huaguang Dadi is a god of legendary origin. Ordinary Chinese worshippers generally describe Gantian Dadi as the Dabogong of the Hakka, but the temple description shows that he is Xu Zhenjun (许真君), also Xu Zhenren (许真人), who was a deified Taoist master by the name of Xu Xun (许逊, 239–374). As to Hongxian Dadi, the temple record mentions that he is a deity of Malayan origin, a deified person who was known to subdue tigers, of which there were many back when the Chinese first settled in Malaya. Significantly, there is an altar of the Tiger God (Huye) on the floor, close to the altar table of Hongxian Dadi.

Today the temple management committee of Roufo Gumiao efficiently manages the annual communal worship and parade. Nowadays this *youshen* is also called *ying laoye* (营老爷); the name derives from the Teochew, who called their patron deity *laoye* or "lord." The celebration lasts three days in the first month of the Chinese calendar, although preparation begins before that, beginning with the rite of lighting the lantern on the eighteenth evening. On the nineteenth morning is the ceremony of cleansing the streets that the gods will parade in. To the beating of gongs, a person uses a twig of pomelo and pomegranate leaves to sprinkle charm water, while others throw uncooked rice, salt and tea leaves along the street.[4] In the afternoon, the rite for inviting the five deities to sit in the sedan chairs is performed; the statues are carefully installed and fastened in their seats so that they can withstand the swaying of the sedan chairs on the day of the parade. On the twentieth, the statues in sedan chairs are paraded in the procession to the *xinggong* (行宫), the "temporary divine residence" where the communal worship takes place.

In the past, each time a communal worship was to be held, a site had to be chosen to build a shelter for the deities and the public worship. Such a temporary shelter was called *shenchang* (神厂), a term derived from the Teochew dialect. After the celebration, the *shenchang* was dismantled. In 2005, a permanent site for public worship was built. This building is called *xinggong* (literally, "temporary palace") and serves as the temporary residence for the deities brought here for the public worship.

4 My study of Baba postfuneral cleansing rites at home describes a similar rite: the monk and his assistant use pomegranate leaves to sprinkle charm water, and then throw uncooked rice, salt and dried tea leaves, these being items that expel evil with performance of the rite (Tan 1988, 178).

On the afternoon of the twenty-first, at 4 p.m., the climax of the celebration begins, this being the parade of the deities to the major streets in Johor Bharu and their return to the hall after about ten hours. The festive atmosphere is made more so by the devotees' shouts of "*huat a* 发啊 (bring wealth)" and "*heng a* 兴啊 (bring prosperity)" in Hokkien and Teochew as the gods' sedan chairs pass by. On the twenty-second, the last day of the celebration, the deities are paraded along the route to return to the temple (cf. Shu and Chen 2010).

Temple festivals like that of the Johor Old Chinese Temple aren't only communal events, but also major tourist attractions and important parts of local Chinese heritage. In Penang, the touristic Chingay Procession began as a procession for Guanyin from the Guangfu Gong. Today it has become a festive performance that has the support of the local government. There are two Chingay associations: the Penang Chingay Association on the island, and the Province Wellesley Chingay Association. According to the website of the Penang Chingay Association, the procession can be traced to around 1900. Chingay was the term used by the early English newspaper *Echo*, and is said to derive from the Hokkien term for *zhenyi*, or "real art." A famous part of this procession of floats involved acrobatic performances, especially the lifting of the flag poles, these being bamboo poles reaching from twenty-five to thirty-two feet, and weighing about sixty pounds, with flags of about twenty-five feet each (Penang Chingay Association website). The Chinese name of the Penang Chingay Association (槟城大旗鼓公会) actually means "association of the big flags and drums," that being the name adopted for registering the society in 1975.

Less noticed by the Chinese outside Kelantan is the local tradition of communal cults that do not center on temples, like the *angong su* celebration mentioned above. Another unique communal worship is the celebration of *ziapsin* (*jieshen* 接神), "welcoming the return of deities." In Chinese popular belief, the deities leave for heaven on the twenty-fourth day of the twelfth moon to report to Tiangong, the God of Heaven, about human conduct for the year. They return to the earthly abode on the fourth day of the New Year. The Chinese worshippers in Malaysia generally perform a simple rite at home to welcome the return of deities, but the Peranakan-type Chinese in northeast Kelantan organize a more elaborate communal rite under the leadership of a *loozu*. A special site, possibly a distance away from the village, is selected for performance of the communal rite. This may be at a river islet, as in the case of Kampung Kasar, or at a hill about 30 kilometers away, as in the case of Kampung Beklam in Bachok district. At the latter site, which I observed in 1983 (February 15–16), the villagers went to the hill on the evening of the third, with the rite lasting until the morning of the fourth day of the New Year. Tables were set up for the deities' statues, which had been brought there. At about

1 a.m., gongs were beaten and several people fell into possession, indicating the arrival of the deities. This phase continued until daybreak, developing all the while as more and more individuals were possessed. Those who thus became spirit mediums performed various rituals, like dotting new statues and writing charm papers with the blood from their tongues, which they bled skillfully now and then. The celebration ended at around 7 a.m., when people packed up to return to their village (cf. Tan 1990 for a detailed description).

Dabogong and Communal Organization

The temples of the traditional Chinese earth god in the form of Dabogong have become communal temples in many places, a tendency especially notable in Sarawak. The temples' status reflects Dabogong's significance and the influence of the Hokkien as the earliest settlers in many towns in Malaysia. In Sarawak, the temples were built to face the rivers or the sea, the main means of access in the past; nowadays some temples have been relocated to face a main road. In facing the river (or road), the god of the temple protects the travelers and the local residents. The Dabogong temple in Kuching called Fude Ci (福德祠) was historically the communal temple of the Chinese in Kuching. The date written on the temple's signboard with the name Fude Ci (that is, Fude Temple), as well as on a leg of the altar table, bears the year *xianfeng liunian* (咸丰六年), or 1856,[5] despite the possibility that the original temple dated all the way back to the arrival of the Hokkien migrants. According to the prominent local Chinese Ong Kee Hui (王其辉), the present site on a small hill facing the Sarawak River was granted the temple by the Brooke government in 1871.[6] Today the temple is managed by the Kuching Chinese Community Charitable Trust Board.

In Sibu, despite the concentration of Fuzhou people here, the Dabogong temple originally built by the Hokkien has remained the major communal temple of all the town's Chinese. Called Sibu Eng Ann Teng Tua Peh Kong Temple (诗巫永安亭大伯公庙), the temple traces its official history to 1897, when the rebuilt temple was installed with the earth god statue made in Xiamen in China. The temple was rebuilt and renovated a few times, including after a fire in 1928 and after Japanese bombardment in 1945. The two other major renovations since then were completed in 1957 and 1980. Today it is a big temple, especially with

5 I have visited this temple many times, with the last visit being in January 2013.

6 See *Shiwu Yong'an Ting Dabogong Miao qingzhu Guanyin baota luocheng dianli tekan*, 1990, p. 184.

the addition in 1989 of the Guanyin pagoda at the back of the temple (cf. Cai 1997; Fong 1993). I visited the temple a few times before and after the construction of the pagoda. Facing the Rejang River close to the estuary to the sea, this majestic temple is today one of the most active and well-organized Dabogong temples in Malaysia and is visited by tourists from all over the world.[7]

The other coastal towns in Sarawak, like Mukah, Bintulu, Miri, Trusan and Lawas, all have Dobogong temples as their communal temples. Going up the Baram River, there is a Dabogong communal temple called Shoushan Ting (寿山亭) in the inland town of Marudi. Going up the Rejang, which is the other major river in Sarawak, the communal temples at Kanowit, Song and Kapit are all Dabogong temples, namely Fu'an Ting (福安亭), Kangning Ting (康宁亭) and Fulong Ting (福隆亭), respectively.[8] Thus, Dabogong temples are major Chinese temples in Sarawak.

Elsewhere in Malaysia there are, of course, many Dabogong temples, but they are scattered in urban and rural Malaysia. An old Dabogong temple in Peninsular Malaysia that has remained well known and active is Hock Teik Cheng Sin Temple (福德正神庙) at Armenian Street in Penang. The temple's name is based on the formal name of the god. Interestingly, Armenian Street is known as Buntaogong Hang (本头公巷) in Hokkien, literally Buntaogong Lane. As noted, Buntaogong is the name commonly used by the Chinese (mostly Teochew) in Thailand and in northern Peninsular Malaysia, as in Penang and Kelantan.

Hock Teik Cheng Sin Temple in Penang originated from the worship of Dabogong as patron deity by the Hokkien "secret" society (not recognized by the British authorities) Kian Teik Tong (建德堂), founded in 1844. The society was popularly known as Toa Peh Kong Society (Dabogong Hui 大伯公会). It was involved in competition over economic interests with other societies, especially the powerful Ghee Hin (义兴) Society, which comprised Chinese speech groups from Guangdong. With the establishment of a Chinese

7 I first investigated on 16 May 1989, and I have visited this temple many times since then. I thank the very knowledgeable temple keeper, Tan Teck Chiong (陈德昌), for his generous introduction to the temple. His friendliness has impressed tourists from all over the world, and they have left their words of appreciation in the temple visitors' book. Basic information on the temple is available in its souvenir magazine *Shiwu Yongan Ting Dabogong Miao chongjian bainian jinian tekan* 1897–1991 (诗巫永安亭大伯公庙重建百年纪念特刊 1897–1997), and *Shiwu Yong'an Ting Dabogong Miao qingzhu Guanyin baota luocheng dianli tekan* (诗巫永安亭大伯公庙庆祝观音宝塔落成典礼特刊), 1990.

8 I visited the Chinese temples in Sarawak in my various trips between 1989 and 1995, as well as in 2003.

Protectorate in 1877, the British began to have more effective control of the Chinese society. The passing of the Societies Ordinance of 1889 allowed the British to suppress secret societies, and Kian Teik Tong was banned in 1890. Through various maneuvers, "the officially banned Kian Teik Tong reincarnated itself into a peaceful Hock Teik Cheng Sin (Temple), retaining almost in toto its members, organizational hierarchy, ritual practices and properties through its religious affinity with the True God of Blessings and Virtues" (Tan Kim Hong 2007, 39).

Accordingly, Hock Teik Cheng Sin Temple was closely linked to the politics of the early Hokkien community in Penang. At Armenian Street, it shared the building with four brotherhood societies: Tong Kheng Seah (同庆社, formed around 1843), Cheng Hoe Seah (清和社, formed around 1843), Hokkien Kongsi (福建公司, formed around 1856), and Poh Hock Seah (宝福社, formed around 1890). The patron deities of the various societies are honored at the Hock Teik Cheng Sin Temple, with the patron deity of Tong Kheng Seah being Shennong (神农), that of Cheng Hoe Seah being Qingshui Zushi (清水祖师), and that of Poh Hock Seah being Dabogong. Hokkien Kongsi was formed by the five major surname groups in Penang: namely, Cheah (谢), Khoo (邱), Lim (林), Tan (陈) and Yeoh (杨). These four societies moved into the Hock Teik Cheng Sin Temple at different times between 1908 and 1924. A board of trustees comprising sixteen members, with each sending four representatives, governs the property at Hock Teik Cheng Sin Temple. Of these societies, Poh Hock Seah organizes the celebration of Dabogong's birthday on the twenty-third day of the eighth moon, when the famous procession of decorated floats and giant flags called Chingay is performed. In addition, on the eve of Chap Goh Meh (元宵, on the fourteenth evening of the first moon), Tong Kheng Seah organizes the ritual renewal ceremony called *qinghuo* (清火) at the Tanjong Tokong Dabogong Temple; this shows the relationship of the two major Dabogong temples in Penang, even though the one at Tanjung Tokong originated with worshipping Chinese pioneers, as we have seen.[9] The description of Hock Teik Cheng Sin Temple in Penang shows the political and communal significance of a Dabogong temple.

9 See *Hock Teik Cheng Sin Temple Commemorative Publication Celebrating the Completion of the Restoration of the Temple*, 2007, for information on the temple and the affiliated organizations.

Conclusion

In writing about the communal aspects of popular cults in imperial and Republican China, C. K. Yang notes, “no community in China was without one or more collective representations in the form of patron gods, the cults of which served as centers for communal religious life” (Yang 1961, 81). My research in Yongchun, Fujian, shows that each village has a village temple. Generally, this is very much the case with the Chinese communities in Malaysia. The early migrants brought their regional beliefs and practices to Malaya. The patron deity that was installed might be the same as the one in the original community in China, or it might be a deity brought by one of the settlers, or it might be a deified local pioneer. A community’s patron god or goddess provided the basis of social organization for the early migrants.

The communal cult was not only a form of practicing Chinese culture that provided supernatural support, hope and expression of desire for security and economic success. It was also the basis of Chinese organizational life. Even before a communal temple was built, a local community might organize its communal life around a cult of patron deity, as I have described. Early communal temples might be forerunners of Chinese associations, as we have seen in the case of the Hainanese associations. In fact, a major communal temple might be the political center of a local Chinese community during the colonial era, with Cheng Hoon Teng being an example. While today the Chinese Malaysians have their communal associations and political parties to represent them, communal temples remain politically significant. During temple celebrations and the procession involving divine inspection of territory (this being a procession of deities carried in sedan chairs to all the major streets in a city or community), local Chinese leaders take part as communal leaders.

The celebration is not only an important occasion for common Chinese participation, it is also a public expression of Chinese culture and identity. (As is true elsewhere in the Chinese diasporas, the temples’ architecture itself expresses Chinese identity, notably traditional Chinese roof style.) This dimension has become heightened in an increasingly Malay-dominated and racially polarized political environment, with the rites being celebrated even more elaborately. The various organizational committees of Roufo Gumiao in Jobor Bahru, for instance, have not only strengthened the communal role of the temple through the annual communal celebration, they have also highlighted the significance of local Chinese history and made the celebration an internationally known touristic event.

The communal worship described may be referred to as “rituals of social renewal” (Pandian 1991, 178). These are communal rites that are held cyclically or

periodically, and that allow participation of the public, especially by members of the local communities. A communal temple's celebration is many things. It is a renewal rite that appeals for spiritual blessing to bring peace and prosperity. It is a public display of belonging to the local community (for the celebration always evokes the people's sense of space and time since the time of the early settlement). The celebration is visibly Chinese, a display of Chinese culture and identity. In the case of some historical temples, the celebration is also touristic, a display for tourists and onlookers. Chinese and even non-Chinese politicians and royal guests attend the event to show support for the Chinese and their culture, and also for multicultural coexistence. This symbolic act of support for multiculturalism is little reflected in the reality of present-day Malaysia's racial politics.

FIGURE 1 *Huge statue of Dabogong (58-foot tall) at Fubo Tan, Batu Pahat, Johor.* MAY 2016, AUTHOR

FIGURE 2 *The Jade Emperor's altar at Yudi Gong at Semiling Town, Kedah. Note the gold-gilded pineapple and the Third Prince with a milk bottle.*
FEBRUARY 2014, AUTHOR

FIGURE 3 *Statues of Guanyin, Jinhua Niangninag, Taisui and other deities on an altar at the Guandi Temple in Kuala Lumpur. Note the altar of Tang-Fan Dizhu on the floor at left.*
AUGUST 2015, AUTHOR

FIGURE 4 *Statue of the Hailong Wang (Sea Dragon King) and his assistants at the seaside in Sebunting, Batu Pahat, Johor. Note the spectacles.*
FEBRUARY 2013, AUTHOR

CHAPTER 3

Deities, Speech Groups and Temples

Any Chinese temple in Malaysia contains statues of deities, and there are temples that contain many. Generally, a row of three altar tables is set apart and faces the main entrance. The table in the center faces the main entrance directly and serves the temple's patron deity (*zhusishen* 主祀神). To its left and right are the altar tables of the cohonored (*peisi* 配祀) deities. Normally, the cohonored deities are lower in rank than the patron deity, but many temples in Malaysia make exceptions to this rule. With a patron deity chosen from the lower ranks—the earth god, in the form of Dabogong, is a frequent example—the cohonored deities will often rank higher. There are usually a number of other, smaller statues of the same deities and others on these altar tables, which are usually placed close to the wall. There may be an altar table on each side of the main entrance, usually honoring the earth god and other guardian gods. A temple with more than one hall may also have altars in these other halls. Irrespective of rank in the world of the pantheon, the patron deity is always installed in the central position on the central altar table. In very small temples, which are not so common nowadays, where all statues are arranged on the same altar table, the patron deity is always in the prominent central position, flanked by the cohonored deities and with smaller statues of other deities placed in front. Those at stage left of the table are of higher rank and more honored than the ones on the right, with the center deity enjoying the greatest honor of all. Placement of the three altar tables also treats stage left, stage right and stage center the same way.

A given temple's choice of which deities count as major is influenced by historical factors and speech-group identities. Coming from a variety of Chinese regions and drawing on local experiences, the Chinese worshippers in Malaysia have access to many deities, with most of these deities deriving historically from China and spreading with Chinese migration and settlement. This chapter will describe the major types of Chinese deities and analyze the association of deities with speech groups and temples.

Diversity of Deities

The diverse regional and occupational origins of Chinese migrants, combined with China's long religious history, have brought about a great diversity of

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deities. We can broadly classify these into pan-Chinese deities and regional Chinese deities. By *pan-Chinese deities* I refer to those deities that are common to all Chinese worshippers in China and Malaysia, regardless of region. Not all pan-Chinese deities are worshipped everywhere, although their temples may be found in different parts of China and in the diasporas. Only a few of them are worshipped almost everywhere in China and among the Chinese outside China. These may be called universal pan-Chinese deities. The most widespread of these are Guanyin and Guandi.

Guanyin is of Buddhist origin, and is known as Avalokitesvara in India but as female Guanyin in Chinese culture. She is popular not only in Chinese Buddhism but also in the Chinese popular religion. Like most Chinese deities, Guanyin is a deity of many functions in the popular religion, from blessing personal well-being to blessing communal peace. As a female deity, she is also popularly worshipped for begetting and blessing children; the image or statue of Guanyin carrying a child, usually a boy, and known as *songzi Guanyin* (送子观音 Guanyin that gives children) is common in Chinese culture. As Guanyin is a Bodhisattva who delays her own attainment of nirvana to help all beings to reach the final salvation, she is perceived in the popular religion as being in charge of the dead and their reincarnation, and so she is important to prayers for either the living or the dead.

Unlike Guanyin, Guandi began in China. The best-known Chinese deity of human origin, he is a hero of the Three Kingdoms (around AD 221–265), with his remarkable deeds perpetuated in the popular romance *Sanguo Yanyi*, or *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Beheaded as a mortal because he refused to renounce his allegiance to his lord, he was deified and promoted by the state to encourage loyalty. Today he is worshipped all over China and beyond. Originally a military deity, he has added many functions, including god of wealth. Chinese shopkeepers who are followers of Chinese Religion generally install an altar of Guandi in their shops. Even in Hong Kong, where space is limited, the statue of Guandi can be seen in many small shops.

Other pan-Chinese deities that are fairly "universal" range from Yuhuang Dadi (Jade Emperor), the highest-ranked deity in the popular Chinese pantheon, to the lowly ranked earth god. The Jade Emperor may be worshipped as a patron deity of a temple, but generally not as patron deity of a home. As he is a Taoist deity and the popular religion regards him as the emperor of the heavenly pantheon, he is appropriately worshipped in a temple that is usually called *dian*, or "palace." In recent years, the larger of these have sometimes hosted Taoist organizations and activities. China has Taoist temples (generally called *guan*), but Southeast Asia generally doesn't. In recent years some have been established in Malaysia and Singapore (see the

chapter on Taoist Religion), but the Jade Emperor temples have still been filling the gap.

Although low in rank, the earth god is important to worshippers. Being in charge of the earth, the deity blesses economic production and prosperity. Indeed, being earth god means being a god of wealth. Nevertheless, in China his altar is usually a small shrine in a field or at a crossroads, or perhaps an inscribed slab of stone in the village for communal worship. If in a temple, the shrine is installed on a separate altar, usually at a side close to the main entrance. In Malaysia and Singapore, the deity is also worshipped as a patron deity of a temple.

Mazu may be regarded as a pan-Chinese deity because she is widely worshipped in Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan, although her worship in China proper is largely along the country's coast and a distance inland. Also known as Tianhou (Heavenly Queen), Mazu began as a locality deity in Meizhou, Fujian, and her worship spread along the coast. As a patron deity, she is still very popular in southeastern China. As a sea deity, Mazu spread with Chinese migration out of South China, becoming as popular as Guanyin and Guandi among Chinese worshippers in Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines and Indonesia. Her statue is usually flanked by her two legendary assistants, Qianliyan (千里眼, Thousand Li Eyes) and Shunfenger (顺风耳, Follow Wind Ears). The former can see many miles away (one *li* is equivalent to 0.5 kilometers), while the latter can hear from afar. When she was a mortal, Mazu was a woman called Lin Moniang (林默娘). With Lin as her surname, she has become the patron deity of the Lin clan associations. In Batu Pahat, Johor, for instance, the office of the Lin clan association is located in the Mazu Temple.

The vast and multifarious Chinese pantheon can be classified this way: deities of human origin, deities of Taoist origin, deities of Buddhist origin, deities of mythical origin, deities of nature, deities of animal origin, deities of non-Chinese local origin, and others. Of the deities of human origin, many were heroes or other famous personalities in Chinese history. Guandi, the best known, was a hero; Mazu was of humble origin, most likely a shaman (cf. Tan 2013). All these deities of human origin were honored and deified after their death, and they were promoted by the state or the local communities as virtuous persons who upheld certain Confucian values. As we shall see, there are many other deities of human origin, including those who are patron deities of specific professions. Some examples of *zhiyeshen* (职业神 occupation deities) include Hua Tuo, who is a deity of health and medicine, and Luban, the patron deity of carpenters. The former (145?–208) was a famous Chinese physician in the Han dynasty, and the latter (507?–444 BC) a famous craftsman of the Warring Period.

Of the deities of Taoist origin, the Jade Emperor and Xuantian Shangdi are the best known, and they are commonly found in Chinese temples in Malaysia, while the popular Zaojun, or Kitchen God, is worshipped in the kitchen, at home, or in a temple, or in a Chinese association. The high Taoist triple deities called Sanqing (三清, the Three Pure Ones), namely Yuanshi Tianzun (原始天尊), Lingbao Tianzun (灵宝天尊) and Daode Tianzun (道德天尊), are honored by Taoist priests, who display their pictures for the conduct of Taoist rites. In fact, Daode Tianzun is worshipped in many temples. He is better known as Taishang Laojun, which is another title for the deified Laozi, whom followers of Taoist Religion regard as their faith's founder. Taisui (Deity of the Year), of which there are sixty for each year of the sixty-year cycle in the Chinese calendar system, is important, too. Some temples have statues of all the sixty *taisui*.

Jiuhuang Ye (九皇爷, the Nine Emperor Gods) are widely worshipped in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Their origin is not clear, but the gods seem to be related to the Taoist goddess Doumu. As far as we know, there is no Jiuhuang Ye temple in China, but there are many such temples in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand (Cheu 1988; Cohen 2001). The celebration of the deities' birthday on the ninth day of the ninth moon attracts not only devotees (who must observe a vegetarian diet and abstain from sex during this period), but also tourists and other onlookers. Events include fire walking (on burning charcoals), the placing of hand and arm in what appears to be boiling oil, and performances by spirit mediums. The Nine Emperor Gods temple in Ampang, Kuala Lumpur, called Nantian Gong (South Heaven Temple) and established in 1862, is well known throughout Malaysia. The altar of the Nine Emperor Gods is flanked by that of Dabogong at stage left and Guanyin at stage right. The temple's influence has spread to a number of places, including the establishment of Nantian Gong Temple in Kota Kinabalu in Sabah.

Of all the Buddhist deities fully incorporated into the popular Chinese Religion, Guanyin is most significant. Some Chinese Religion temples may have statues of Buddha, bodhisattvas and arhats (known as *luohan* in Chinese), but these beings are mostly worshipped in Chinese Buddhist temples. An exception is the popular Chinese Buddhist deity called Jigong, the vagabond monk. His statues can be found in many temples, and he is one of the popular deities that possesses spirit mediums.

There are many deities of mythical origin, among them the ancient Pangu, the creator of the world; Shennong, the god of the five grains and of agriculture; and Sun Wukong, or the Monkey God, who was made popular by the sixteenth-century classical novel *Xiyouji*, or *Journey to the West*. Pangu is one of the major deities at the temple Tianfu Gong in Sekinchan, Selangor, while a number of Chen families in Sungai Ayam Village, Batu Pahat, Johor, whose forebears

migrated from Huyang of Yongchun County in Fujian, worship Shennong at home. Known affectionately as Xian Gong, Shennong is the patron deity of their ancestral village of Meiyao, in Huyang; this author conducted research there in the late 2000s.

Because of their fighting skills, the altars of the Monkey God and other legendary deities like Nezha (哪吒, popularly known as San Taizi, the Third Prince) are commonly installed in temples that provide *tongji* (童乩, popularly known in Hokkien as *dang'gi*) spirit-medium services. Because Nezha is perceived as a child god, some temples offer milk in a milk bottle to the deity.[1] Erlang Shen (二郎神), who has a third eye, is worshipped with other deities (and with his celestial dog) in many temples. Among the people of southern Fujian origin, both in Malaysia and Taiwan, the goddess in charge of birth and protecting children, Zhusheng Niangniang (註生娘娘), is widely worshipped. In Malaysia, it is common to see her statue as a cohonored deity or as one of the many deities installed in a temple, although I have not come across her being worshipped as a patron deity.

The most popular nature deities are Tudishen (Earth God) and Shanshen (Mountain God), who attract more worshippers than the Sun God and Moon Goddess. In Hong Kong a tree deity—affectionately addressed as Daaihsyuhgung (大树公, Big Tree Granddad)—is worshipped, usually at a big banyan tree. In Malaysia and Singapore, this is mostly replaced by the worship of Nadugong at a large or aged tree of special characteristics. Nadugong is a localized deity in Malaysia and Singapore, as I shall describe in Chapter 5. In Chinese Religion, deities are personified, thus the deities of nature, be they the stars in Taoist Religion or the earth god, are also personified.

Of the deities of animal origin, Huye (Tiger God) is widely worshipped. Other animals are associated with certain deities rather than being worshipped themselves. For example, the statue of Xuantian Shangdi, who is a Taoist deity skilled at expelling demons and evils, is usually made in the image of one holding a sword in the right hand while his left foot stands on a tortoise and his right foot on a snake. As mentioned, Erlang Shen is accompanied by his celestial dog. While the dog is worshipped as a deity in Quanzhou, I have not come across this worship in Malaysia. Of the temples I have visited, Dinan Gumiao

1 I first observed this at Hong Gong Miao (洪公庙) in Sasaran (in Sungai Buluh), Selangor, in December 1998. The patron deity Hong Gong is addressed by the Hokkien there as Ang Gong, and he is said to be one of the three sworn brothers of Fazhu Gong. The temple was established by a spirit medium who had also installed a statue of Third Prince on the altar. According to him, the god had instructed him to offer milk on every first and fifteenth day of each month of the Chinese calendar.

(地南古庙)[2] in Sungai Tiram, Johor, has a number of animal statues. Renovated in 2008, it is now a big temple, and a stone censer dated 1876 bears witness to the temple's long history. The patron deity is Xuantian Shangdi, but a host of other deities are worshipped in the main hall, like Guandi, Fazhu Gong, earth god, Huagung Dadi, Tiandu Yuanshuai, Guanyin, Tianhou, Qingshui Zushi, Luban, Wenchang Dijun, Ziwei Dadi and others, including Erlang Shen with his dog. A side building contains an altar for the Tiger God. Nearby this altar, there is a statue of Tang Tudi (Chinese earth god) and one of Nadugong in the image of an Indonesian man holding a chicken. I was told that this was the image of an Indonesian who loved cockfighting. In a cage, there is a life python honored as She Jiangjun (蛇将军, Snake General), and the tortoises reared outside the temple are honored as Gui Jiangjun (Tortoise Generals). Although so honored, the python and the tortoises seem more for attracting visitors than for worship.

Deities of Malayan origin belong to two groups: Chinese pioneers who have been deified, and local territorial spirit guardians. In fact, Nadugong includes both groups. Other deities of local origin include famous local personalities. For example, the famous temple in Kuala Lumpur called Xian Si Shiye Miao (仙四师爷庙) honors the friends of Yap Ah Loy (Ye Yalai), the Chinese founder of Kuala Lumpur.

Deities of regional origins appear alongside the pan-Chinese deities. Migrants of different regional origins brought these deities overseas, adding to the many diverse deities in Malaysia and Singapore. Qingshui Zushi (清水祖师, Clear Water Patriarch) is of Anxi origin in Minnan (southern Fujian); in Malaysia, he is mainly worshipped by the Hokkien of different regional origins. Sanshan Guowang (三山国王, Three-Mountain Kings) are the gods presiding over three mountains—Mingshan (明山), Dushan (独山) and Jinshan (巾山)—all found in Hepo (河婆) of Guangdong's Jiexi (揭西) County. The Hakka from this region are very much associated with the worship, although the Chaozhou people from this area share the deities. At the outskirt of Bau in Sarawak, there is a small but old Sanshan Guowang temple called Guowang Gumiao (国王古庙). This was the site of the early Hakka settlement. While we do not know when the temple was built, a wooden plaque in the temple bears the date 1896 (*Guangxu binshen*). As Bau expanded into the town it now is, a new building for the Huanglao Xianshi Temple was erected in 1987, and three statues of Sanshan Guowang and statues of their wives were installed there.[3]

2 Visited on 30 January 2013.

3 Both investigated on 2 February 2013.

At the Guandi Temple in Serian Town, also in Sarawak, Sanshan Guowang are also among the deities honored.[4]

The above description gives a picture of the diversity of Chinese deities. Each temple in a locality usually honors a number of deities in addition to the patron deity. The main deities honored in a temple usually reflect the history of settlement and the kinds of Chinese speech groups that are present, while the temples established by spirit mediums are associated with the deities that can be invoked to possess a given medium; usually these are deities that are known for expelling evils, or deities that bless good fortune.

Deities, Temples and Chinese Speech Groups

Now we can introduce temples with particular deities. Guanyin and Guandi, being the most widespread of the pan-Chinese deities, are important ones for worship in communal temples and at home. We have noted the significance of Mazu in South China and in the Chinese diasporas. The other deity that is commonly worshipped as the patron or a cohonored deity in communal temples is Dabogong. This worship is a Southeast Asian phenomenon, where the earth god has been elevated from lowly territorial deity to one that can be cohonored with such high-rankng deities as Guanyin and Guandi. In fact, many other pan-Chinese and regional deities can be chosen to be the patron deity of a temple, reflecting ethnoregional Chinese identities. We shall now discuss Chinese Religion and Chinese speech group identities.

In Malaysia, Mazu is the pan-Chinese deity most closely associated with the Hainanese. Indeed, the early Hainanese migrants organized their communities around the cult of Mazu, and the goddess' shrines or temples were the forerunner of Hainanese associations, as I have studied in Terengganu. Hainanese associations generally have an altar, or even a hall, that honors Mazu. Kuala Lumpur's impressive Mazu temple, which has become a tourist site, is closely associated with the Hainanese Association.

While Dabogong is also widely worshipped by the Hokkien, Hakka and Teochew in Malaysia, the well-known pan-Chinese deity Xuantian Shangdi (玄天上帝) is the patron deity of the Teochew speech group in a number of regions in Malaysia, and his temple is associated with this speech group. This is so with the Teochew of Johor Bahru and the Teochew of Kuching in Sarawak. Xuantian Shangdi is known by many titles, including Xuanwu Dadi (玄武大帝),

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4 Investigated on 19 August 1981.

Zhenwu Dadi (真武大帝) and Beiji Dadi (北极大帝). He is known affectionately as Diye Gong (帝爷公), Shandi Ye Gong (上帝爷公) and Shangdi Gong (上帝公), while the Teochew also address him as Da Laoye (大老爷, Great Lord). Xuantian Shangdi is a Taoist deity, being the northern star personified, and is commonly known as Beidi (北帝, Emperor of the North).

The temple at Carpenter Street in Kuching is known as Shandi Miao, or Shangdi Temple. The epigraphic record at the temple mentions that the Teochew Association began with the temple, which is still managed by the association. The original temple, called Laoye Gong, was established at Shunfeng Street; later it was moved to the present site, where the temple was built in 1863. Destroyed by a fire in 1884, the temple was rebuilt in 1889. It was managed at first by a Teochew organization called Yi'anjun Sishi (义安郡司事, the Yi'an Prefecture Management Committee), Yi'an being the old name of Chaozhou. Later this organization was renamed Shunfeng Gonsi (顺丰公司). In 1914, Shunfeng Gongsi was officially registered as an association of the Teochew people. In 1933, the name was amended to Chaoqiao Gongsi (潮侨公司, Overseas Teochew Gongsi), and in 1938 this was amended to Chaozhou Gonghui (潮州公会, Teochew Association) to be in line with the names of other Teochew associations.

The main altars at Shangdi Temple comprise those of Shangdi Gong in the center, Fude Zhengshen at stage left and Huagong Huama at stage right. The statues of Huagong and Huama reflect specific Teochew culture. The traditional Teochew rite of passage for adulthood is celebrated at the age of fifteen. In this rite, called *chu huayuan* (出花园, going out of the flower garden), the parents prepare offerings for their son or daughter to pray to Huagong (花公, Flower Grandpa) and Huama (花妈, Flower Grandma),[5] after which the son or daughter wears a pair of red clogs and eats a bit of the offerings.

Regional deities reflect the ethnoregional identity of the Chinese. A common one in Southeast Asia is Guangze Zunwang (广泽尊王), who is a local deity from Shishan (诗山) of Nan'an (南安) County in southern Fujian. As there are many Hokkien people in Southeast Asia, there are many temples by the name of Fengshan Si (Phoenix Mountain Temple), which is based on the name of the mother temple of Guangze Zunwang in Nan'an. Not all temples are named Fengshan Si, although this is the standard name that can be found for such a temple in China and in the Chinese diasporas. In places where the Hokkien are not in the majority—such as in Sabah, where the majority of

5 The reference to a flower may be related to the Chinese usage of *baihua*, or "white flower," to refer to a boy at birth and *honghua*, or "red flower," to refer to a girl.

the Chinese are Hakka—the Guangze Zunwang temple may be referred to as the Hokkien temple, even though today the temple is visited by different speech groups of Chinese living around the area. This is so with Tengnan Tang (腾南堂) in Papar, which I first visited in August 1981. There is a majestic temple in Kota Kinabalu (capital of Sabah), called Guan Sheng Gong (观圣宫), which honors Guangze Zunwang along with Guandi, Shennong Dadi, Tianshang Shengmu (Mazu) and Fude Zhengshen. In Tuaran, which is 34 kilometers from Kota Kinabalu in northwest Sabah, there is another big Guangze Zunwang temple, one established by the Hokkien there in 1974. Called Longshan Miao (Dragon Mountain Temple), it honors Guangze Zunwang at the main altar, flanked at stage left by the altar for Guanyin and at stage right by that for Fude Zhengshen. In Sarawak, Hong San Si (that is, Fengshan Si), situated at the junction of Wayang Street and Ewe Hai Street is an important old temple established in the nineteenth century. It is managed by the Kuching Hockien Association (古晋福建公会).

From Shishan of Nan'an there is a special regional deity called Huize Zunwang (惠泽尊王). This is actually an ancestral deity, a defied Ye-surname person honored by the Ye (叶) lineage of the Nan'an region. The Ye-surname Chinese from Nan'an in Malaysia are mostly distributed in Kuala Lumpur (around Jinjiang, Sentul and Segambut) and in Penang, and they established Huize Zunwang temples (Tan 2007). The most impressive one is Ciji Gong (慈济宫) in Penang.

Other popular regional deities of Minnan include Wang Ye (王爷) and Fazhu Gong (法主公). Wang Ye, under different surnames, is popular in Quanzhou in Fujian. We have noted the Wang Ye worship in Melaka and Kelantan. In different parts of Malaysia there is Wangye worship here and there, although not in most temples. Not all Minnan people worship Wang Ye. In Yongchun in Minnan, for example, there is no Wang Ye worship. A local legend explains why. The *wangye* from Quanzhou wanted to go to Yongchun. Worried about competition, the Fazhugong deities of Yongchun sought out the *wangye* and told them the idea was useless. "There is nothing much to eat here," they said. "Look at our faces. We have suffered so much that our faces are all black."[6] On hearing that, the *wangye* turned back to Quanzhou.

Fazhu Gong originated from Dehua, a county neighboring Yongchun. This deity is quite popular in Yongchun, and indeed throughout southern and eastern Fujian. In Malaysia the regional deity is even associated with the Hokkien people of Yongchun origin, and many of those with the surname Zhang

6 The Fazhu Gong statues have dark faces. The legend says that Fazhu Gong in his lifetime fought with evil forces whose poison darkened his face.

worship this deity at home, as Fazhugong's surname is Zhang—that is, his title bearing this surname is Zhanggong Shengjun (张公圣君, Holy Lord Zhang). In Malaysia, Yongchun people are mostly distributed in Batu Pahat and Muar in Johor, and Klang and Seckinchan in Selangor; at these places the worship of Fazhu Gong is popular.

In the region of Kuala Selangor, Tanjung Karang and Seckinchan, the worship of Fazhu Gong is interrelated. From interviews, it appears that the Fazhu Gong temple called Tianfu Gong (天福宫, Blessing of Heaven Temple) in this region was first established in Kuala Selangor (locally called Gangkao, or "Port," in Hokkien). Then another Tianfu Gong temple was built in Tanjung Karang (locally called Lakgi, meaning "six miles" from Kuala Selangor). The patron deities here are Fazhugong and his second deputy (*jihu* 二副), called Xiao Gong (萧公), although there is also a statue of the third deputy. The temple in Seckinchan, also called Tianfu Gong, honors both Fazhu Gong and his third deputy, called Ang Kong (洪公) in Hokkien or Hong Gong in Mandarin. In Sasaran, also in coastal Selangor, Hong Gong has his own temple, which is called Hong Gong Miao. The local people consider Fazhu Gong, Xiao Gong and Hong Gong as sworn brothers. According to Ye Mingsheng, a specialist on the study of Fazhu Gong in Fujian, the popularity of Fazhu Gong has caused a number of local deities to be worshipped with him; at each locality, Fazhu Gong is worshipped with two local deities as a trio. Of these local deities, Xiao Gong is especially important, thanks to his association with Fazhugong worship (Ye 2008, 45). The worship of Fazhugong in Kuala Selangor and Seckinchan reflects the movement of Yongchun migrants from Klang to Kuala Selangor and to Seckinchan.[7]

Temples established by the Cantonese have regional deities that are generally not found in temples established by the other speech groups. For example, Jinhua Niangniang (金花娘娘, Golden Flower Goddess), also known as Jinhuā Furen (金花夫人) and Jinhuá Furen (金华夫人), is worshipped in Guangdong and Hong Kong for begetting and blessing children. In Kuala Lumpur her statue can be found in Xian Si Shiye Temple. In Pahang, where there are concentrations of Chinese who are descendants of migrants from Guangdong and Guangxi, Jinhua Furen is one of the deities honored in local temples, such as in Sam Seng Kong (三圣宫, Sansheng Gong) of Gambang, Pahang. With the presence of the various speech groups in Malaysia, there are various goddesses that bless birth and protect children. We have mentioned Zhusheng Niangniang among the Hokkien, and Huagong and Huama among the Teochew, and

7 The investigation of Fazhu Gong temples in Kuala Selangor and Seckinchan was conducted in December 1998.

Jinhua Niangniang is popular among the Cantonese. In addition, Guanyin, whom Chinese of all speech groups pray to, also blesses begetting children and protecting them.

In Mazu temples of the Hainanese, one can usually find an altar for Shuiwei Niangniang (水尾娘娘), as well as a tablet for 108 souls. For example, at the Tianhou Temple at Carpenter Street in Kuching,[8] the main altar is that of Tianhou Shengmu, flanked by that of Shuiwei Niangninag on the left, and that of Zhusheng Niangniang on the right. In front of the statue of Tianhou is a smaller statue of Guanyin, and there is a tablet for the 108 souls (*zhaoying yibaiba gong shenwei* 昭应一百八公神位). This kind of tablet honoring the 108 deceased persons is commonly seen in the Mazu temple of the Hainanese. At the Tainhou Gong in Terengganu, the tablet has more characters (清昭应英烈壹百有八兄弟神位), but basically the message is about the 108 souls. In Tan (2002, 28) I have described the massacre of 108 Hainanese settlers by pirates in Indochina, while another version mentions that the tablet is in honor of the 108 Hainanese migrants who died at sea on their way to Southeast Asia. Whatever the story, this event was so traumatic that the memory is perpetuated in Hainanese temples in Malaysia and Singapore.

As to Shuiwei Niangniang (Downriver Goddess), also called Shuiwei Shengniang (Downriver Holy Goddess), she is a goddess of the Hainanese. Hainanese associations' souvenir magazines describe a mysterious origin that began when a fisherman in Hainan found a piece of wood in his fishing net. Various uncanny events, including the goddess' appearance on earth as a lady, eventually led the villagers to build a temple in her honor, with the statue made out of the wood the fisherman had found.

Another deity associated with the Hakka is Tan Gong (谭公). In Kuala Lumpur's Ampang Town, one finds a concentration of Hakka and the Tan Gong Xiansheng Temple (谭公仙圣, Holy Immortal Tan Gong), which honors the deity as its patron. Xian Si Shiye Temple also has a statue of Tan Gong Xiansheng. The Hakka presence in these temples is not surprising, given that

8 An epigraphic description at the temple mentions that the temple was built in 1885. The present rebuilt four-story building of the Kuching Hainan Association, which houses the temple on the fourth floor, was completed in 1991 and officially opened in June 1993 in conjunction with the hundred and eighth anniversary of the Kuching Hainan Association (see the association's souvenir magazine published in 1993 in conjunction with the occasion). In other words, the temple was the forerunner of the association, which traced its history to the year the temple was built. When a temple is located in an association's multistory building, it is always on the uppermost floor to show respect to the deities. This is so also with the Mazu Temple of the Kota Kinabalu Hainan Association in Sabah.

the Hakka (under the leadership of Yap Ah Loy) played a part in founding the city of Kuala Lumpur. Pulai in interior Kelantan is a well-known Hakka village, and Tan Gong (here known as Tan Gong Ye) is one of the deities honored in the village temple called Sui Nyek Kiong (Shuiyue Gong 水月宫), whose patron deity is Guanyin. During the 1950s, authorities resettled some of the people from Pulai to Pulai Baharu in Terengganu, and the settlers there also built a Shuiyue Gong temple where Tan Gong Ye is honored along with Guanyin, Guandi and others.[9]

The selection of deities by the Chinese pioneers can be seen in the predominantly Hakka town of Bau in Sarawak. On the riverside and a short distance from the town center is the Dabogong temple, which was in the process of being rebuilt and enlarged when I visited it in February 2013. We have seen that Dabogong, though not specifically Hakka, is important to them. The grand temple in Bau is the Huanglao Xianshi Temple, which was reconstructed in 1987. Most likely the temple was first built toward the end of the nineteenth century,[10] after the victory of the Dutch over the *kongsi* (previously autonomous Hakka political entities) in 1850 spurred the migration of Hakka miners from their original settlement in Kalimantan. The new arrivals mined gold in Bau (cf. Chew 1990, 1–25).

At the temple there is a big bat-shaped *zhong* (a kind of bell that's played as a musical instrument) inscribed with the name Huanglao Xianshi and the date 1904; this was donated by a devotee who originated from Panyu in Guangdong. A large and round common temple bell (*qifuzhong* 祈福钟), also dated 1904, was offered by a devotee whose Hakka homeland was in Jiaying, Guangdong. The patron deities are Huanglao Xianshi (Huanglao Immortal Masters). The title most likely refers to the legendary emperor called Huangdi (Yellow Emperor) and Laozi, both regarded as Taoist deities. According to Shi Cangjin, temples that honor Huanglao Xianshi belong to a religious group called Cijiao (慈教), which was founded by a Hakka from Jieyang County, called Liao Shengjun (廖声俊, 1901–1973) (Shi 2014, 212). Given the early history of the temple in Bau, the Huanglao Xianshi there is probably not related to Cijiao.

At stage right of the main altar table is the altar for Laozu Tianshi (老祖天师). This deity is Laozi, also known as Taishang Laojun, according to Liew (1993, 100) in his description of this deity's temple at the original Hakka

9 I visited Pulai in Kelantan on 21 May 1983 and Pulai Baharu in Terengganu in May 1987. Pulai is the research site of Sharon A. Carstens (see Carstens 1983).

10 No one today knows when the temple was built. The note prepared by the temple secretariat for the temple's reconstruction estimated that it was built around 1893 by a spirit medium who "invited" the deity from Kalimantan.

settlement Lumabau (called Maoshan in Chinese and located not far from Bau). On the altar table at stage right, there are three statues representing Sanshan Guowang, together with the statues of their wives behind them. Before the establishment of Huanglao Xianshi Temple in the town, Hakka devotees visited the Sanshan Guowang (三山国王, Three-Mountain Kings) temple in Lumabau, which was the location of the early Chinese settlement. Called Guowang Gumiao (Kings' Old Temple), today this is a small and simple temple.

In downtown Bau, there is a temple called Shuixing Gong (Mercury Planet Temple). At the main altar, there is a tablet bearing the names Tang Gong Xianshi and Shuide Xingjun, the latter referring to the Taoist deity associated with the the planet Mercury (Shuixing) and overseeing water and rain. The local people refer to him as Shui Xiangong, the Water God. According to the local people, Bau was prone to flood, hence the worship of Shui Xiangong. As to Tang Gong Xianshi, we have seen that this deity is associated with Hakka devotees.

In Sarawak, Sibu is a well-known Fuzhou settlement, with many descendants of migrants from Fuzhou in eastern Fujian. Many of the Fuzhou Chinese in Sibu are Christians, but those who follow Chinese Religion have their own temple, called Tanhua Fu (探花府). It honors three deities collectively named Yuanshuai Ye (元帅爷), and it cohonors Guanyin and others. One of the Yuanshuai Ye is Tian Yuanshuai (田元帅), who was a deified Tang dynasty person honored as the patron deity of musicians and opera singers. The establishment of the temple was intertwined with that of the opera society Tongle She (同乐社), since both began with the worship of Yuanshuai Ye at a private residence in 1938. Today Tanhua Fu is a big temple that celebrates the birthday of Yuanshuai Ye on the twenty-third day of the eighth moon, as well as organizing the celebration of the beginning of the year (as marked by the Chinese calendar) on the sixteenth day of the first moon, and the end of year on the sixteenth day of the twelfth moon (cf. Jiang 1997).

There are other examples of temples associated with Chinese migrants from particular regions in China. Henghua (Putonghua: Xinghua) people are descended from migrants from Putian and Xianyou, two counties located just north of Minnan (southern Fujian). Lin Zhao'en (1517–1598) of the Ming dynasty established in Putian the syncretic religious organization Sanyi Jiao (Three-in-One Teaching), which comprises Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. This organization has become associated with the religious tradition of Xinghua people. Early Xinghua migrants established Sanyi Jiao temples, which became their ritual and secular centers; of these, the one in Bricksfield, Kuala Lumpur, called Sanjiao Tang (Hall of Three Teachings) is the best known.

Conclusion

Different speech groups brought along their regional traditions from China, contributing to the great diversity of deities and temples in Malaysia and Singapore. Certain deities, and the temples built in their honor, are closely associated with different speech groups and help the groups project their identity. Thus, the Teochew in Kuching have their Shangdi Miao in honor of Xuantian Shangdi, while the Hokkien have their Fengshan Si honoring Guangze Zunwang. The honoring of these deities was associated with the deities' worship in the Chinese homeland. Early migrants chose the deities to be honored by a given speech group in a local community. While the deities were mostly reterritorialized from the homeland, some were selected from the local history of development. We have seen that at the Roufo Gumiao in Johor Bahru, the Hakka chose Gantian Dadi as their patron deity, while the Hokkien chose Hongxian Dadi; these deities have local elements, and in fact Hongxian Dadi had early links with the Hokkien secret society. A fuller study of the history of Chinese temples requires examining both sets of influences: the local political economy and the temples' historical links with China.

While most of the Chinese Religion deities have their origin in China and can be traced to similar historical traditions and mythologies, once a god is reterritorialized as a patron deity of a locality in Malaysia, it defines a ritual space for the Chinese, never mind that the geographical or administrative space is also occupied by Malays and other Malaysians. This is very evident in a religious procession that covers the territory where the deity or deities are in charge. The deities provide local Chinese with a spatial and temporal connection to China, most notably to the original temples and generally to Chinese civilization in matters religious. But the time and expense lavished on the processions are lavished, necessarily, in Malaysia. By parading their deities, the Chinese of Malaysia provide a very material declaration of their rootedness in their adopted home.

FIGURE 5 *The spirit medium at Kim Sah Kiong, Melaka.*
DECEMBER 1997, AUTHOR

FIGURE 6 *Praying to the Tiger God (Huye) at Cheng Hoon Teng in Melaka.*
MARCH 2016, AUTHOR

FIGURE 7 *The shrines of Sheji and Shigandang at the Baogong Temple in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.*
AUGUST 1981, AUTHOR

FIGURE 8 *A Nadugong shrine in front of a shop-house in Teluk Intan, Perak. Note the flight of steps in imitation of a traditional Malay house. The three Malay saints are represented by pictures in a framed "photograph".*
FEBRUARY 2017, AUTHOR

FIGURE 9 *Nadu shrine of Awang and his wife at Sam Siang Keng* (三善宫) *Temple in Johor Baru.*
JANUARY 2013, AUTHOR

FIGURE 10 *Nadugong represented by a stone slab at a roadside Nadugong shrine in Penang.* AUGUST 2013, AUTHOR

CHAPTER 4

Temple Services, Mediums and Temple Promotion

Temple Services

The most basic service provided to worshippers is the availability of joss sticks and light candles. Established or popular temples usually have one or more temple assistants whom the worshippers can ask for advice and instructions, such as how to set about having a deity adopt one's child (usually Guanyin for a daughter and Guandi for a son), or how to worship a particular god, such as the Tiger God, on a special occasion. In normal daily worship, there may be a temple assistant who helps worshippers to add oil to the oil lamps, a ritual act called *tianyou* (literally, "adding oil"). There is a donation box where worshippers can donate some money for the use of services (such as using oil provided by the temple). Often worshippers give a small amount of money to the temple assistant for his or her service. A temple keeper called *miaozhu* takes care of the temple, including removing the offered joss sticks when there are too many in the incense pot. He (usually a man) also serves as the temple assistant to worshippers, and a big temple may have additional regular or part-time assistants. The temple keeper may be hired by a temple, but I came across a speech-group association that rented out its temple to a temple keeper; he paid a monthly rent to the association, and in return he got to collect all the donations from the donation box.

Major temples, including communal temples, usually have a counter selling candles, joss papers and joss sticks. Worshippers can burn joss papers with incense burners stationed at the temple's stage-left front corner. By providing services, temples continue to be relevant to worshippers and also earn some money. On major Chinese festivals, especially the Chinese New Year and the Pudu celebration (see Chapter 6), major temples organize various kinds of services and celebrations. For example, at a communal temple, worshippers can buy lanterns and spiral joss sticks at different prices according to size, and have their and family members' names written on a paper attached to the lanterns or joss sticks. The temple assistant will hang the lantern or joss sticks in the temple during the days of celebration. Temples are thus managed and promoted with an eye to being relevant to worshippers and attracting them. There is some "marketing," but it is different from the phenomenon of outsiders treating temples as enterprises, as reported by Selina Chan and Graeme Lang (2011) about establishing new temples in China.

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Many worshippers go to a popular temple to seek the gods' advice or blessing, which is obtained through divination. A common kind of divination that a worshipper can perform herself or himself is to ask for a divining stick called *qian*. At a communal temple and most major temples, there is usually a bamboo container that holds such numbered divining sticks. After offering joss sticks, a worshipper who wants to do this kind of divination holds the bamboo container and kneels in front of the altar to inform the deity what he or she is asking the deity to bless or what the worshipper seeks advice on. Then she tilts the container and shakes it until one of the divining sticks drops out. She then throws two divining blocks to see if this is the deity's answer. The answer is yes if the kidney-shaped blocks have one face up and another face down. The answer is no if both blocks land on the flat sides showing the arched sides. If both land on the arched sides, this means that the deity is amused, although nothing else is revealed. Then she will need to make the request again and shake the container to get another stick. She picks up the stick that the deity has "approved," looks at the number and goes to the counter to get the revelation note so numbered to find out the deity's answer. Usually the worshipper asks the temple clerk to help interpret, as the note is written in poetic Chinese and may describe an event from Chinese history that must be applied to the question of whether it is good to start a new project or whether one's health or fortune will turn better.

The first and fifteenth of a month in the Chinese calendar are important days for offering joss sticks to deities, both at home (for those who have altars at home) and at a temple. Of course, on days of festivals (especially the Chinese New Year), on days of temple celebrations and on the anniversary day of a deity that one worships, it is essential for a worshipper to visit the temple of his or her choice. Often the visitors are women who seek blessings on behalf of family members, although men are very visible during a communal celebration. Temple assistants are on hand to help individual worshippers during these occasions. For example, it is common to go to the temple at the beginning and the end of a year, as marked by the Chinese calendar; the former is marked by the Chinese New Year and the latter is generally around the Winter Solstice, which is a Chinese festival that usually falls on 22 December. On these occasions, the devotees pray to Taisui and Huye (Tiger God) if these statues are available in the temple. For example, on 20 December 1998, two days before the winter solstice, I observed such a rite at Tianfu Gong in Seckinchan. A Hokkien woman worshipper laid out the offerings (two oranges, two slices of raw pork and two raw eggs) at the altars of Taisui and Huye. She lit three joss sticks, then the woman temple assistant conducted the rite for her, while the worshipper squatted in front of the altars; these were next to each other on the ground.

The temple assistant asked the woman the name, age and address of the person who wished to *huanyuan* (return a vow). The assistant took the offerings to the front of the face of Taisui and then to touch the mouth of the tiger statue. Then she mentioned in Hokkien the name, age and address of the person to be blessed and said "*bo ping'an, hou tanziah,*" meaning "bless peace (no mishap), bless success in work or career." After that the assistant went to the main altar in the temple to "offer oil" (*tianyou*). While pouring the oil, she mentioned that so-and-so was offering oil. Then she rang the bell, which marked the end of the rite. The worshipper "donated" $8 Malaysian dollars (MYR) for the joss sticks, the oil and the service.

Spirit Mediums and Temples

At some popular temples and private temples owned by a spirit medium, regular spirit-medium services are provided. Usually, a communal temple managed by all speech groups does not provide this kind of divination. *Spirit medium*, as used here, means a person who has become a medium through which a deity or a supernatural being speaks or conveys his or her message. While Chinese speakers nowadays understand the modern Chinese term *lingmei* (灵媒) as spirit medium, there are various Chinese terms that refer to specific types of mediumship. Most Chinese associate mediumship with the ancient practice of *wu*, or shamanism (in modern anthropological terms). A form that is popular among the Chinese in Southeast Asia and in Taiwan is *tiaodang* (跳童, in Hokkien), a trance session performed by a medium called *dang'gi* (童乩), or *gidong* (乩童) in the Hokkien (Minnan) dialect. This was a common practice in Fujian, hence its popularity in Taiwan and Southeast Asia, where there are many descendants of Minnan migrants. After 1949 this "superstitious" activity was suppressed in the People's Republic of China, but it continues to play an important part in many temples in Southeast Asia, serving the divine consultation needs of ordinary worshippers. Because of the intermixing of different Chinese speech groups in Southeast Asia, *dang'gi* practices can be found among all groups of Chinese.

In China, *dang'gi* mediumship seemed to be more of a tradition of Minnan, where there is some revival of the practice nowadays. The Cantonese in Hong Kong do not seem to practice *dang'gi*, which indicates that it is not a Cantonese practice. A popular form of mediumship that is still popular in Hong Kong is *mahn maih* (问米), through which relatives of a deceased person can find out if the deceased has any request or advice for the living. In Hong Kong, such a medium is usually a woman. While in Malaysia there are some people who

consult such a medium for information about the deceased, nowadays it is not a widespread practice. On the other hand, *dang'gi* is still a common phenomenon. Many temples, both public and private, provide *dang'gi* services, though major communal temples may do away with this practice if the leaders consider it too "superstitious." A private temple is generally owned and operated by a *dang'gi*, and so its survival depends on the reputation and charisma of the *dang'gi*. The gods honored at private temples are thus mostly martial ones, with legends that feature the deities' remarkable abilities. These include Qitian Dasheng, or simply Dasheng Ye (the Great Saint, the Monkey God); Zhongtan Yuanshui, or Nezha, also called San Taizi (the Third Prince, the Child God); Jigong the Vagabond Monk, and others. In addition, temples of the Nine Emperor Gods (Jiuhuang Ye) are very much associated with spirit-medium cults, and mediums play important roles in temple celebrations.

The significance of *dang'gi* in Southeast Asia and Taiwan has given rise to a number of informative studies. By the beginning of the twentieth century, J. J. M. De Groot had already reported about *dang'gi* in Amoy (otherwise Xiamen). He aptly translated the terms *tang ki* and *ki tong* as "youthful diviners" and "divining youths" (De Groot 1976, 1269). Allan Elliott provided the earliest good ethnographic account of *dang'gi* in his study of the spirit-medium cults of Singapore (Elliott 1955). Other studies since then include Jordan (1972) and Seaman (1978) in Taiwan, Heinze (1984) in Southeast Asia, Cheu (1988) and DeBernardi (2006) in Malaysia, and Chan (2006) in Singapore, of which DeBernardi's work is most impressive. We need not be concerned about the details, except to note that a *dang'gi* is believed to be possessed by a god or goddess. A *dang'gi* performance involves the medium shaking his body when possessed, and it is believed that the deity speaks through him in a consultation session. His job when possessed includes writing charm papers, and he may write them in blood dramatically produced from his own tongue. In a public ceremony or religious procession, usually more than one *dang'gi* is possessed. The rites may involve the *dang'gi* bleeding their tongues, beating their bodies with sharp objects such as a spiked ball, putting their hands in what looks like boiling oil, walking over burning charcoals, and more. In a temple, when a trance is in session, people gather around the *dang'gi* to have their turns to consult the deity. If a *dang'gi* attracts many clients, they may have to take numbers to wait for their turn. In one case that I observed, the consultation process was like waiting for consultation in a modern clinic.

While doing research in Melaka in December 1997, I was told that Kim Sah Kiong (Jinsha Gong 金沙宫) in Bukit Baru, Melaka, was a very popular temple for *dang'gi* consultation. There are many deities honored in the temple, but the main deity is Fazhu Gong, whose title is Zhanggong Shengjun (the Holy

Lord Zhang). This deity is popular among the Yongchun Hokkien people in Malaysia, and in the area around the temple there are many Yongchun people with the deity's surname, Zhang.

My field notes made on 29 December 1997 show a process of *dang'gi* consultation at Kim Sah Kiong. The *dang'gi* session began at 8 p.m. There were around twenty people, old and young. Those who wanted to consult the medium obtained a call number from the *dang'gi*'s assistant. The atmosphere was informal and there was no dramatic performance. The *dang'gi* wore his *dang'gi* apron over his chest, while his only assistant wore shorts and singlet. The session took place in the temple in front of the Fazhu Gong altar. The *dang'gi*, who stood in front of a small table and faced the altars, began by offering joss sticks to Fazhu Gong. His assistant chanted in Hokkien, and soon the *dang'gi* shook his body, indicating that he was possessed. The assistant then called out the first number. Each client approached the *dang'gi* to tell him what they wanted to consult about.

There were various kinds of consultations. For most, the medium wrote charm papers. The assistant, who stood to the left of the *dang'gi*, collected the charm papers and went to the urn of Fazhu Gong to pass the papers over it in such a way that they collected some ash. The *dang'gi* burnt the charm papers when required for a consultation. The assistant sorted those that should be taken home to be burnt (their ashes were to be mixed with water for drinking), and those that were to be burnt at the temple. But the cases involved had their differences. Some parents brought their children to ask for the god's blessing or to get rid of bad luck. In these cases, the *dang'gi* passed his flag (it bore the Taoist symbol of yin and yang) over the front and back of the boy or girl. After this, he used his brush to write *fu* (charm) on a charm paper, which was then stamped with a charm stamp. Setting the charm on fire, he quickly passed it over the child's body, and then threw the last bit of the burning paper onto the floor. In some cases, he wrote the charm on the child's back over his or her shirt, and applied his charm stamp to it. Then he wrote some more charm papers for the mother (usually) to take home for the child. Some parents brought only their child's shirt or blouse, which was written on and stamped without the child being present. This ritual was for *bowun* (Hokkien for *baoyun*), or blessing luck.

A person brought a wooden trigram (*bagua*) with mirror for the *dang'gi* to *kaiguang*, a ritual in which an object is imbued with spiritual power. The trigram wards off evil and is installed at the top of a house's main entrance. The *dang'gi* wrote four charm papers, and the assistant advised the owner to burn two before hanging the trigram at home, and two afterward. The proper time for installation was also laid out.

The assistant also sold small packages of Chinese medicine for curing rheumatism at MYR $2. These, of course, had been ritually blessed by the god through the *dang'gi*. On the evening of observation, the session ended at 10:15 p.m. Most consultations had to do with curing sickness and expelling evil, but I was told that one could consult about anything, including marriage. The *dang'gi* stood throughout the session; usually he was holding the table in front of him, and his body shook more vigorously when he was consulted. Before ending the session, he wrote some more charm papers for the assistant to keep. He then prayed to the god and ended his trance session. His assistant helped him to take off the ritual apron.

The above description is of a *dang'gi* providing regular consultation service in a temple. His performance was mild compared with the dramatic trance often seen in public ceremonies. In fact, the *dang'gi* often showed little sign of trance except for the slight shaking of his body. He listened intensely, without much motion, and then he would go into trance. In private temples owned by a *dang'gi*, the medium often imitates the expected image of a deity. One possessed by the Monkey God will behave like a monkey. One possessed by Jigong may show this deity's vagabond nature by tearing apart an entire boiled chicken while eating it. The *dang'gi* possessed by San Taizi (Third Prince, the Child God) may ask for a bottle of milk for sucking. Overall, a spirit medium performs to reveal the deity that has possessed him, and to be in a trance is an essential aspect of this performance.

As we shall see, *dang'gi* mediumship is also popular in the localized cult called Nadugong worship. There are various forms of mediumship, as we have seen, and a literary style of mediumship called *fuji* (扶乩, Chinese planchette) is available in *shantang* (charitable temples) and among such Chinese religious organizations as Dejiao Hui or Moral Uplifting Societies. We shall discuss this kind of mediumship in Chapter 5.

Temples with one or more spirit mediums can attract worshippers who go to the temple to worship and for consultations. By virtue of the deities speaking through them, mediums can play significant roles in the development or even creation of a temple. A number of well-known temples were established by mediums. A famous one is Nantian Si (南天寺) of Parit Unas (巴力文那), not far from Muar as one reaches the town from Batu Pahat. The main deity worshipped is Shancai Ye (善才爷), popularly addressed in Hokkien as Sianzaiya Gong (善才爷公). This deity, an assistant of Guanyin, is popularly worshipped along with her. The fame of the temple is closely linked to the fame of its spirit medium, Koh Thian Peng (许天平), who helped found the temple in 1938. A very important contribution was his part in the temple's creation of a Chinese primary school in 1947. This was done with the blessing of the patron deity,

of course, and the school was named after this deity, hence San Chai Chinese Primary School (善才学校). The simple school building was renovated into a modern one in 1987.

In 1980, Koh Than Peng was given the title of Dato by the sultan of Johor, a title that is usually bestowed on prominent business people and politicians. That a spirit medium received this title was considered an impressive news by the Chinese throughout the country, adding more prestige to the temple. In 1996 the temple was renovated into a grand temple. On the anniversary of Shancai Ye, on the twenty-third day of the first moon, the temple is crowded with devotees and tourists from all over the country, many coming from Singapore and other towns by hired buses. The few days of grand celebration include staging Hokkien and Teochew operas. On other days, especially on the anniversaries of the other deities honored in the temple, there are many worshippers and tourists, too. Koh Thian Peng passed away in 1994, and a memorial hall in the temple honors him.[1]

More recently, the Dabogong temple in Batu Pahat, Johor, called Qingtian Gong Dabogong Miao (青天宫大伯公庙), became a success in large part because of its spirit medium's innovative management. There are a few well-known Dabogong temples in Batu Pahat; this one is located on the outskirts of the town, at the place the local Chinese call Sanchun (三春). This is Qingtian Gong Dabogong Miao, a huge temple containing a complex of small temples and halls that honor many deities other than Dabogong. Architecturally, it is best known for the huge dragon statue on top of the front temple wall, on which the life-size statues of the Eight Immortals stand. Built in 1982, the success of the temple is closely linked to the management by its spirit medium.

The temple attracts not only local worshippers but also worshippers from Singapore. Other than worshipping the various deities, many are attracted by the chance to worship the two Immortals of Harmony, called He-He Er Xian (和合二仙). After worshipping them, a worshipper can get water from a nearby well and bathe in a chamber marked for one's Chinese horoscope year (e.g., Year of the Tiger); the ritual act is said to bring the immortals' blessing for marital harmony or business success. There is also a wishing tree nearby, where worshippers hang sheets of papers on the branches. The characters mention various kinds of harmony: *aiqing hehe* (love harmony), *shengyi hehe* (business harmony; i.e., business success), *fuqi hehe* (marital harmony) and *hejia hehe* (family harmony). Promoting the worship of He-He Er Xian has been very successful in attracting worshippers. Furthermore, urban people are interested in

1 Investigated on 2 February 2013.

having a chance to bathe in natural well water. Why not a good bathing with the gods' blessing?[2]

Temple Promotion

We have seen what spirit mediums can do to promote and even establish temples, even aside from providing divination service. All established temples need to be managed and promoted to attract worshippers. The committee of a public temple must come up with ways to keep the temple "marketable," as it were, and a well-known spirit medium can be a great help. A private temple run by a spirit medium and his family depends largely on the reputation of the medium, since worshippers who go there are mainly interested in consultation. In Batu Pahat, Johor, there are a number of temples that are well managed and promoted, attracting worshippers and tourists from afar and especially Singapore (about a three hours' drive).

In downtown Batu Pahat, the Dabogong temple at the river side (at Jalan Pantai) is called Fude Tan Sihai Longwang Dabogong Miao (福德坛四海龙王大伯公庙). Established in 1981, this temple has built a number of attractions in addition to the main building for Dabogong,[3] and these include halls of other deities (such as the City God "temple"), as well as a touristic good luck bridge and a "dragon spring" (龙泉井) where one can get water to wash hands for good luck, or bring the water home to wash car plates for blessing and for safe driving. There is a white crocodile statue to be touched for good luck. An explanatory note mentions that there was a white crocodile in the river, and that a few people who touched the statue had won the lottery with the number 2121. Actually, pronounced in Mandarin this number is homophonous with the word for *eyu*, meaning "crocodile."[4]

A mile and a half away on Minyak Beku Road is another Dabogong temple, called Fude Tan Dabogong (福德坛大伯公). This one is mainly managed and promoted by its spirit medium, and its main attraction is the opportunity for worshippers and visitors to touch a traditional Chinese ingot (*yuanbao*, money) for blessing wealth. Letting people touch lucky items for blessing is a way that temples attract worshippers and visitors.

2 Investigated on 12 February 2013. See Hu (2008: 160–165) for a description of this temple.

3 The statue of Dabogong is flanked on his left by that of San Taizi (Third Prince) and on his right by those of Mazu, Zhusheng Niangniang and Guanyin. These statues all face the direction of Batu Pahat River.

4 Investigated on 12 February 2013. See description in Hu (2008: 184–189).

At a fishing village in Batu Pahat District, there is a temple famous for letting worshippers touch fish in the hope of getting wealth (*facai*). This is the Dabogong temple at Sigenting Village, known in Chinese as Shiwending (石文丁) and locally pronounced in Hokkien as Sikbbunding. The Dabogong temple is at the seaside and is called Chonglong Gong (崇龙宫), and it was officially registered on 27 April 1995. Closer to the sea is a small building that houses the Dragon God. In a pool near a huge statue of Guanyin are three arapaima fish. Arapaima is a big freshwater fish from South America that can grow as large as two meters. Many visitors have been drawn here by the sight of these creatures and the promoted belief of blessing wealth, with the poor fish having to endure their touch. One day in March 2016, I was on an express bus from Kuala Lumpur to Batu Pahat. Sitting beside me was a 64-year-old Chinese from Kuching, Sarawak, who was going to Batu Pahat for the first time. He told me that he had heard about a temple where one could *moyu* (touch fish), and he made the trip to do so and would return to Kuala Lumpur later in the evening. *Moyu* has become so famous that many worshippers from afar go to this small fishing village, mainly by car or hired bus.[5]

With its numerous attractive Chinese temples, Batu Pahat draws temple tourism from places within two or three hours' drive, notably Singapore. For the city's practitioners of the Chinese Religion, a one-day tour to Batu Pahat allows them to visit temples where they can touch auspicious objects, and there is also the local food to enjoy. Thus, it is common to see tourist buses at the major and touristic temples in Batu Pahat. The visitors can also continue their journey to visit the famed Nantian Si at Parit Unas, about an hour's drive toward Muar. On the way, they may visit the touristic Wufang Zhengshen Temple (五方正神庙) at Sungai Sarang Buaya, Semerah, which is a small town not far from Batu Pahat Town. This is a temple with many Buddhist, Taoist and even Hindu deities, although most are Buddhist.[6]

5 Investigated on 8 February 2013. I have visited this temple a few times.

6 Another temple that I came across that has adopted the strategy of having many statues of deities is Tianling Dian (天灵殿) of Ulu Choh, not far from Johor Bahru. Here many statues of all kinds of deities in the Chinese popular religion can be found. An important attraction is the Guanyin Pond, beside the large outdoor statue of Guanyin. Worshippers fetch water from the pond to wash their car number plates, believing that this will bless safe driving and bring other good luck; perhaps the car number will be used in buying lottery chances. I should like to also mention Sam Siang Keng (三善宫) at Yahya Awal Road, Johor Bahru. Established in 1947, the present temple has a grand building, and many Taoist and a number of Buddhist deities are installed here (investigated on 28 January 2013). The celebration of the anniversary days (*baodan*) of a number of major Taoist and Buddhist deities makes this temple very

Chinese Religion appeals to different classes of Chinese in different ways. More educated people, such as teachers, may participate in the literary planchette divination, and they generally do not consult *tongji* spirit mediums, considering this to be *mixin* (superstitious). But the low-income earners and people with little education are attracted by the *tongji* services, and the hope of striking it rich is a strong motivation for worship. Praying or conducting rituals to get a lottery number is a popular pursuit when these people visit temples.[7] This explains the popularity of touching a "gold ingot" (actually a sculpted replica) or an auspicious fish, or getting blessed water to wash car number plates, as we have seen. Thus, many of the lower-income people are interested in practices that the more educated Chinese look on as superstitious or magical. Those who manage temples often pay attention to the interest of these people to promote their temples.

Even *yinshen* (阴神), or deified ghosts and supernatural beings from the netherworld, may be worshipped for good luck. In particular, a good deal of importance attaches to the worship in Malaysia and Singapore of Heibai Wuchang (黑白无常, Black and White Wuchang), popularly known as Da Er Ye (大二爷, Eldest and Second Uncles). In charge of policing the netherworld and protecting humans from evil, they are believed to be two soldiers of the Tang dynasty, General Xie and General Fan. The former was tall and was hanged by the enemy, while the latter was shorter and was drowned while fighting enemies. General Xie's image is that of a tall person with a protruding long tongue; he's wearing a white shirt, and his high hat has the characters *yijian daji* ("big luck on seeing me") or *yijian shengcai* ("getting wealth on seeing me"). General Fan's image has a dark face, and his square hat bears the characters *tianxia taiping*, or "peace in the world." Also called Qiye (七爷) and Baye (八爷), the two generals are in charge of rewarding good people and punishing evil ones. General Xie is more popular among worshippers; frightening as he is, the Elder Uncle benefits from his association with blessing wealth.

Shan Nan Si (善南寺) in Johor Bahru honors many deities, with Shancai Ye (善才爷) as the patron deity. But the temple, whose establishment is closely associated with a spirit medium, is better known for the worship of Da Er Ye, and there are stories of striking the lottery after getting tips from the Elder

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active. For instance, the celebration of Jiuhuang Dadi (Jiuhuang Ye) anniversary day on the first to the ninth of the ninth moon is a grand occasion drawing many devotees to the temple.

7 In Johor Bahru, I met a Chinese man who was very knowledgeable about temples throughout Malaysia. In his younger days, he and a few friends used to bring along a spirit medium to visit temples throughout Peninsular Malaysia on the quest for lottery numbers recommended by deities. He regretted that he never got rich this way.

Uncle.[8] Accordingly, this is a popular temple for those who seeks lottery numbers. Of the temples that also honor *yinshen* (that is, deities of the netherworld), the Nine Emperor Gods (九皇大帝) temple in Kota Kinablau called Nantian Gong (南天宫) has a big hall with many deities from the netherworld and is kept suitably dark. In Nezha Temple (哪吒庙), a small temple operated by a spirit medium in the Johor Jaya residential area of Johor Bahru, a section behind the front main altar honors *yinshen*, and there Da Er Ye are worshipped.[9]

Conclusion

Chinese temples, including communal temples, provide various kinds of religious services. Other than those described so far, some communal temples provide ancestral halls where tablets of the deceased are installed. The descendants pay a fee for the tablets to be kept there and for the temple keeper to offer incense over them, with the descendants visiting the halls on the anniversary of the ancestor's death and during major festivals, such as the Chinese New Year and the Zhongyuan Festival. But, as we shall see, charitable temples and such Chinese religious organizations as Dejiao Hui have played a bigger part than the communal temples in providing ancestral halls and columbaria. At any rate, a temple's success and reputation depend on its religious services, many of which provide income for the temple and not just the temple assistants. Organizing religious celebrations during temple festivals and Chinese festivals is essential to make the temples relevant to the local community. Historical communal temples like Cheng Hoon Teng in Melaka and Roufo Gumiao in Johor Bahru have their advantages as historical temples, but their continuing communal significance also owes a debt to the organizing skill and resourcefulness of their temple committees.

We have seen that a temple's spirit medium plays an important role in promoting it. Yes, temples do need promotion, especially when a given town or city has a multitude of them. Graeme Lang and Selina Chan have applied the religious economy model to analyze the success and failure of new temples in China (see also Lang, Chan and Ragvald 2005). The religious economy model owes much to Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, who analyze religions as competitors in a free religious market that offers "several brands of religion" (Stark and Bainbridge 1966, 149). But, as Frank J. Lechner points out, the idea of rational choice and religious economies traces back to Talcott

8 Visited on 29 January 2013. See description in Hu (2008: 101–105).

9 Visited on 29 January 2013.

Parsons' idea of the subsystem within an overall social system, and from there to Adam's Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (Lechner 2007). Lechner (2007, 94) points out that "religious economy proponents acknowledge that markets have no uniform effects, or in other words, that the possible effects of competition depend on many other factors." Chinese spirit-medium temples need to compete with other such temples. Even a historical communal temple needs to ensure that it is relevant to the current age, and organizing temple celebrations is an important way of doing so.

"Chinese religion has been largely a religion of the masses," wrote Wing-tsit Chan (1953, 136). Analyzing the Chinese popular religion in China, he identified two levels to the religious life of the Chinese: the level of the masses and that of the enlightened. The first group took in "85 percent of the Chinese people," whom he pronounced "devout but ignorant." The second group was made up of "the intelligentsia and illiterate farmers, fishermen, and similar humble folks who may use a smaller vocabulary but often express greater wisdom" (Chan 1953, 142). This is the view of a Chinese scholar on Chinese Religion. But before one accuses him of elitism, consider this observation he made:

> The masses worship thousands of idols and natural objects of ancient, Buddhist, Taoist, and other origins, making special offerings to whatever deity is believed to have the power to influence their lives at the time.... The enlightened, on the other hand, honor only Heaven, ancestors, and sometimes also Confucius, Buddha, Lao Tzu, and a few great historical beings, but not other spirits.... The masses believe in astrology, almanacs, dream interpretation, geomancy, witchcraft, phrenology, palmistry, the recalling of the soul, fortune-telling in all forms, charms, magic, and all varieties of superstitions. The enlightened are seldom contaminated by these diseases. The masses visit temples and shrines of all descriptions. The enlightened avoid these places, except the Temple of Heaven, ancestral halls, the Confucian temple, and occasionally the temples of great historical personages.... The ignorant people go to deities primarily to seek blessings, particularly those of children, wealth, and long life. The enlightened people worship not to seek favors, but to pay respect.... The masses *pai*, that is, worship in the formal, orthodox, strictly religious sense, but the enlightened *chi*, that is, sacrifice or make offerings.
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> CHAN 1953, 142–3

Wing-tsit Chan was a Chinese philosophy professor, not an anthropologist. If we ignore his condescending attitude toward the practices of the masses (though it is not easy to find a word to substitute for "the enlightened"), his

observation of the attitude of the masses toward Chinese Religion is fairly accurate, judging from my research in Malaysia. In this respect, we can understand how temple promotion by spirit mediums can be so attractive to lower-income housewives, laborers, taxi drivers, small traders and others.

Overall, consulting deities directly or through mediums remains a meaningful part of daily life for most ordinary Chinese. It is a way of "mending luck" (DeBernardi 2006). In so doing, they act out a Chinese religious tradition, thereby perpetuating it. The consultations aren't just a way of communicating with the supernatural, but also a means of communication with other worshippers, with relatives and friends. They share information and experiences, and pass along stories about how efficacious the deity of a particular temple is or how an individual has become wealthy and contributed to the building of a temple. The deities, the temples and the worship rites all form a valuable cultural tradition, and so individuals from different households are more than willing to contribute to organizing collective religious celebrations. In so doing, they maintain and bring to life a local Chinese community while exhibiting their Chineseness.

CHAPTER 5

Localization and Chinese Religion

Religion follows migrants via their cognition, memory and reenactment. Thus, there is cultural continuity along with the transformation due to cognitive interaction with local cultures and local interpretations, a transformation that is part of a wide-ranging cultural process that I refer to as localization. In the Chinese Religion of Malaysia, this process stands out in the worship of the Chinese Tudi Shen (Earth God) and of the localized Sino-Malayan guardian deity called Lnadokgong (in Hokkien) and Nadu Gong (in Mandarin). The localization process stems from the immigrants' cultural interaction with the indigenous people, with immigrants from nations other than China, and with different Chinese speech groups encountered here in this new land. In China these speech groups historically live in separate counties or provinces, but in Southeast Asia they may live in the same city. Side by side, they still maintain their respective speech-group identities, with the groups influencing each other culturally while remaining distinct.

The Earth God

Tudi Shen has its origin in the ancient Chinese worship of *sheji* (gods of earth and grain) and *tudi* (earth god). C. K. Yang points out that *sheji* was "the theistic symbol of the feudal state" and that *tudi* was the patron of the local community (Yang 1961, 97), although the ordinary people came to regard the two as the same. By the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), the *she* (altar of the earth) "was universally found in all counties, villages, towns, and neighborhoods" (Yang 1961, 98). Today, in rural Hong Kong and in Guangdong, it is still common to find the communal shrine of *she*, *sheji* or *tudishen*, all meaning Earth God.

In Malaysia, I came across two shrines that specifically honor *sheji*. Both bear the characters *benfang sheji zhi shen* (本坊社稷之神) or "the god of *sheji* of the local area," meaning the local community. Both are in Sabah: at Bao Gong Temple (包公庙) in Kota Kinabalu, and at Liesheng Gong (列圣宫) in Sandakan. The former temple's patron deity is, of course, Bao Zheng (999–1062), the righteous judge of the Northern Song dynasty, who was deified and known affectionately as Bao Gong. The latter temple honors a host of deities including Dabogong, Guandi, Mazu and a few others, hence the temple's name of Liesheng Gong, or Temple of Various Saints. At both temples, the shrines

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for *sheji* are made of concrete and built outside the temples. Beside the *sheji* shrine at Bao Gong Temple, there is a smaller shrine stage right to the first, one that includes a stone slab bearing the characters *taishan shigandang zhi shen* (泰山石敢当之神, the god Shigandang of Taishan). Such an altar serves to ward off evils. At the *sheji* altar in Sandakan, there is a couplet that reads *feng-tiao yushun, guotai min'an* (with timely wind and rain, the country and people have peace), indicating the *sheji* function of blessing prosperity and peace for the local community.

In Taiwan, the Earth God is widely worshipped in temples, while in the fields and the wild there are small shrines of *tudi*. In both Taiwan and mainland China, the Earth God worshipped in the temple and at home is known as Fude Zhengshen (the God of Blessing and Virtues),[1] the statue of which is normally represented by a bearded old man holding a dragon staff (*longzhang*, which symbolizes status and power) in his right hand and an ingot (Chinese money) in his left hand.

In Malaysia and Singapore, Fude Zhenshen is one of the major deities worshipped in temples and at home. However, the Chinese in these countries popularly call this deity Da Bogong (大伯公, Elder Uncle God), or Duabehgong in Hokkien and Teochew. There has been some discussion about the origin of this term of address (e.g., Rao 1952; Xu 1952; Sakai 1981; Cai 1996), and I have discussed the Hakka origin of the term (Chen, Zhiming 2000), as the Hakka in mainland China and in Taiwan call the Earth God Bogong and Dabogong. In Malaysia and Singapore, the Hokkien and Teochew must have adopted the Hakka term to address the Earth God, being familiar with the term as kinship term referring to an elder patrilateral uncle. The southern Fujian people in mainland China and Taiwan do not address Fude Zhengshen as Dabogong, so the use of the label in Southeast Asia is a local development arising from cultural interaction among Chinese speech groups. In Kelantan (the state close to Thailand), Duabehgong (Dabogong) is also known by the Hokkien there as Buntaogong (本头公, God of Locality). This is the popular address for the earth god used by the Teochew in Thailand.

In Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, Dabogong also refers to deified Chinese pioneers, and in this respect the use of a kinship term is most relevant, as in Dabogong (Eldest Bogong), Erbogong (Second Bogong) and so on.

1 In my earlier writings, I have translated Fude Zhengshen as "Righteous God of Blessings and Virtues." It is difficult to translate the term *zhengshen*. *Shen* means "god," while *zheng* means "righteous," "true," "patron" or "the major one," as in the major deity honored in a temple, and so on. It seems to me *zhengshen* here means more "the god." Thus, I now translate the deity's name as the God of Blessing and Virtues.

In Tanjung Morawa in Sumatra, Indonesia, there is a Wihara Pekong Lima, or Five Bogong Temple. It honors five Teochew heroes who were hanged by the Dutch for allegedly killing an oppressive Dutch supervisor (Franke, Salmon and Siu 1988, 274–275). Thus, the five heroes were honored as Bogong.

In Malaysia, the best-known Dabogong temple honoring deified Chinese pioneers is at Tanjung Tokong in Penang (known in English as Thai Pak Koong Tanjung Tokong Temple, 海珠屿大伯公庙).[2] As the temple record shows, the Dabogong honored here comprises three Hakka pioneers (*kaishan zhi chuzu* 开山之初祖) surnamed Zhang, Qiu and Ma. They were collectively deified as Dabogong, with the temple being established by the Hakka from the five counties of Huizhou (惠州), Jiaying (嘉应), Dabu (大埔), Yongding (永定) and Zengcheng (增城).[3] The worship of the Hakka pioneers has become associated with the worship of Fude Zhengshen, the Earth God. There is no statue at the main altar, only a tablet bearing these characters written from top down: *Dabongong zhi shenwei* (The Altar of Dabogong). Above the tablet are the characters written from right to left, *fude zhengshen* (the God of Blessing and Virtue), which is the title of the Earth God.

The Tanjung Tokong Dabogong altar is near the seaside. To the left of the Dabogong altar, away from the seaside, is a temple called Bentougong Yu Wudegong (本头公屿伍德宫), literally Bentougong Island Wude Temple. The main altar is that of Wufu Wangyegong (五府王爷公, Wangye of Five Surnames) with four cohonored altars. The ones at stage left are those of Dagogong and Huye Gong (虎爷公, Tiger God), and the ones at stage right honor Jiuwei Xianshi Gong (九位先师公, Nine Immortal Gods) and Caishen Ye (财神爷, God of Wealth). What interests us here is the name of the temple, which is shown on a plaque above the main entrance. In Hokkien, the name Bentougong or Buntaogong means "God of the Local Area." The place name Bentougong Yu or Bentougong Island refers to the Dabogong site here. Thus, Dabogong is also described as Bentougong, or God of the Local Area.

Citing Chen Ta, Victor Purcell was of the opinion that Dabogong was the deification of Chinese pioneers (Purcell 1967, 123). Chen Ta, who was known for his pioneering study of Chinese emigrant communities in South China, pointed out that the term *Tai Pai Kung* (i.e., Dabogong) for *Earth God* was introduced by returnees from Southeast Asia; drawing on information from his Teochew informants, he thought that the term originated with the Chinese in Southeast Asia, who honored the early pioneers as *kaishan dabo* (the earliest pioneers to open up the land), with *gong* added to further show respect;

2 First investigated on 2 February 1995.

3 I visited Tanjung Tokong Dabokong Temple on 2 February 1995.

hence the term *Dabogong* (Chen, Ta 1940, 233–236). This is, of course, one local version of Dabogong; as discussed above, the main concept of Dabogong refers to the traditional Chinese Earth God, who acquired a new affectionate term of address in Southeast Asia.

Chinese Religion treats Earth God, like City God, as a position that different individuals can fill. A story from a famous Chinese fiction collection of the Qing dynasty (*Liaozhai Zhiyi*, or *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*)[4] can help to illustrate this point. In this story about choosing a city god, a Mr. Song fell sick and saw himself sitting for an examination. He performed very well and was summoned by the gods to be informed that he qualified to fill the post of city god in Henan. Realizing he must have died, he begged to defer the appointment, as he had to take care of his elderly mother. The gods were moved by his filial piety. They granted his request, and the post went instead to a Mr. Zhang. Mr. Song woke up in his coffin, having been dead for three days. He asked his mother about Mr. Zhang, and she said he had died that very day.

Like many jobs, that of Earth God can vary from occupant to occupant and place to place. Houtu, an earth god of graveyards, is honored by a small shrine that is usually (although not always) installed at stage left and in front of a grave, with a small stone structure bearing the character *houtu* (后土). Dizhu, Lord of the Land, is honored in homes and in coffee shops by a tablet installed on the floor underneath the altar table where the deities are worshipped. This is earth god as a guardian deity that protects the home and family members. Thus, the characters on the tablet often read "*wufang wutu longshen* 五方五土龙神, *huzhai dizhu caishen* 护宅地主财神" (Earth God of the Five Directions and Five Regions, Lord of the Land the God of Wealth that Protects the Home). There are also Dizhu conceived as Chinese and non-Chinese (Tang-Fan). A common example of such a tablet reads vertically as follows (here typed horizontally):

金枝初发叶	Golden branch sprouting
五方五土龙神	Earth God of the Five Directions and Five Regions
唐番地主财神	Tang-Fan Dizhu, the God of Wealth
银树正开花	Silver tree flowering

The first line and the fourth line form a couplet that reflects the nature of the god and the wishes of the worshippers (i.e., the guardian god is perceived as blessing wealth). The second and third line are inscribed on the center of the tablet, and they mention the territorial deities being worshipped. Dizhu, as

4 The title as translated by Herbert A. Giles (1908).

Lord of the Land, is also considered a god of wealth, and in fact an altar to Dizhu and Dabogong is often described as *jubao tang* (聚宝堂, hall of gathering wealth). In the Tang-Fan tablet, the identity of Dizhu is perceived as both Chinese and non-Chinese, or as coming from China but also being of local (i.e., Malayan) origin.

In a business person's home or a shop house, the couplet of such an altar may have something to say about business success, as in the following:

生意兴隆千里至	Prosperous businesses arrive from afar
五方五土龙神	Earth God of the Five Directions and Five Regions
唐番地主财神	Tang-Fan Dizhu, the God of Wealth
财源广进万方来	Lots of wealth coming from all directions

The reinvention of Dizhu as one of Tang-Fan or "Chinese and non-Chinese" is not that drastic if we note that Hong Kong and Guangdong are home to many *dizhu* tablets reading *qianhou dizhu caishen* (前后地主财神, Lord of the Land of the Front and Back, the God of Wealth). Thus, the reinvented term Tang-Fan really replaces the term *qian hou* (front and back) or, as we have seen, *huzhai* (that protects the home). The idea of Tang-Fan is even more common in the worship of Nadu Gong, which we will now turn to.

Nadu Gong

Nadu Gong is a unique Sino-Malayan conception of deity. It arises from the Chinese conception of earth god, to which Chinese migrants added the earth god of the local Malayan region. This earth god is the Tang-Fan Dizhu, or "Chinese and the Local Non-Chinese Lord of the Land," mentioned above. Then there are Muslim saints honored by the Malays as *keramat*, and by the ethnic Chinese as Nadu or Nadu Gong. Despite some studies of this fascinating religious localization (cf. Cheu 1982, 1992; Tan 1988, 161–163, 1993; Lee 1983; Lee and Chin 2015), the diverse nature of Nadu Gong has not been adequately addressed.

The name Nadu Gong in Mandarin is based on the Hokkien term Lnadokgong (often locally transcribed as Datuk Kong). The label is derived from a combination of the Malay word *datuk* and the Hokkien term *gong*. Both mean grandfather, a kinship term favored by the Chinese masses when addressing their gods affectionately. *Datuk*, though Malay, also refers to Chinese deities. This is most likely because of the Malay-speaking Baba, who follow the Chinese Religion. They address their paternal grandfather as *ng-kong*, but refer to and address

Chinese deities as *datuk* (as in the phrase *sembayang datuk*, meaning to worship deities). Datuk Peh Kong is their name for the deity known as Duabehgong (in Hokkien) and Dabogong (in Mandarin). The use of the Malay term *datuk* for grandfather is similar to the Chinese usage of *gong* (also meaning grandfather) to address their deities affectionately. Thus, the term Lnadokgong is a syncretism of Malay and Hokkien terms that have the same meaning, and that here refer to the Sino-Malayan earth deity or guardian deity, reflecting the deity's Sino-Malayan identity.

Since the name is a local creation, there are various ways of writing it in Chinese. These follow the Hokkien pronunciation, but when read in Mandarin they may differ a bit from one another. The characters for the Nadugong label include the following: 嚂啅公 (Lan Zhuo Gong); 哪啅公 (Na Zhuo Gong); 篮督 (Landu); 哪督 (Nadu); 嗱嘟 (Nadu). The last three sets of characters refer to the name of the deity, Nadu, but without the address term "gong." We can use *Nadu* and *Nadugong* interchangeably. The characters 督 (*du*) and 卓 (*zhuo*) are pronounced similarly as *dok* in Hokkien, hence the common alternative use of the characters. The addition of the radical 口 (for mouth) to the characters for *lan*, *na* and *zhuo* indicates that these belong to a local style of writing not found in standard Chinese, reflecting the Malayan identity of the deity. For convenience, I shall use the Mandarin pronunciation of Nadu Gong.

The Nadu as Malay or Malayan (now Malaysian) guardian deity is also influenced by the Chinese understanding of Malay traditions regarding the existence of *keramat*, guardian spirits or deities of sacred sites. These include the pre-Islamic but still extant belief in guardian spirits of the wild, as indicated by unusual sites that include anthills and the tombs of Muslim saints (cf. Mohd. Taib Osman 1989). Traditionally, when a Malay enters a forest he may call out, "Datuk, *minta lalu*" ("Datuk, may I pass this place"). The ethnic Chinese would have found this idea of the guardian spirit of a wild spot or of a mountain similar to their belief in earth god or mountain god. The address term "datuk" for the guardian spirit may also help explain the label used for the deity in its Malay or Malayan aspect. The honoring of saints is also familiar to the Chinese, and so the incorporation of the local beliefs and the reconception of local guardian deities as both Chinese and local is not difficult to understand. Indeed, early Chinese migrants would have found the nature and functions of *keramat* as described by Mohd. Taib Osman, a well-known authority on Malay folk beliefs, very much in line with Chinese beliefs:

> The worship at the grave of a *keramat*, for example, is usually to enlist the blessings of the dead saint for the request one has in mind. Thus, one resorts to the *keramat* to request children, to win a dispute, or to ask

> for success in a business venture. The nature and guardian spirits, on the other hand, are propitiated for the success of the villagers' fishing, agricultural, and other life activities which have to do with the departments of nature.
>
> 1989, 157

As we shall see, the local Sino-Malayan belief in Nadu Gong incorporates belief in the local spirits of the wild and belief in the Muslim saints.

Nadu as Localized Sino-Malayan Guardian Deity

Nadu may be seen as a Chinese Malayan earth god, being of the Chinese tradition but also a Malayan territorial guardian deity. The characters indicating Nadu, when found on a tablet, are usually written vertically as Tan-Fan Nadu *shenwei* (唐番拿督神位), meaning "the divine tablet of Chinese and non-Chinese Nadu." For example, the rectangular tablet may bear the Chinese characters, with *jing ru zai* 敬如在 (worship as if existing) on top horizontally from right to left. Under the character *ru*, the central line from top down vertically reads 唐番嗱[口督]神位. This is flanked by the lines under *jing* and *zai*, which together form a couplet that reads 嗱扶家家好，[口督]庇户户安. The lines spell out "Nadu" when only each line's first character is looked at; hence, the couplet means "With the support and protection of Nadu, every family is fine and every household is in peace."

The character *fan* for non-Chinese (a category that can be understood as ethnically Malay or territorially Malayan) is sometimes written as 畨. Some Nadu tablets may bear just the characters Nadu *shenwei*, or "the divine tablet of Nadu." The Nadu tablets can have different couplets reflecting the wish for protection and for wealth. For example, the characters of the Nadu tablet at a big rock in Damansara Utama observed in April 1980 reads vertically:

四方财宝进	Wealth coming from all directions
唐畨拿督神位	Divine tablet of Tang-Fan Nadu
中外贵人扶	Helpful beings from China and overseas providing guidance

Here we see the reference to China and foreign lands, as well as to Chinese and non-Chinese. Such Nadu tablets are commonly installed in small shrines that can be seen in the wild, at construction sites, at roadsides, and also in the vicinity of some public buildings, where the shrines were installed at the time of the building's construction. The Nadu shrines are equivalent to the earth

god shrines that are commonly found in the fields and villages of rural Taiwan. They are Chinese Malaysian earth god shrines, dedicated to a traditional Chinese earth god but with the Malayan/Malaysian component added to it.

As Malays are the majority people in Malaysia, most Nadu deities are perceived as Malay and Muslim; hence, pork is not offered. The images are generally made in the image of a Malay wearing Malay attire, which may include sarong, Malay-style shirt, *tengkolok* (cloth headgear) or *songkok*, which is a small cap that can be black, embroidered with colors, or a plain white. (In Malaysia and Singapore, the white caps are only for a *haji*, one who has returned from a hajj pilgrimage.) Some statues may even have the Nadu holding a Malay dagger called the *keris*. Even the offerings reflect the early migrants' association of certain food with Malay foodways. The Hokkien refer to the offerings for Nadu Gong as Nadu Gong *liao* (items of offerings for Nadu Gong). These include a glass of plain water, an indigenous cigarette of tobacco rolled in a thin white paper (*rokok daun*), areca nut pieces, betel leaves (*daun sirih*, used for chewing areca nut), turmeric rice (*nasi kunyit*), and *kemenyan* (benzoin incense). Instead of the red candles used for worshipping Chinese deities, white candles are often used for worshipping the non-Chinese Nadu Gong. Other than benzoin, Chinese joss sticks are generally used. There is, of course, an incense pot at the altar. The food offerings can include boiled eggs and Malay pastries (*kuih*), even coffee, but never pork. For normal worship, the offerings can be very simple: just some of these food items or merely some fruit.

Having observed a Nadu shrine being installed at the University of Malaya campus, I saw much to illustrate the nature and significance of such an undertaking. Mr. Li, the contractor, bought a Tang-Fan Nadu tablet and had it ritually opened (开光) at the Guanyin Temple (观音亭) at Birch Road, Kuala Lumpur. A chicken was slaughtered, and a spirit medium spread some of the chicken blood over the Nadu tablet. He then took the tablet to install it at the shrine, which was under construction. Joss sticks were offered and joss papers burnt. Food offerings included a whole pineapple, betel leaves, *rokok daun*, areca nut pieces, and a cigar. The pineapple, the symbol of prosperity, is offered by the Chinese to many deities, but the other items go only to Nadu Gong. The contractor said that it was not just he, as a contractor, who wanted the blessing of the Nadu, that the workers might not feel good if a Nadu shrine weren't installed, as they felt that the blessing of the Nadu was needed for them to work safely.[5] In other words, if a Chinese contractor refuses to install a Nadu

5 Interviewed on 14 July 1981. The Nadu tablet was officiated on 16 June 1981, which coincided with the fifteenth day of the fifth moon; no doubt this was an auspicious date chosen by the contractor.

shrine before starting work, he may be blamed by his Chinese workers for any accidents that follow.

Nadu shrines are to be found along roadsides, at construction sites, and even at Chinese-owned supermarkets because of the traditional Chinese worship of earth gods in public places and the wild—areas that call for the protection of the territorial divine guardian. The Nadu shrines initially installed at construction sites are generally left to be worshipped by the Chinese who own the land or a building, adding to the great number of Nadu shrines all over Peninsular Malaysia. In a sense, these Nadu shrines spatially and temporally mark the presence of the Chinese localized in Malaysia. Chinese migrants settling down and taking root were ritually assisted by the propitiation of territorial guardian deities seen as both Chinese and Malayan. This practice has become a Chinese Malaysian tradition of religious thought and worship. Nadu Gong belief is Chinese, not Malay; at the same time it is Malayan (i.e., Malaysian), reflecting the identity of the Chinese in Malaysia as both Chinese and Malaysian.

Nadu Gong as Muslim Saints and as Other Local Saints

Chinese in certain areas in Malaysia and Singapore also visit the tombs of Malay saints. In Melaka, for example, the *keramat* sites of Muslim saints in Pulau Besar, an island off the town of Melaka, were popular with the town's Babas.[6] My Baba informants often reminded me not to eat pork when visiting Pulau Besar; doing so might offend the *keramat*, they said, and one might encounter a storm when approaching the island by boat. In a 1981 trip with some Baba friends, I observed they bought some joss sticks from an Indian Muslim stall, and offered them at the main shrine (tomb of the main saint). They then asked the Malay caretaker to recite some Islamic verses (*ayat suci*) and give an Islamic prayer. After that they gave the caretaker some money. As the Malay saints were Muslims, the Baba and other Chinese were careful to observe the pork taboo and not to violate Islamic rules. As written in my book on the Baba (Tan 1988, 162), other well-known *keramat* of Malay saints in Melaka include the tombs of Malay saints in Machap, known collectively as Datuk Machap; the *keramat* of the Javanese saint in Nyalas called Datuk Gubah; and the *keramat* at Bukit Katil called Keramat Lobok Batu. These *keramat* sites are visited by both Malays and Babas, even though the Malaysian

6 The Melaka State Islamic Council demolished the tombs in 2008 (*Malaysiakini*, updated 2008.01–29).

Islamic authorities discourage Muslims from vowing at these *keramat*. In fact, when I visited the Datuk Gubah *keramat* in 1977, there was a signboard erected by the state Islamic authority that warned Muslims not to vow (*bernazar*) at the *keramat*.

The Machap *keramat* was so famous that a Straits Chinese (Baba) introduced it to Singapore, where the spirit medium made a fake tomb and installed the *keramat*'s shrine and those of two others, Keramat Ga'ong Sembilan and Datok Siti Esah. The spirit medium sat cross-legged (Malay cultural behavior) to go into a trance (when a trance was involved), and the consultation was carried out in Malay (Elliott 1955, 114). Here we see the incorporation of an indigenous Muslim belief into Chinese religious worship. Chinese spirit-medium divination is still practiced at some Nadu Gong shrines in different parts of Malaysia, and Raymond Lee has a good sociological description of a "Sino-Malay spirit cult" in Pataling Jaya, a satellite town of Kuala Lumpur (Lee 1983). As Lee and Chin (2015, 155) have reported, the medium at a Malay Nadu shrine imitates Malay behavior, including speaking in Malay and giving Muslim greetings, when in a trance.

The saint *keramat* (i.e., *keramat* associated with a saint) is also commonly worshipped by other Chinese in a few regions in Peninsular Malaysia. In coastal Perak around Teluk Intan (formerly Teluk Anson), and on Pangkor Island (which is slightly north of Teluk Intan), not only do the Chinese pray at the tombs of Malay saints, but pictures of specific Muslim saints are sold in Chinese religious shops so that devotees can install Nadu shrines honoring these saints at home or at Chinese public buildings. The most famous saint is Datuk Tua (in Malay) or Lao Lnadok (Old Nadu, 老拿啅 in Hokkien). Mrs. Ong of Eastern Garden in Teluk Intan, interviewed on 18 November 1981, said she consulted with a spirit medium (*dang'gi*) because of her husband's work as a timber contractor, which took him into the jungle and involved the risk of accident. She said the medium recommended installing a shrine of the Malay saint Datuk Yilaiman (拿啅依莱曼). She did so, buying the photo of the Nadu at MYR $13, while the cost of installation of the shrine by the spirit medium at the front stage-left corner of the house cost MYR $60. Aside from the Nadu shrine, the family also had a shrine in the living room, one honoring the deities Guan Gong (i.e., Guandi), Mazu and Guanyin.

Most Chinese Malaysians don't have a shrine to Nadu in their home, though the god may be included in the Tang-Fan Dizhu altar. If the family has a shrine in front of the house, it is generally an altar to Tianguan, who is the Heavenly Official but generally perceived as God of Heaven (Tian Gong). These altars are common in the houses of Chinese devotees in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, though a few Nadu shrines can be seen because urban neighborhoods draw

residents from across Malaysia. Nadu shrines are far more common in Teluk Intan and Pulau Pangkor. In the second of these towns, they're built inside and toward the home's rear, not out in front; possibly this is to give the fishermen space for their work. A woman whose family had a Nadu shrine at the stage left corner of the back of the house said that her family's troubles had caused her to consult a spirit medium, who advised her to install a shrine for the Malay saint Datuk Hamid (篮督哈蜜). The Nadu shrine had no picture, with the deity being represented by a tablet that read "Shrine of Datuk Hamid" (篮督哈蜜神位). The medium recommended worshipping Datuk Hamid as the family's Nadu because the other Nadu in the area, Datuk Hassan, was already worshipped by a neighbor.[7]

In Georgetown (Penang) near the jetty, there is a Nadu Gong (here written as 哪啅公) shrine under a banyan tree. It features two small statues: one, dressed in a white shirt, looks like a Malay; to its right, the second statue wears a turban and is dressed in yellow, an outfit that appears Sikh. In Penang, there are some Indian or Thai Nadus along with the Malay Nadu, who is Muslim. Further toward the city center at Lebuh Presgrave, there is a Datuk Awang (哪啅亚旺) Temple that houses the statue of the Malay saint Datuk Awang. At Gat Leboh Noordin, there is a Nadu shrine under a banyan tree; it honors the Muslim saint Datuk Ali (哪督阿里), but without a statue. The Nadu is represented by a stone partly immersed in water. This is an older shrine, as the censer is dated 1959.[8] In Penang, there are a significant number of *keramat* of saints who are non-Malays, especially Siamese (Thai) and Indian. Like Datuk Machap in Singapore, there are saint *keramat* shrines installed at home together with one or more fake tombs. Thai *menora* dramas are staged on the "birthdays" of these "saints." Ooi Hui Cheng, who writes about the worship of Siamese Nadus at Kampung Baru in Butterworth, Penang, mentions that there was a *menora* troupe called Rombongan Menora Thai Malaysia that was established in Penang in 1965 (Ooi 1995, 23). The troupe was available for hire by Siamese Nadu Gong worshippers there. In the case of Malay saints, worshippers participate in the Malay traditional dance called *ronggeng*, and a spirit-medium trance may be performed, as I observed on the "birthday" of Datuk Ali in a Chinese house in Island Glades in Penang in May 1985.

At Eng Ann Estate, Klang, a city about 35 kilometers from Kuala Lumpur, there is a Chinese temple called Thong Seng Doong (通圣洞). Three Malay saints are honored as main deities. Their altar is placed in the central position, flanked at stage left by that of Nanhai Guanyin, and at stage right by that of Qitian Dasheng, the monkey deity. At the Nadu altar, there are three statues

7 Interviewed on 19 November 1981.

8 These three Nadu shrines in Penang were first investigated on 25 November 1981.

of the saints: Bbnoo Hah Bhuan (毛哈挽) in the center, flanked by Lna Hah Bbuan (那哈挽) to the left and Sam Su Ling (三思领) to the right. I think the names represent Hokkien pronunciation of the Malay names Muhamad and Shamshuddin, and of Nahamad, a name that is not commonly used by the Malays. Along with the statues there is a deity's tablet. This bears, written vertically, the Chinese characters for the names of the three saints, followed by the characters Nadu Gong shenwei (那督公神位, the tablet of the Nadus). There is a separate shrine for Lna Hah Bbuan, where there is a Chinese couplet that praises his skill in curing sickness.

In this case, we see that the Nadu of Muslim saints are represented both by statues and by characters written on a tablet. They are honored together with other Chinese deities, Chinese gods that rank higher in official prestige. These rank higher, but the Nadu are the temple's patron and their altar takes center place. The arrangement in the temple shows that the Nadus are fully incorporated into the Chinese pantheon and its hierarchy. In addition, the temple is home to a spirit-medium service. As in other Chinese temples, there is a religious committee made up of *luzhu* and *toujia*. The day-to-day management of the temple is left to the spirit medium and his family. Mr. Huang's wife and mother, and one of his sisters, all serve as his assistants when he conducts trance sessions. In fact, the medium inherited his position from his father, who was the *dang'gi* at this temple until passing away. From my observation of two consultations, the Nadus are indeed prayed to for medical assistance. When approached to go into trance, the medium sat at the table in front of the altar. After his body jerked and his eyes half closed, he asked the first visitor what she wanted from the Nadu. She said that her fifteen-year old son complained of stomach ache. He had consulted a doctor at a government hospital, and been examined there by x-ray, but he was not cured. The *dang'gi* said her son had offended some spirits, and he gave the woman some charm papers for the boy. The woman donated RM$2 in the form of *tianyou* (adding oil).

In the second case, the woman brought a two-year-old child who had some kind of skin disease. After examination, the medium advised the child to bathe in water mixed with *bozhucao* herb (薄柱草, *Nertera sinensis*), tea leaves and salt. After bathing, the child should be given glucose drink. The medium gave advice on how to take care of the child, such as letting him sleep somewhere airy. He also advised the woman to treat the child's skin disease with a kind of pill called 693. Lastly, he gave the woman some small pieces of charm papers to be burnt so the ash could be mixed with water for the child to drink. The medium looked awake while giving advice, although his legs were still shaking.[9] His treatment advice reflected the folk medical knowledge of the time.

9 Observed on 21 March 1982.

Our last example here is the Nadu shrine at Kampung Istana (合春港篮卓公) on the outskirt of Batu Pahat town in Johor. Here the Nadu is represented by a huge rock around a big tree on a slope. People are not sure of the identity of the saint. As an informant pointed out, the Nadu might be a Malay, an Indonesian or even a Chinese, and the place here was originally occupied by the aborigines now called Orang Asli. Spirit mediums may be invited to perform trance divination, and it seemed sometimes the saint that possessed the medium was Malay. Despite the lack of clarity about the origin and ethnic status of the saint or saints, this is an important Nadu site for the whole Batu Pahat district, and devotees I observed included those from other towns and Singapore. There is a big religious affairs committee. In 1982, the committee comprised one *luzhu* (who was from Kampung Istana), nine deputy *luzhu* from different regions of Batu Pahat district, and more than five hundred *toujia*. The *toujia* comprised one or more members from different places in Batu Pahat District, including from other towns in the district. For example, the highest number of *toujia* was from downtown Batu Pahat, with twenty people; next was Pasir Puteh, with twelve; Tongkang Pechah with ten, and so on. There were some members who were from outside Batu Pahat district, namely the *toujia* from Singapore and the five from the market area of Pontian, a coastal town in southern Johor. The committee is elected during the second moon of each year. This is during the time of the Nadu celebration, which is also accompanied by five days of Hokkien and Teochew operas in performance.

Ethnic status matters in all forms of Nadu worship, and foremost is the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim status. Most Nadus are perceived as Malay, and so pork is deemed taboo and the offerings reflect early Chinese perceptions of what sorts of food are associated with Malays. For example, I observed these offerings: a glass of water, *kemenyan* incense, curry chicken, turmeric rice, a banana, and two small white candles. Both curry chicken and turmeric rice are perceived as Malay food, and such cooked food is generally offered on special occasions only. Often some Nadu *liao* items and some bananas and possibly other fruit, like oranges and apples, are considered sufficient. Chinese joss sticks and joss papers may be burnt, too. The offering of an odd number of joss sticks indicates that the Chinese treat the Nadus as deities; another indication is the burning of "gold" joss papers rather than "silver."

A few Nadus are conceived as Chinese, not Indian, Malay or Thai. An example is found at the temple Lin Tianlai Nadu Gong (古楼港口林天来嗱啅公) in Kuala Kurau, a coastal town in Perak. According to the local informants, Lin Tianlai was a Hokkien pioneer. Represented at the altar by a plaque bearing his name (林天来嗱啅公), the deity is considered a "Chinese Nadu," and so pork can be included in the offering. Built in 1948 and with its renovation completed

in 1967, this is a popular local temple.[10] In this case, the Nadu site of worship has become a full-fledged temple, although most Nadu sites of worship are small shrines with written tablets as images for worship. The *keramat* of the Malays are associated with the tombs of Muslim saints, while the Chinese conception of Nadu is more general and the worship of the saints need not be at their tombs. In fact, in Java there are Chinese tombs that have become *keramat* (Claudine 1991), which in Malaysia would have been known as Nadu.

Nadu worship thus reflects the multiethnic context of Malaysia and Singapore. The worship of saint Nadus (mainly Nadus of Muslim saints) was popular in the Straits settlements of Penang, Melaka and Singapore, hence the continuing popularity of such worship in these regions to this day. As the Baba of Singapore had close connections with the Baba of Melaka, the *keramat* that were popular among the Baba of Melaka had been reterritorialized for worship in Singapore by Baba spirit mediums, as in the case of Machap *keramat* reported by Alan Elliott. The Pulau Besar keramat worship had also been brought to Singapore, where the shrine was installed in a medium's house and Datok Puloh Besar was given the Chinese name Sam Poh Neo Neo 三宝娘娘 (Ng 1983). Modern Singapore continues to have important sites of Nadu worship. For example, there is a Nadu temple at St. Michael Estate (a residential area) in Singapore. The altar, bearing the characters Nadu Gong (拿督公), is built by an anthill. At the time of investigation on 6 May 1983, there was a Malay *bomoh* dressed in a long-sleeved shirt and sarong who recited Islamic verses and performed Muslim prayer for both Chinese and Malay devotees; thus, the Nadu is perceived to be Malay in identity. The *bomoh* was assisted by a Chinese woman caretaker. At Kusu Island in Singapore, there is a Dabogong temple and a well-known Nadu shrine. This is called Keramat Kusu in Malay or Lnadokgong (Nadu Gong) in Chinese. Nadu's wife has a shrine of her own, which is called Datuk Nenek or, in Chinese, Nadu Tai Niangniang (拿督太娘娘).[11]

We have noted the significance of Nadu worship in the coastal regions of Perak all the way north to Penang. While small shrines for the Tang-Fan Nadu are common throughout Peninsular Malaysia, Nadu worship is less common in Kelantan and Terengganu, where Malays form the overwhelming majority. This worship was also less widespread in East Malaysia, although Nadu shrines have been introduced by Chinese developers and workers from Peninsular Malaysia who have been engaged in logging and agricultural development in the country's east since the 1980s. At a front corner of the famous Dabogong

10 Investigated 21 November 1981.

11 Investigated on 8 November 1989.

temple in Sibu, a shrine houses a Malay Nadu statue that sits cross-legged and has a Malay cap; to its left there's another Malay-like Nadu, one sitting on a chair with a white skull hat and wearing a long-sleeved shirt and sarong. To the right of the cross-legged Nadu is a statue of Chinese Tudi Gong (Dabogong) sitting on a chair. That the statues of the Chinese earth god and the Nadu Gong are installed in the same shrine shows the similar nature of these gods as territorial guardian deities, or *tudi shen*, and how they comprise both Chinese and Malay identities.

Today Nadu worship is common throughout Malaysia, especially Nadu as Sino-Malay territorial deity in the form of Tang-Fan Nadu. Nadus of actual or imagined saints are common in Melaka, Singapore and Penang, and in coastal Perak all the way to Penang. The historical presence of Thais in the northern states of Penang, Kedah and Perlis is reflected in the worship of Thai Nadus alongside Malay and Indian Nadus. Nadu worship is the product of Chinese cognition and reconstruction of the Chinese earth god and local guardian deities in the context of the multiethnic Malayan environment.

The Worship of Tiger God

It's common for a Malaysian Chinese temple to have at least one statue of a tiger god, with its shrine installed on the floor. Malaya was a land of tigers, but tiger worship has historical ties to Chinese culture and should not be assumed to be of Malayan origin. In Taiwanese earth god temples, the patch of floor beneath the altar table is commonly home to a statue of a tiger; this being serves as a beast the earth god can ride. Called Huye, the tiger god is credited with the power to dispel epidemics and protect children from diseases and from being timid (Wang Jianwang 2003, 98). In Malaysia, a stone or clay tiger statue is commonly seen under or near the altar table of a temple, and this isn't limited to Dabogong temples. The functions of the tiger god are also to dispel evil and villains, and to protect children. It is thus an object of worship for performing the *da xiaoren*, or "beating villains" ritual. The tiger god is offered raw food such as pork and egg, after which the worshippers pray. They then begin beating or poking the paper figurines representing villains; this is a way of keeping oneself from unknown harm. The ritual is usually performed during *jingzhe* (惊蛰日), a time in the Chinese calendar called "Insects Awakening," around March 5.

In 2016 this date corresponded to the twenty-seventh day of the first moon in the Chinese calendar. On this day, I observed the rite at Cheng Hoon Teng in Melaka. Many major temples, including the well-known Cheng Hoon Teng,

Roufo Gumiao in Johor Bahru, and Xian Si Shiye Temple in Kuala Lumpur, all have tiger statues for the worship. Chai Zongxiang (1996: 36–52) reports of such a worship at the Dabogong Temple in Miri, Sarawak. Some temples fix a certain date around this time for the "beating villains" ritual, which is much more widely practiced in Hong Kong. In Malaysia, the essential offerings to the tiger god during *jingzhe* include a piece of pork, a chicken egg or duck egg, and firm tofu called *dougan*, with this last item symbolizing no more evil or bad things. The egg symbolizes family harmony, and the pork symbolizes business or career success. Significantly, the pork is also for feeding the tiger,[12] in the hope that the tiger god will keep all evil forces away from the worshippers. Other offerings can include a Chinese bun (*bao*) and mung beans; after worship, a devotee throws the beans over his or her head in hopes of a "good harvest," meaning career success.

On this day, each worshipper brings a selection of ritual papers (*zhizha*): the usual "gold papers" (joss papers) for offering to deities; a paper with images of *xiaoren*, or "villains," representing evil forces; and a paper with pictures of *guiren*, or "helpful persons." The "beating villains" ritual keeps the villains and evil forces away, and it invites *guiren* to help the worshipper's career. From my observation at Cheng Hoon Teng and reports in the newspapers, young people also participate in this rite, but at Cheng Hoon Teng most of the participants I observed were older women. A woman assistant at the altar helped worshippers who needed it, in return receiving a small sum of money as gift. For example, a woman worshipper mentioned to the assistant the names of those in the family to be blessed, and the assistant called out their names and guided her in giving the offerings. The ritual papers, including those of *xiaoren* and *guiren*, were all dropped into the furnace at the front corner of the temple.

Conclusion

We see that there is cultural continuity and transformation in the Chinese worship of earth gods in Malaysia. The China-origin earth god was reterritorialized in Malaysia and became localized as Dabogong, though the names Tudishen and Fude Zhengshen persist. At the same time, some deceased Chinese pioneers were honored as Bogong and became identified with Dabogong under the name Fude Zhenshenm. The traditional (Chinese) earth god had also been reinterpreted by the early migrants into a being described as Tang-Fan,

12 At the tiger altar in Cheng Hoon Teng, there are a number of tiger statues whose bodies are covered with yellow robes. Nevertheless, I shall refer to the tiger god in the singular.

an earth god both Chinese and local non-Chinese (mainly Malay). This reinvented territorial deity was called Nadu or, more affectionately, Nadu Gong. Reflecting the Tang-Fan conception, the name comprises Malay and Chinese words for addressing deities or spirits. The Malay cult of *keramat* had been incorporated into the Chinese Religion. The Malay guardian spirits of the wild and sacred sites correspond easily with the Chinese conception of earth god and its variants such as mountain god, god of the forest, and so on. The honoring of Muslim saints corresponds well with the Chinese worship of deified heroes, pioneers and sages. These deified non-Chinese saints are also called Nadu. Thus, *Nadu* refers to local non-Chinese spirits as well as Sino Malay/Sino-local deities, deified pioneers and saints.

Other than Chinese pioneers deified as Dabogong or as Nadu (thus, Chinese Nadu), there are also deceased Chinese "heroes" who were deified directly as local Chinese deities, not as Nadu. A well-known case is the Xian Si Shiye Temple (仙四师爷庙) in Kuala Lumpur, which I have described in Tan (2000). The Chinese pioneer of Kuala Lumpur, Yap Ah Loy (1837–1885), a Hakka, built the temple in 1883 to honor his deceased sworn brothers, collectively known as Xian Si Shiye. Xian Shiye was Sheng Mingli (盛明利), the Chinese Kapitan of Seremban. Shi Shiye was Zhong Lai (cf. Yang 1959; Wen 1987). The temple, in which Yap Ah Loy is honored, too, has become an important temple in Kuala Lumpur, and the procession in honor of Xian Si Shiye on the twenty-eighth of the first lunar month is an important event for praying for peace and blessing. A less-known example is the small Gongzi Ye Temple (公子爷庙) in Kampung Baru, Ulu Tiram; this is in southern Johor, close to Johor Bahru. This temple honors a Hainanese scholar who migrated from China to Ulu Tiram but soon fell sick and died. A temple was built in his honor after he visited locals in their dreams to warn of various dangers facing the village. At the temple, his statue is flanked by that of Shuiwei Niangniang (a Hainanese goddess) at stage left, and that of Nezha (the Third Prince) at stage right.[13]

Paying attention to the historical connections and choices of Chinese migrants helps to avoid the mistake of assuming that Nadu worship is simply influenced by the Malays, or that the practices are all of Malayan origin. To worship Nadu Gong at a tree, or to use one or more stones to represent Nadu, is to continue Chinese historical connections. Indeed, using a tree to represent *she*, or a territorial deity, is of ancient Chinese origin, and this is mentioned in the Tang work *Tongdian* (通典), compiled by Du You (杜佑). And it is common

13 Visited on 30 January 2013.

for the Chinese in South China to worship a tree god called Dashu Gong (大树公, Big Tree God). In Macau, Hong Kong and Taiwan, it is still common to see an earth god shrine installed at the foot of a tree, or a stone used to represent *tudi* the earth god (cf. Tong 2010; Wang 2003).

Tudishen, or the Chinese earth god, is the fundamental Chinese deity for worship of a territorial guardian. In Malaysia, this being has assumed the popular name of Dabogong. The idea of earth god is further expressed in its different functions and forms, including Nadu. The Mountain God Temple in Brinchang, Cameron Highland, expresses this Chinese conception very clearly. At this temple, the patron deity is Fude Zhengshen. The Chinese couplets written on red paper at the altar refer to the god as *benshan da Nadu* (本山大拿督, the Great Nadu of This Mountain). Dabogong is thus perceived here as both mountain god and Nadu.[14]

In this chapter, we have seen the agency of Chinese migrants in relying on their religious knowledge to reinterpret the Chinese earth god and the local Malay spirit guardians. They adapted to living in the Malayan environment—spatially, socially and ritually. In the process, they recreated their symbolic world. The territorial deities in the space of the Malayan land had to be both Chinese and Malayan, and so are Chinese Malaysians today.

14 Investigated on 24 August 1990.

FIGURE 11 *A rare permanent statue of Pudu Gong at Xietian Gong in Batu Pahat, Johor.*
MAY 2016, AUTHOR

FIGURE 12 *Preparing to send off the Hungry Ghosts Festival boat by burning.*
AUGUST 2000, AUTHOR

FIGURE 13 *Altar of the Selangor Chapter of Nanyang Tongfeng Shantang. Note the statue of Song Dafeng at the central position of the altar.*
DECEMBER 2012, AUTHOR

FIGURE 14 *Dejiao altar at Che Sang Khor in Klang. Note the pictures of the "founders of the five religions" and the planchette tray* (jipan).
DECEMBER 2012, AUTHOR

CHAPTER 6

Pudu: The Hungry Ghosts Festival

The communal nature of major Chinese temples is seen in the temples' communal celebration, including a religious procession, on the anniversary day of the communal deities. The communal significance is also seen during celebrations of major Chinese festivals. New Year and Zhongyuan Jie are the most grandly celebrated Chinese festivals of the Chinese in Malaysia and Singapore. But it is in the celebration of Zhongyuan Jie that the communal significance is most evident. Popularly known in English as the Hungry Ghosts Festival because of the belief that during the seventh moon (around August/September), the deceased and all kinds of ghosts visit the human world, the Hungry Ghosts Festival is very significant as a private event and as a communal celebration. The name Zhongyuan is Taoist, as the fifteenth day of the seventh moon is the "birthday" of Diguan (地官, the Earth Official). This deity belongs to the Taoist trinity of Tianguan, Diguan and Shuiguan, beings respectively in charge of heaven, earth and water. Diguan is in charge of absolving the living and the dead from sins committed, and so Taoist rites are performed during the Zhongyuan Festival.

There are two parts of the celebration: one private and bearing on family or firm, and the other communal. The private rites are conducted on the fifteenth of the seventh moon and involve people in a family performing domestic worship. This includes giving offerings to deities and ancestors, and also to wandering ghosts. The ghost offerings are left at the back of the house, except in the city; for most urban families, the necessary space is in the front. The Hokkien in Malaysia politely call these wandering ghosts *ho hniadi*, or "good siblings." As can be expected, ancestor worship on such an occasion is very important, this being the case at home, in the ancestral halls with their tablets, and in columbaria with tablets and ashes. Around this date (the fourteenth or fifteenth day of the moon), one can see staff from small Chinese firms or shops offering food to the ghosts and burning joss papers in front of their shops; this takes place in the late morning, which is also the time most families perform the Zhongyuan rite. The Hokkien refer to this private Zhongyuan worship as *zue citggehbnua* (做七月半, "observing the mid-seventh-moon festival").

More dramatic is the communal worship conducted throughout the seventh moon, especially during the moon's second half. This is the time when some local communities stage Hokkien, Cantonese or Teochew operas. Some rural communities do stage Chinese operas, but most often the communities

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are urban; they have the money and can look for sponsors among business people, speech group associations or an established temple. This is the time one can see which section or ward of a town forms a Chinese ritual community, as each celebrates its own Zhongyuan Festival. The communal celebration is popularly known as Pudu (普渡), or Poodoo in Hokkien. The term has the Buddhist connotation of leading from a life of suffering to a better life. Pudu is also widely known by the specific Buddhist name of Yulanpen Jie (盂兰盆节, Ullambana Festival) or Yulan Shenghui (盂兰胜会). In Buddhism, the festival is related to the story of Mulian (Sanskrit name Maudgalyayana) seeing his deceased mother suffering among hungry ghosts. He was instructed by Buddha to perform rites and give offerings on the fifteenth day of the seventh moon. In the public celebration of the festival, we see the combination of Buddhist and Taoist beliefs and rites in the popular religious practice of the masses. The rites are conducted by one or more Taoist priests. In this discussion, I shall use the terms *Zhongyuan Jie* and *Pudu* interchangeably for the Hungry Ghosts Festival.

Yulan Shenghui in a Rural Chinese Community

A brief description of Yulan Shenghui in a rural community in Johor serves to provide some details of the celebration. This was the celebration of the Hokkien community observed in Ayam Suluh of Batu Pahat District in Johor on 17 August 2000 (the eighteenth day of the seventh moon). Beginning in the morning, some people began preparations in the village temple for worship and for the communal dinner in the evening. In fact, the preparation had nothing to do with the temple; it was the use of the temple ground for the Zhongyuan worship. Giant incense sticks, each bearing either the characters *guotai min'an* (the country flourishes and people live in peace) or *shengyi xinglong* (booming business), lined the front of the temple. Most of the activities were at the roofed but otherwise open-air space that I shall call the "hall." Tables and chairs were arranged for the dinner. The cook and his team of helpers had arrived and begun preparations. They would cook food for both the ghosts and the humans.

Nearby, a simple toilet and a washroom had been constructed. These were for the use of the visiting ghosts. At the hall, there were two important items bought from an incense shop in town. These were made of bamboo sticks and paper. A life-size paper boat was placed at one corner of the space. At the center of the "hall" was the huge paper figure of Daisuya (Hokkien for Dashiye 大仕爷), the Great Lord. Also called Poodoogong (普渡公, Lord of Pudu) in Hokkien, he is considered by most people the King of Ghosts. In Chinese

popular religion, Guanyin is also in charge of reincarnation. People pray to her for their deceased loved ones to be reincarnated into a better life. In fact, there is a small statue of Guanyin on top of the head of the Great Lord, and many worshippers interpret this as Guanyin controlling the King of Ghosts. After the paper statue was properly arranged in the middle of the "hall," the Taoist priest, who had arrived in the early afternoon, performed the *kaiguang*, or dotting ritual. He climbed up a small ladder to dot the eyes and other parts of the face of Dashiye. *Kaiguang* is a Chinese rite to officiate a statue, after which it is believed that the spirit takes up the place at the statue. He also performed the dotting ritual on the major *fupin* (福品), or "lucky items" that will be available for bidding in the evening, with particular attention to the decorated charcoal and the decorated rice bucket (*mitong*). These items fetch the highest bids, well beyond what's bid for the regular charcoal or rice. The blessed charcoal—called *oogim* (Hokkien for *wujin*), or "black gold"—and the rice bucket are believed to bring good luck to the person who wins the bid. This symbolic value is why individuals bid hundreds and even thousands of Malaysian dollars for these few pieces of charcoal and a small bucket of uncooked rice. Successful bidders also win prestige, since they show themselves to be financially successful and trustworthy. Thus, the ritual is a status contest as well as a means of gaining spiritual blessing.

After the dotting ritual, the Taoist priest, his main assistant and four companions rode on their three motorbikes to the east, west, south and north corners of the ritual village to perform a simple rite at each place. These were the four cardinal points marking the boundaries perceived by the local Chinese as defining their community in space, even though today one of these locations actually lies within another administrative village. At each "corner," the assistant and his friends arranged some candles and joss papers on the ground. A short stick with a small piece of red cloth on top was stuck into the dirt. After the candles were lit, the Taoist priest performed a brief rite, blowing his buffalo horn now and then. He also lashed his whip a few times, symbolically warding off evil spirits. At the end of the rite, the main assistant burnt the joss papers. This ritual is called *zhenqi* (镇旗), or "guarding the flag." It keeps evil forces from entering the village, holding them at bay until the next performance of the rite.

My research in a Yongchun village in Fujian shows that a similar rite was performed at the communal renewal rite called *cniahe* (Hokkien for *qinghuo* 请火), or "inviting incense fire." The one-day ceremony that I observed on 14 February 2008 involved the Taoist priest going to each of the four cardinal points of the village to perform a *din-geh* (Hokkien for *zhenge* 镇格), or "guarding the location" rite. While the names of the rites differ a bit, the crucial word

is *zhen*, which means "garrison post" or "guarding a post," and so *zhenqi* or *zhenge* rites indicate the boundaries of the community and serve to ward off evil spirits. In David Faure's description of territorial worship in rural Fan Ling in Hong Kong, there is also mention of the priest "marking out the five directions (north, south, east, west and center) with an axe" (1986, 76), although the priest did not go to each territorial border to perform the rite. Instead he hacked open a pig's stomach with the axe. In Chinese, "stomach" is homophonous with the word for "earth," hence the symbolism of marking the territory.

Back in the village temple compound, the Taoist priest performed rituals at the Sanqing (三清) altar from the early evening until the end of the ceremony before midnight, resting now and then. The San Qing altar was arranged at one corner of the hall. As usual, the pictures of the Taoist trinity of San Qing were hung in place when the priest prepared the altar for a Taoist rite. When conducting a rite, the Taoist priest was accompanied by a person who beat a drum and another person who played the Chinese shawm (*suona*). As people arrived for the dinner, the atmosphere became very festive. A highlight during the course of dinner was the bidding of items that ranged from such farm products as bananas, jackfruit and pineapples to all kinds of food and *fupin*, such as porcelain figurines of Maitreya or a horse portrayed as *hongyun baoma* (horse of good fortune). But the most significant items were the charcoal and the bucket of rice; the last to be bid for, they fetched the highest prices. Some of the fruits, like the pineapples and the bunches of bananas, were displayed by being hung up, but most items were placed on little stages that were covered with red paper; the "black gold" and the rice bucket commanded the highest stage. At the center of a lower stage was an altar of Guanyin with an incense pot in front of the statue, showing the significance of Guanyin to the Hungry Ghosts Festival. The money collected went to the Hungry Ghosts Festival Committee, which would use it to pay for the celebration and then donate the rest to the local Chinese school.

Late at night, the ceremony came to an end. After the final Taoist rites in the hall, including one performed in front of the paper boat, the Daisuya was carried outside and placed on a big stack of joss papers. The Taoist priest and the worshippers surrounded the standing statue to perform the sending-off rite, after which the statue was burnt by the lighting of joss papers. The boat was carried on a vehicle to the selected riverside. Some people followed to the site. There the boat was put on top of neatly arranged stacks of joss papers. The boat had a number, 3363. This catered to the wish of people to use the number to buy four-digit lottery. After the priest had conducted a brief rite, he led the few villagers who went to the site to go around the boat three times. After that the boat was set alight. The people then went home without looking

back at the burning boat (with the exception of the anthropologist, who could not resist taking photographs despite the chance of bringing bad luck home). The sending of the boat away to sea (or burning it at the seaside) is an important part of a communal cleansing rite, symbolizing that bad luck and evil influences have been sent off. Where there is no sea nearby, as in the case of this village, the boat will be "sent off" to the bank of a small river or to another convenient site.

Yulan Shenghui in Overall Perspective

I have described a rural Zhongyuan rite to give a clearer view of its territorial nature. The celebration in urban neighborhoods varies in scale, and the absence of suitable geography will mean that the boat is not actually sent to a river or riverbank. The rural rite, though smaller in scale, may be more complete in other ways. For example, in the case described, a toilet and a washroom were made for the ghosts. It is up to the people to imagine what the supernatural world needs, based on their own human experience. The fact that the religious order follows aspects of human living experiences has been pointed out by Evans-Pritchard (1956, see 1974, 115), who wrote that "in all societies religious thought bears the impress of the social order." Starting with the pantheon hierarchy, Chinese popular religion provides many examples of the influence of imperial bureaucracy. But religious organizers and worshippers are also able to imagine the needs of the supernatural in terms of their own daily experiences.

The worship of Dashiye as a symbol of controlling evil, and of blessing peace and prosperity, is present in all Zhongyuan celebrations, where the huge paper effigy is the most visible of those on hand. There is at least a Taoist priest who conducts the relevant rites. Other effigies may also appear in a Hungry Ghosts Festival celebration; for example, there is Wuchang, who is in charge of leading the deceased to the underworld. But the celebration has to have the effigy of Dashiye. Different communities compete to have the tallest statue of him. Since the 1970s, Bukit Mertajam in the state of Penang has been reported by the Chinese newspapers as having the largest; in 1979, the town's effigy was reported to be nineteen feet high (cf. Nonini 2015, 79). However, in the 2016 Zhongyuan celebration, the Nine Emperor Gods temple Doumu Gong in Alor Setar, Kedah, claimed the record. Its Dashiye statue was reported to be 31 feet 8.2 inches high, and the three huge samples of *longxiang* (dragon incense) offered to Dashiye were thirty feet high (*Guanghua Ribao*, 2016.8.16, p. A7).

There are many other paper goods used for burning in the Hungry Ghosts Festival celebration, including a paper boat in which evil and bad luck can be

sent sailing away. Sending off a ritual boat is a Chinese tradition of long standing, with mention of the practice in Beijing toward the later period of the Qing dynasty. In *Yanjing Suishi Ji* (燕京岁时记), Fucha Dunchong (富察敦崇) wrote that "On the day of Zhongyuan every Buddhist temple built a ritual boat, and burnt it in the evening, some as big as several *zhang* in length" (中元日各寺院制造法船，至晚焚之，有长至数丈者). The Chinese measurement *zhang* is equivalent to 3.33 meters, with the resulting boat being quite large. Pan Rongbi (潘荣陛) in his *Dijing Suishi Jisheng* (帝京岁时记胜),[1] a work of the Qing dynasty's earlier work (18th century), wrote about Zhongyuan worship in Beijing. He said stages were built in urban neighborhoods, as were the canopies for the King of Ghosts (*guiwang*), and he described boats made of beautiful paper. The boats measured seventy or eighty *chi* (one *chi* being equivalent to ten inches) in length, and they were burnt near a pond or pool (街巷搭苫高台、鬼王棚座 … 锦纸扎糊法船，长至七八十尺者，临池焚化。).

While the visual focus of Zhongyuan celebration in Malaysia has been on Dashiye, the King of Ghosts, the ritual burning of paper boats was just as important in China (in pre-Communist days, when worship was allowed). Pan Rongbi's report is especially significant, for he wrote about the celebration in urban neighborhoods and not just in Buddhist temples. While major Buddhist temples in Malaysia also conduct their celebration of Yulanpen, it is the celebrations of the Chinese masses in urban neighborhoods and in villages that are most important. Furthermore, Pan Rongbi mentioned *guiwang*, or "King of Ghosts," which is very important in the form of Dashiye in Malaysia, although we hardly know of the worship of *guiwang* in imperial China. Also interesting is the mention of burning paper boats near a pond or pool. In Malaysia, the boat is ideally sent off near a river or at the seaside. But in urban areas, worshippers have hit on the interesting device of substituting a pond or pool.

The Pudu festival was already widely observed in medieval China, especially in Buddhist temples, as Stephen F. Teiser tells us: "At its peak in Tang times the ghost festival was celebrated on a grand scale by people from all walks of life" (1998, 26). The significance of the fifteenth day of the seventh moon for the celebration of Buddhist Yulanpen Festival and the Taoist observation of Zhongyuan naturally led to the integration of the religious traditions. We can say that the imported Yulanpen tradition in China became indigenized through the Taoist Religion, the latter having incorporated many Buddhist elements throughout the course of Chinese history.

1 I am grateful to Hou Xudong (侯旭东) for mentioning these two Qing works in his preface to his translation of the book *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China* by Stephen F. Teiser (Hou 2016).

In Malaysia, we see that the Zhongyuan celebration is a tradition of the Chinese Religion, even though the separate religious identities coexist within the festival's name. Ordinary worshippers are not familiar with the Mulian story, although it is often featured in newspaper articles about the festival. While monks in Chinese Buddhist temples hold their Buddhist celebrations of Yulanpen, the communal celebrations of the Chinese Religion generally use Taoist priests to conduct rituals. At the same time, the celebrations in Malaysia have incorporated a number of local elements and are influenced by the cultural politics of the Chinese in Malaysia. One example is the significance that the festival accords philanthropic support of Chinese education, a feature we will now discuss.

Zhongyuan Festival and Philanthropy

A grand Zhongyuan celebration may last a few days, with an opera show every evening and then a communal feast on the last night. In a city like Penang, different urban neighborhoods called *jiequ* (街区) organize their respective Zhongyuan celebrations. Each neighborhood has its *zhongyuan lishihui* (中元理事会, Zhongyuan Board of Directors). While the celebration is a religious festival, it can also be an occasion for raising money in support of communal projects, of which supporting Chinese education is the most important and gets the strongest support. Since the 1970s, Chinese worshippers in Penang have manned a committee that coordinates the Zhongyuan celebration in different neighborhoods while tackling the even more important job of promoting philanthropy for Chinese primary schools, which are only partially supported by the government. Called Binzhou Qing Zhongyuan Weiyuanhui (Penang Zhongyuan Festival Committee), the body's chief founders belonged to the multiethnic but largely Chinese-based Gerakan Party, which was then the ruling party in Penang. At the time of study in 2013, the group's main leaders were still Gerakan Party members, even though the city's ruling party was now the Democratic Action Party (DAP). By this point, raising school funds had become the committee's chief aim regarding the festival.

In December 1972, Penang saw its first attempt at uniting the neighborhoods' various Zhongyuan celebrations when fifteen neighborhoods sent representatives to a meeting. In the following year, the neighborhoods were urged to donate to Shangwu Huaxiao (商务华小), which may be considered the first Chinese primary school to benefit from an informal cooperation between different neighborhoods during the Hungry Ghosts Festival. Ahead of a formal society being created, an interim committee called Binzhou Qing Zhongyuan

Weiyuanhui (Penang Zhongyuan Festival Committee) was established in 1975, with the society proper formally registering in 1979.[2] The society's constitution was amended in 1980, broadening its scope to further unite the Zhongyuan Festival neighborhoods; in addition, the society's name was changed to Binzhou Zhongyuan Lianhehui (槟州中元联合会, the Penang Zhongyuan Federation), the name it still bears. The amended constitution lists four aims:[3]

1. To promote the harmony and mutual understanding of the people of the different Zhongyuan Festival neighborhoods.
2. To promote the spirit of mutual help and the welfare of members.
3. To promote the harmony and the spirit of cooperation between people of different ethnic groups.
4. To rigorously promote all forms of social welfare and philanthropic work.

The Binzhou Zhongyuan Lianhehui is a nonprofit society and is formally organized like most other Chinese societies, with a President, Secretary, General Affairs Secretary (*zongwu*), Treasurer, Education Secretary, Welfare Secretary, Recreation Secretary and so on. The education bureau organizes talks and holds weekend classes that teach children Chinese values. The recreation bureau organizes ballroom dancing, singing sessions, tai chi (*taiji*) classes, and local and international tours, these last catering mainly to retirees. The welfare bureau is in charge of wedding and funeral matters. In 2013, the society had about 4,000 individual members and about 200 urban neighborhoods (*jiequ*) as institutional members. The individual membership is popular; for a one-time fee of just MYR $50, the member entitles his or her children to the benefit of the society's education fund.

The society's main function is to promote donations during the Hungry Ghosts Festival. Generally, only one school a year is selected to receive the money. In April or May each year, before the Hungry Ghosts Festival, urban neighborhoods are informed of the meeting at which the recipient will be decided. Each school sends a representative to make its case, with the final choice being made by vote of the general meeting, or by a compromise arrived at among the two or three schools competing. Sometimes the society also gives donations to an independent Chinese high school or even a Chinese-run hospital. As of the time of my research in 2013, the society had provided donations

2 Information about the Binzhou Zhongyuan Lianhehui comes from my interview with its President, Mr. Ronnie Hung Siat Hee (Fang Xixi 方锡希), on 20 September 2013, as well as from the society's souvenir magazine *Binzhou Zhongyuan Lianhehui Jinian Tekan*, 1979.

3 Author's translation from Chinese.

of around 28 million in Malaysian dollars to more than thirty Chinese schools. In recent years the society has been able to raise more than a million MYR each year; in the past, the total amount each year was around MYR $40,000 or MYR $50,000. In all cases the money comes both from individual worshippers and neighborhood committees. On and after the fifteenth day of the seventh moon, the committee members of the society are busy attending Zhongyuan celebrations in different neighborhoods. Each evening there may be a few celebrations. The society must send someone—the President, a committee member, or more than one committee member—so that each celebration has a society representative calling for donations. The donation drive is done on the last day of a given neighborhood's celebration, along with a combination of communal dinner and auction in the evening. For example, a lot of money can be generated by the bidding over "black gold," which has become a Zhongyuan Festival feature throughout Malaysia. A knowledgeable informant told me that gamblers and underground gambling organizations were especially interested in bidding for the black gold and other lucky items.

Conclusion

We have seen that the Zhongyuan celebration has a private component and a communal component. The private component is worship as conducted by individual families, firms and even supermarkets—I have observed employees of a Chinese-owned supermarket conducting their worship in front of where they worked. The communal component, of course, refers to worship by an entire community, and in a city the local Chinese communal units are the *jiequ*, or urban neighborhoods. The most important neighborhoods are the wet market neighborhoods, where business people are concentrated. Holding the Zhongyuan celebration in market areas is a long historical tradition. Stephen Teiser's study of historical records reveals that in the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries in China, people of all walks of life gathered in Buddhist temples and at markets for the seventh moon celebration (Teiser 1998, 108). Today in Malaysia, wet markets and hawker food centers are major urban neighborhoods where Zhonguan celebrations are held.

Why is the Zhongyuan Festival so important? When asked, one is likely to be told of ghosts visiting earth on their yearly furlough from purgatory, and one is reminded that the Chinese do not hold weddings during the month, and that one should be careful when planning trips until the ghosts go home. Depending on the teller, the narrative can become very dramatic. In daily life, most Chinese don't bother much with wandering ghosts, and many even

laugh at the idea. Nevertheless, the tale does cast an interesting light on the celebration, and the existence of the narrative does influence behavior involving certain cultural matters. For example, the Chinese generally avoid holding weddings during the seventh moon, since it is symbolically not auspicious to do so.

The significance is really symbolic. It is the festival where individuals can worship in order to cast off misfortune and bring peace and prosperity to their families and business enterprises. It is also a time for remembering the dead and displaying filial piety. The communal worship brings each communal unit together to pray for peace and prosperity, and to keep the evil away. It is, in fact, a rite of renewal. Durkheim's analysis of how rites bring people together is relevant here, although the focus belongs less on unity and more on symbolic communal participation to expel evil and to hope for peace and prosperity. The communal celebration involves social, political and economic dimensions, not just religious. Where the celebration is held on a grand scale and extends longer than a day, there are Chinese operas in the evenings. Such religious celebrations help to preserve traditional Chinese opera, in which the young people are becoming less interested. Many neighborhoods nowadays stage *getai* (singing stage) in addition to Chinese operas. Getai (*guadai* in Hokkien) performance attracts young people who are interested in seeing the performance of a modern singing troupe with singers, especially female ones, performing popular songs to loud accompaniment from electric guitars and drums.[4] Tan Sooi Beng reports that during a five-day Zhongyuan Festival that she observed in Penang, Chinese operas took the stage on the first three evenings, with *getai* performances on the fourth and fifth (Tan, SB 1988, 21).

With the final evening of celebration comes the climax: the Dashiye is sent off. On this evening there is a communal feast, which is generally called *pudu ping'an wanyan* (普渡平安晚宴, *pudu* peace dinner) or simply *ping'an wanyan* (peace feast, peace dinner). The scale of the peace dinner differs from locality to locality. In 2013, for example, the Old Petaling Jaya neighborhood in Selangor had a peace dinner of ninety-three tables, and a table in a Chinese dinner usually seats ten people (*Xingzhou Ribao* 2013.8.14 *daduhui* p. 9). Bidding for *fupin*, the "lucky items," is also a common feature of all communal Zhongyuan celebration. Of these, the "black gold" and the *facai mitong* (发财米桶, good fortune rice bucket) are common features all over Malaysia and even in Singapore. The bidding satisfies individual hopes for divine blessing and for good fortune and status, as we have seen. Above all, it is a way of collecting funds.

4 The earliest scholar to write about *getai* in Malaysia is Tan Sooi Beng (1988).

Thanks to its communal significance, the Hungry Ghosts Festival is also important to Chinese politics. Chinese politicians find this an important occasion for gracing the Zhongyuan worship or accepting invitation to the peace dinner. Those who are not constrained by their religion (such as Christianity) also participate in the worship, and their activities are reported in the local Chinese newspapers. The Chinese politician Mr. Lim Guan Eng, for instance, has attended the Zhongyuan celebration in Bukit Mertajam every year since he became the Chief Minister of Penang in 2008. The picture of him offering incense at the altar of the Great Lord published in the Chinese press (see, e.g., *Xingzhou Ribao*, 20 August 2013) is a powerful show of his support for Chinese culture and community.

The Zhongyuan celebration involves the use of not only large amounts of joss papers, candles and joss sticks (including the expensive huge joss sticks that are a few meters high), but also various kinds of religious goods. Of these, the most notable are *zhizha jipin* (纸扎祭品, paper goods for offering), a category that includes the huge statue of Dashiye. Thus, the Zhongyuan Festival is important to *shenliao shangye* (神料商业, religious goods business). The many small shops that sell Chinese religious goods depend on such occasions as the Zhongyuan Festival. In addition, Zhongyuan celebration is also important to strolling hawkers of food and goods, who take advantage of the opera performance.

The communal significance of the Zhongyuan Festival is most vividly expressed in the donation drive. In this respect, the Zhongyuan Festival in Penang is the best organized, and over the years Binzhou Zhongyuan Lianhehui has donated not only to Chinese primary schools, but also to some independent secondary Chinese schools (for example, the library fund of Han Chiang School), and other Chinese institutions such as the Nanhua Hospital (南华医院) and the Penang Chinese Assembly Hall. Elsewhere in Malaysia, Zhongyuan Festival neighborhoods also collect money to donate to local Chinese causes, especially to Chinese-medium schools but also to old folks homes and other institutions.

The Zhongyuan Festival is one of the many aspects of Chinese culture that Chinese migrants have brought to Southeast Asia. Whether in Malaysia and Singapore, or in Thailand, or in Hong Kong, observation of the festival has common features: among them, holding the festival during the seventh moon, conducting communal worship, the arrangement of the huge effigy of Dashiye, and so on. For this reason, I have suggested studying Chinese Religion "in the larger context of a Chinese ethnological field that is not limited by national boundaries" (Tan 2004, 23). In Hong Kong, celebration of the Zhongyuan Festival is visible when stages are put up in different parts of the territory for

performances of the Zhongyuan operas. But in Malaysia, use of the Zhongyuan Festival to raise money for Chinese institutions takes on a special scale and intensity. The migrants' experience of the need for communal support, the racial politics that put the Chinese on guard for signs the government wants to close down Chinese-medium schools, and the felt need to be self-reliant in support of Chinese institutions—these all feed into what is already the strong Chinese sentiment for philanthropy. The communal nature of the Zhongyuan celebration turns out to be a good occasion to call for Chinese unity and for donations. The Zhongyuan Festival thus has both religious and political significance.

Obviously, the significance and popularity of the festival have to do with attachment to honoring ancestors and propitiating wandering ghosts. The wish for peace and a successful livelihood calls for communal celebration. Here we see how the overwhelming support for the Zhongyuan Festival draws from two kinds of values: those tied to the honoring of ancestors, and those tied to the individual's wish for peace and success. The importance of business to the Chinese in the diasporas further reinforces the significance of the celebration. In fact, Zhongyuan celebrations are at their grandest when organized by business people in urban wards. The communal always begins with individuals, who must relate to "society" because of their aspirations for religious expression, for well-being and for public expression of social values such as remembering ancestors. Through organizing and participating in such religious celebrations as the Zhongyuan Festival, Chinese worshippers establish their different communities and perpetuate a cultural tradition. In the case of the Chinese overseas, the need for mutual aids and for promoting Chinese culture, such as supporting Chinese education, is appropriately emphasized on this occasion. Thus, the religious tradition is linked closely to people's social life, making it even more relevant for reenactment every year.

FIGURE 15 *Pictures of Sanqing Taoist deities belonging to Taoist priest Hu Hanjie.*
DECEMBER 2012, AUTHOR

FIGURE 16 *Hokkien Taoist priest at the end of a post-funeral* gongde *rite in Sungai Ayam, Batu Pahat, Johor. Earlier he wore a black robe.*
DECEMBER 1998, AUTHOR

CHAPTER 7

Religious Organizations and Philanthropy

Chinese Religion is best conceived of as a complex system of beliefs and practices, of which family altars and temples are visible features. Temples are managed and organized, and communal temples play an important part in the organization of local communities. Overall, the religious life of the Chinese generally isn't dominated by a religious doctrine or by a central religious authority such as a church. Within this complex of Chinese beliefs and practices, there are some religious groups, or sects (to use the term without any derogatory meaning). C. K. Yang tried hard to distinguish between organized Chinese religion and the form of religion with which "people made their most intimate contact" (Yang 1961, 296), the diffuse sort of faith that permeates social life. He proposed the terms "diffused religion" and "institutional religion" (Yang 1961, chapter 12). He didn't mean that temples were not organized, and it is misleading for scholars to criticize him for ignoring the organizational aspects of temples. He could not have failed to notice these, as he paid much attention to the communal functions of temple fairs.

Daniel Overmyer accuses him of applying to China "a sectarian definition of religion derived from Christianity that is not relevant to the mainstream Chinese religion, which has always been community-based, inclusive and nonsectarian" (Overmyer 2009, 5). I find this criticism unfair. C. K. Yang was trying to distinguish between formally organized traditions and another form of religion, one diffused into various Chinese institutions as part of Chinese social life. Unfortunately, in my view, the terms *diffused religion* and *institutional religion* appear to divide the complex of Chinese Religion into different religions. At the same time, Yang seemed to regard the presence of religious personnel such as geomancers, diviners and sorcerers as institutional. If so, the classical religion and the present Chinese Religion can both be presented as institutional, and the category becomes meaningless. He regarded Buddhism and Taoism as institutional religions; historically, these faiths could be separate from the popular religion, but today the distinction is blurred. There are people who like to call the Chinese popular religion Taoism (Taoist Religion). Yang's application of "institutional religion" to "the syncretic religious societies" is most interesting, although he does not tell us much about them.

I have struggled to find a term to describe these "syncretic" Chinese religious organizations. I have refrained from describing them as separate Chinese religions. Instead they are best understood as formally organized religions

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(institutional, in C. K. Yang's term) that are still within the complex of Chinese Religion. In my study of Dejiao (Tan 1985), I have described it as a Chinese religious organization; English has only the word "sect," which is often perjorative but would otherwise apply.

While C. K. Yang does not write about specific "syncretic religious societies," Wing-tsit Chan (1953, 162–168) writes about four "new societies," namely the Dao Yuan, Tongshan She, Wushan She and Yiguan Dao (the Way of Pervading Unity). Of these, Yiguan Dao has become very significant in Taiwan and also among the Chinese of Southeast Asia, especially in Malaysia and Singapore. Studies include Song (1996) on Yiguan Dao in Taiwan, and Soo (1997, 2010, 35–63) on Yiguan Dao in Malaysia. The syncretic sects were mostly founded from the early twentieth century onward. They are syncretic in a loose sense, in that they are reorganized from the complex of Chinese Religion, and in particular from Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, the trio known in Chinese as the Three Teachings (*sanjiao*). Each is not a real syncretism of the different traditions, but rather an eclectic combination that forms a distinct religious organization. Any of them may borrow different aspects of moral teachings from Confucianism and Buddhism, together with religious rites from Buddhism and the Taoist Religion. Common to most is the practice of *fuji*, or Chinese planchette (spirit writing), and this is a Taoist form of divination. Chinese syncretic religious organizations always have a core group of the local business people and the educated. Influenced by the *shanshu* (morality books), which had become common in the later part of the Qing dynasty, the organizations took as their theological basis the idea that cosmic disaster would strike unless people could be persuaded to perform enough good deeds to ward it off. Each religious organization reorganized the Chinese pantheon and provided its version of a systematic religious teaching, one that derived from the larger popular religion and from the three teachings. In Dejiao, the Jade Emperor of the popular religion is even said to have abdicated and passed his throne to Guandi. But the Dejiao followers, as I have observed in Malaysia, are also members of the larger Chinese popular religion, and in this context they do not question the old Jade Emperor as the head of the pantheon. This is why I consider Chinese religious organizations as part of the complex of Chinese popular religion, which in Malaysia I have referred to simply as Chinese Religion. They are religious organizations within the complex of Chinese Religion.

Throughout Chinese history there has been interaction and borrowing among the Three Teachings, and an early denomination formed out of the teachings was that founded by Lin Zhao'en (1517–1598) of the Ming dynasty (Berling 1980; Dean 1998). This tradition of the three teachings is known by the name of Sanyi Jiao, translated as "Three-in-One Doctrine" by Wolfgang Franke

(1980), and in Malaysia the worshippers are generally Henghua (Xinghua) people. The temple in Kuala Lumpur is called Sanjiao Tang (Hall of Three Religions), and at the time of my revisit on 30 September 2016, a new Mazu temple was being built at the stage-right front of the temple, since the goddess is also closely linked to the people from Xinghua (Henghua people). There is also a Sanyi Jiao temple in Seremban called Zhiyuan Tang (志元堂), which was established in 1947.

In Tan (2000), I have mentioned other Chinese "organized religious groups," including Zhen Kong Jiao (Religion of the True Void), Hongwanzihui (Universal Red Swastika Society), Dejiao and Yiguan Dao. All these Chinese Religion denominations emphasize doing good deeds and giving charity as a way to obtain salvation from cosmic disaster. Each of these groups deserves a book-length study,[1] and in this chapter I will describe only Dejiao, which I studied in the 1980s. But we shall begin with a description of *shantang* (charitable halls), which function as saint-based temples that emphasize doing charity. As we shall see, some of them are organized somewhat as *shantang* groupings, with branches in different towns.

Shantang

Shantang, or benevolent societies (also rendered in English as "philanthropic associations" and "charity halls"), emerged in China toward the end of the Ming dynasty and became widespread in the Qing dynasty and during the Republican period (Chen Bao Liang 1996; Fuma Susumu 2005; Leung 1997; Smith 2009). The societies performed a variety of charitable acts, such as helping widows and orphans, donating coffins and burying the dead, even animals. The *shantang*[2] in Southeast Asia were originally introduced by Teochew migrants from the Chao-Shan region in Guangdong. The *shantang* in Chao-Shan were distinct from the usual benevolent societies in most parts of China, for they were organized around the worship of Song Dafeng, a monk of the Song dynasty. I refer to this kind of shantang as *saint-based shantang* (Tan 2012).

Song Dafeng did a lot of charitable works in his lifetime, and he was credited with building a stone bridge in Chaoyang that is still in use. With Song Dafeng honored as the patron deity and addressed as *shizun*, an honorific for a

1 For a general and historical description in Chinese of Xiantian Dao, which Marjorie Topley described as the Great Way of Former Heaven (Topley 1963), Sanyi Jiao, Zhenkong Jiao, Dejiao and Yiguan Dao, see Shi (2014).

2 Hereafter I do not italicize this Chinese word.

deified saint, the shantang in Chao-Shan focused on providing charity for the poor, old people, widows and orphans, as well as giving donations to victims of fires, floods or other natural disasters. Other regular charitable acts included providing medical aids and donating coffins for the poor, as well as burying the uncared-for dead. The latter charitable acts were important to the early migrants, the poorer ones obviously needing help with medical care and funeral services. Providing for these two needs has remained the most basic function of shantang in Malaysia; most Chinese who are not very familiar with the history and organization of shantang associate them with providing funeral services. The shantang in China were suppressed after 1949, being considered superstitious institutions, but they revived beginning in the 1990s. Cunxin Shantang in Shantou, for example, is not only a large shantang but also an active one, providing various kinds of charity, including maintenance of an old folks home at its old headquarters.

The establishment of shantang in what was then Malaya began with the establishment of Xiude Shantang Yangxin She 修德善堂养心社 in Singapore in 1916. This shantang derived its incense fire from (i.e., branched off from) Dawu Xiude Shantang Yangxin She (大吴修德善堂养心社), a body that had been established in Chao'an County in 1902. Since then, many other shantang have been established in Singapore, of which Xiude Shantang (as it is known today) and Nanyang Tongfeng Shantang (南洋同奉善堂) have proved instrumental to the creation of branches in Malaysia. The Melaka branch of Xiude Shantang was established in 1956, followed by the Muar branch in 1961, the Pontian branch in 1964, and the Kampung Selamat branch in Province Wellesley in 1990. The Singapore Nanyang Tongfeng Shantang was established in 1937, and derived its incense fire from the Tongfeng Shantang in Chao'an County, a body founded in 1875. The Johor branch, established in Johor Bahru in 1960, derived its incense fire from the Singapore Tongfeng Shantang following a planchette revelation there. In the following year, a planchette revelation attributed to Song Dafeng called for the establishment of a branch in Kuala Lumpur, and so the branch called Nanyang Thong Hong Siang T'ng Selangor Chapter[3] (Nanyang Tongfeng Shantang Xuelaner Fentang 南洋同奉善堂雪兰莪分堂) was established in 1961. A branch of Tongfeng Shantang was also established in Penang, in 1967.

While shantang base their organization on the worship of the deified monk Song Dafeng (honored as Song Dafeng Zushi, or Song Dafeng the Ancestral Sage), they still represent a kind of organized Chinese Religion that also honors other Chinese deities. Notable among them is the deified Han dynasty

3 The name of each shantang in Malaysia is registered according to Teochew transcription.

physician Hua Tuo, honored as Hua Tuo Xianshi (Hua Tuo the Immortal Sage). At Tongfeng Shantang temples, such as the one in Johor, other than the patron deity Song Dafeng, the other coworshipped deities are Hua Tuo Xianshi and Hutian Yuanshuai (护天元帅); the second is known as the Marshall Guarding Heaven and is a legendary figure with unlimited martial skills. Both Buddhist and Taoist rites are performed. In fact, the Taoist practice of divination called *fuji* is an essential part of shantang organization. As to religious teachings, both Buddhism and Confucianism are important, especially those aspects that relate to charity, philanthropy and the cultivation of a good human being. For example, the idea of filial piety, regarded as an important Confucian teaching, is emphasized and promoted in the form of providing facilities for installing ancestral tablets and cinerary urns. Providing these facilities also fulfills a basic function of shantang, as we have seen.

All shantang temples are formally registered bodies, each with its constitution and a management committee. The Johor Tongfeng Shantang lists its objectives thus:

> The object of this Charity Hall is to respect the patron Saint Sung Tai Hong, Divine Physician Hua Toh, General Hu Tian and all other Buddhas and Immortals for their excellent virtues, meritorious services, wise maxims and eminent characters; to devote ourselves to good deeds; to foster friendship; and to promote charity and welfare work on the principle of mutual aid. No political activities shall be allowed.[4]

Sung Tai Hong is the Teochew pronunciation of Song Dafeng. The mention of Buddhas and Immortals (*zhufo xianzun*) reflects the worship of both Buddhist and Taoist deities. Other than a President, Vice President, General Secretary and Assistant General Secretary, a shantang has various secretaries in charge of welfare, charity, ritual matters and others. The Selangor Nanyang Tongfeng Shantang, for example, has the following subcommittees: a Buddhist Ceremony subcommittee (敬佛组), a Buddhist Prayer subcommittee (念佛组), a Welfare subcommittee (福利组), a Charity subcommittee (布施组), a Health subcommittee (保健组), a Funeral Affairs subcommittee (善后组), and a Promotion subcommittee (促进组). The Buddhist ceremony subcommittee is in charge of organizing celebrations on the various deities' anniversary days (*shengdan*, literally "birthday"), as well as the Zhongyuan Festival and the

4 See *Roufo Nanyang Tongfeng Shantang Jinxi jinian tekan* 柔佛同奉善堂金禧纪念刊 (Johor Tongfeng Shantang Fiftieth Anniversary [1960–2010] Sovenir Magazine), 2001, p. 151.

public worship of the deceased. The Buddhist prayer subcommittee involves the members of the Buddhist prayer and musical committee in chanting for the deceased. The welfare subcommittee is in charge of organizing assistance in the event of floods, fires or other natural disasters, as well as sponsoring educational activities, while the charity subcommittee is in charge of organizing visits to old folks homes, orphanages, and schools for the disabled, as well as giving donations. The health subcommittee is in charge of providing free medical services, while the funeral affairs subcommittee takes care of the funeral of anyone deceased who lacks known descendants. The promotion subcommittee is in charge of publicity and organizing the Chinese New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival gatherings. As is obvious, this is a very well-organized shantang. Not only does it take care of welfare and charity works, it also has a subcommittee for "improving relationships among members and also outsiders while promoting the activities and spirit of the Chapter."[5]

There are other shantang of different origin, but all were established by Teochew migrants. Either the founders brought the tradition from Chao-Shan, or they established shantang based on the legitimacy of instruction by a saint (mainly Song Dafeng) as revealed via planchette in a shantang in Malaysia or Singapore. Chin Sean Kok (Zhen Shan Ge 振善阁) in Bagan Serai in Perak, for example, was established in the 1950s by some local people, and officially registered in 1958.[6] The religious society describes itself as a *daoshan she*, which in practice is the same as a shantang, being a society for promoting philanthropy and doing good deeds. The patron saints are Taiji Xianshi and Song Chan Zushi; other deities including the Eight Immortals are honored.

In fact, in Perak there are a number of shantang whose names begin with the character *zhen*, although they were not established as branches. Most of them have been established since 1970, joining the Dejiao (see below) as members of Dejiao organization (see Tan 1985, 50–52). Zhen An Ge, established in 1970 in Perak's Tanjong Piandang, derived its incense fire from Zhen Shan Ge. The earliest Zhen philanthropic temple to join Dejiao is the new Chin Ghee Kok (Zhen Yi Ge) of Kuala Kurau, which split off from an older one of the same name that was established in the 1950s. The old Zhen Yi Ge was established with the altar of Song Chan, which had been brought over by a Teochew from Chao-Shan. The new Zhen Yi Ge derived its incense fire from another early charity temple, one called Mingyue Shanshe (明月善社, Beng Guat Sean Seah).

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5 See Nanyang Thong Hong Siang Tng Selangor Chapter pamphlet, 2003.

6 See the shantang's twentieth anniversary souvenir magazine *Zhen Shan Ge daoshan she chuangge ershi zhounian jinian tekan*, 1975.

Mingyue Shanshe of Bagan Serai is an important charitable temple, as its incense fire contributed to the establishment of four other charity temples that carry the character *ming* in their names: Mingxiu Shanshe (明修善社) in Sungai Petani, Kedah; Ming'an Shanshe (明安善社) in Teluk Anson; Mingde Shanshe (明德善社) of Sungai Siput in Perak; and Mingfu Shanshe (明福善社) of Kampung Selamat in Province Wellesley. All of them honor Song Chan as well as Song Dafeng. This is related to the tradition of Mingyue Shanshe of Bagan Serai, which was established by a Teochew from Chaozhou named Lian Yuanda (连远达). He and a few others established the original Mingyue Shanshe in Huilai,[7] which today is a county under Jieyang City in Chao-Shan, Guangdong. And Huilai was the place where Song Chan, the famous Chaozhou monk (recorded as having been born in 1565) was first worshipped as a deified figure. Song Chan honored Li Daoming, one of the Eight Immortals; accordingly, Li Daoming and the other Eight Immortals (八仙 the legendary Eight Immortals), are also prominently worshipped in the Ming and Zhen charity temples. In fact, the Mingyue charitable temple in China formed its name by combining the name of Li Daoming (李道明) (taking the character *ming*) and the secular name of Song Chan, which is Song Chaoyue (宋超月) (taking the character *yue*)—thus, Mingyue.[8] As the earliest Zhen charity temples—namely, the new Zhen Yi Ge and Zhen An Ge—derived their incense fire from Mingyue Shanshe and Zhen Shan Ge, respectively, the Zhen Group of Dejiao temples generally worships both Song Dafeng and Song Chan, as well as the Eight Immortals.

While charitable temples perform various charitable functions, such as donating money to old folks homes or helping victims of disaster, the most basic and traditional functions have been *shiyi zengyao* (施医赠药, providing free medical service and medicines) and *shiguan zengzang* (施棺赠葬, donating coffins and arranging funerals). The 2011 records of Selangor & Kuala Lumpur Nanyang Thong Hong Siang T'ng show that 5,267 people received medical consultation, 454 received acupuncture treatment, and MYR $34,276.03 was spent on the medicine dispensed. Of the forty-four deceased people who were provided with coffins and memorial tablets or spaces for installing cinerary urns, there was one Indian and eight Burmese, while the rest were all Chinese. Charity temples take care of the lonely dead, including migrant workers such as the Burmese. In some cases, coffins were donated by particular members of the charitable temples, and in other cases the ashes were cast to sea.[9]

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7 See the 2011 May issue of *News of De Jiao Hui*《德教会资讯》.

8 See the 2011 May issue of *News of De Jiao Hui*《德教会资讯》.

9 See the charitable temple's 2011 newsletter *Tongfeng Huixun* 同奉会讯.

The records of Mingxiu Shanshe of Sungai Petani show that between 1997 and 2008, MYR $3,312,508.01 was spent on various kinds of charity, of which MYR $1,282,319.00 was spent on helping the poor and the sick, MYR $1,091,619.52 on a variety of other needs, and MYR $938,569.49 on supporting the dialysis center for the four years from 2005 to 2008.[10] Mingxiu Shanshe is a very active and successful charity temple. In 1999, it built a grand three-story columbarium, and in 2006 it established a dialysis center. Its main hall is spacious and can host many religious and cultural activities. It is also an officially recognized venue for marriage registration (Tan 2012). Undoubtedly, this is an important religious and communal center of the Chinese in Sungai Petani.

All charity temples, and in fact all major Chinese temples, organize religious and cultural activities, and in so doing make themselves relevant to the local Chinese communities. As well as providing *fuji* services and celebrating the anniversaries of the deities worshipped in the temples, the charity temples also organize celebrations of major Chinese festivals, notably the Chinese New Year, the Zhongyuan Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival. These festivals, especially the Zhongyuan Festival, involve worshipping ancestors and the dead, and so it is appropriate that charity temples organize such celebrations. In helping victims of natural disasters, the temples give irrespective of ethnicity and religion, and major charity temples also donate to disaster victims in China and other countries. Local Chinese communities rely on charity temples and other major temples to provide ancestral halls and columbaria for installing tablets and urns. To care for the dead is a basic need, but the government does not provide for it. Instead the Chinese in Malaysia must depend on their own organizations.

Today membership is open to all local Chinese, but shantang are Teochew organizations. The leadership has remained predominantly Teochew, and Teochew cultural heritage, such as Teochew music, continues to be perpetuated. Furthermore, with the opening up of China since 1978, and especially with the revival of shantang in China since the 1990s, charity temples in Malaysia often organize transnational pilgrimages (Tan C. B. 2015) to Chao-Shan, visiting the original temples or shantang with similar traditions of worship. For example, pilgrims from Tongfeng Shanshe have visited Jueshi Cishan Fulihui (觉世慈善福利会) in Jieyang, and Mingyue Shanju (明月善居) in Huilai County, both places where Song Chan worship is important.

10 See the 2009 newsletter *Mingxiu Zixun* (明修资讯, *Beng Siew Information*).

Dejiao

Dejiao literally means "moral teaching" or "teaching of virtues." Indeed, the religious organization called Dejiao Hui renders its name in English as Moral Uplifting Society. Each "society," described as *ge* (阁, pavilion),[11] has a specific name to indicate such-and-such Dejiao Hui of which town or city. For example, the oldest Dejiao society in Melaka is Zi Chang Ge, and so the full name of the society is Che Chang Khor Moral Uplifting Society, Melaka; or, in Mandarin, Maliujia Dejiao Hui Zi Chang Ge (马六甲德教会紫昌阁). In English, the name of the Dejiao society is transcribed in Teochew, reflecting the Teochew origin of this religious organization. Indeed, the origin of Dejiao Hui was in Chao-Shan, and the inspiration for its formation was very much that of a shantang; in most Dejiao societies in Malaysia, such as those of the Zi Group, Song Dafeng is worshipped as the patron deity. Dejiao emphasizes doing charity, and *fuji* was an important practice initially. Further, many of the societies still hold planchette sessions regularly. Indeed, the first Dejiao organization recognized by the Zi group was formed by *fuji* revelation, and most of the Dejiao societies have been established this way.

While shantang have elements of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoist tradition, Dejiao seeks to syncretize the *sanjiao* more systematically. The aim is to organize a new Chinese religious institution, or rather to reorganize a new one into being. It was after its spread to Singapore and Malaya that Dejiao incorporated Jesus and the Prophet Muhammad as *shizun* (saints) alongside Confucius, Buddha and Laozi, and claimed its doctrine of five religions (*wujiao tongzong*, five religions from the same source).[12] Indeed, Dejiao societies in Malaysia and Singapore hang pictures of four of the "five founders of religion" in their main hall of worship, and the Prophet Muhammad is represented by his name in Chinese and the Islamic symbols of the star and crescent moon. But Dejiao remains a Chinese religious organization, with Jesus and Muhammad honored alongside Chinese *shizun* who may reveal messages during *fuji* sessions. It is not really a syncretic religion incorporating the religious doctrines of all the "five religions." Nevertheless, the claim to syncretism is expressed by the occasional inclusion of teachings from Christianity and Islam in the souvenir magazines of some of the Dejiao societies, and Dejiao intellectuals (like most people) have no problem accepting the moral teachings of love and compassion in these religions.

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11 In Chinese, *ge* usually refers to a distinct religious building and forms part of the name of the building.

12 I pointed out this observation in Tan (1985: 18), and it has been confirmed by the research of Chen Jingxi (2016: 296).

The Zi Group traces its origin to 1939, when Yang Ruide (杨瑞德) and his friends held a planchette session at his home in Yingxi Gang Village of Heping Township, in Guangdong's Chaoyang County. The Taoist deities Yang Junsong (杨筠松) and Liu Chunfang (柳春芳) revealed that human beings should do charity to avoid cosmic disaster, and advised their audience to form a new organization called Zi Xiang Ge (紫香阁). This was considered the first Dejiao association. Others were formed as planchette revelations directed. Ma Guide was instrumental in the formation of the second Dejiao society, in Miancheng of Chaoyang County, and in 1942 he and a few others established Zi He Ge in Shantou. At Zi He Ge, the Dejiao Prayer Text (*Dejiao Xindian*, 德教心典) was proclaimed through planchette revelation. Rhymed in Teochew, this brief prayer text outlines the basic aims and beliefs of Dejiao; its creation was an important development in the institutionalization of Dejiao as a religious organization. Ma Guide was instrumental in providing the intellectual development of Dejiao, and in 1940 he published a book entitled *Zhongguo yuanshi zongjiao* (The Original Religion of China), in which he argued that Dejiao was the original religion of China and of all mankind. The early formation of Dejiao in Chao-Shan no doubt took place in the familiar cultural environment of shantang and the planchette-revealed *shanshu* (morality books), which warned people of cosmic calamity and the need to do good deeds.[13]

Ma Guide and a few others, including Li Huaide (李怀德), were instrumental in the development of Dejiao in Chao-Shan, Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Li Huaide later migrated to Singapore, where he played an important role in the development of Dejiao there. I have pointed out in Tan (1985) that, from the very beginning, the development and spread of Dejiao had very much to do with Teochew business people. Both Ma Guida and Li Huaide, for instance, were businessmen, and Dejiao came to Thailand when Lin Xiuwu (林修悟), a Chinese businessman from the country, established Zi Chen Ge (紫辰阁) in Bangkok in 1947. The networks of business people between Chao-Shan, Hong Kong and Southeast Asia were instrumental in the development of Dejiao. Li Huide and Ma Guide, for example, were in close contact, and the sharing of planchette texts legitimized and propagated the development of Dejiao.[14]

13 Chen jingxi's analysis of planchette texts and related documents shows that *Dejiao Xindian* was inspired by the 1924 planchette text *Zhongwai pudu huangjing* 中外普渡皇经 (Chen 2016: 268).

14 For more information on the development of Dejiao, see my earlier work Tan (1985). Since then there have been a few other works on Dejiao in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand; see, for example, Formoso (2010) and the volume edited by Chen and Zhang (2011). A significant work on the development of Dejiao is that of Chen Jingxi (2016: 249–320).

In my earlier work (Tan 1985), I have classified the various Dejiao groups in Malaysia and Singapore into the Zi Group (紫系), Ji Group (济系), Zan Hua (赞化) Group and Zhen (振) Group. This scheme is based on my tour of all the Dejiao associations in the two countries in 1982 and 1983. During the time of my research, leaders of the Zi Group and Ji Group had used the term *zi xi* and *ji xi* to distinguish the two major "denominations" of Dejiao; the latter denomination honors Jigong as its patron deity. *Xi* here refers to a group forming a distinct organization, and I translated it as "group." Thus, Zi *xi* is Zi Group. *Zan Hua xi* and *Zhen xi* are my own classifications to refer to a group of Dejiao societies that derived their incense fire from Zan Hua Ge (赞化阁) of Bukit Mertajam, as well as those shantang whose names begin with the character Zhen and who joined Dejiao organizations and followed Dejiao teachings. This classification remains valid, as the Dejiao societies listed in the souvenir magazine of Malaixiya Dejiao Lianhe Zonghui (马来西亚德教联合总会) (see no. 39, 2011) still belong to these groupings. This Dejiao umbrella society now comprises members from different groups of Dejiao. From the 2011 membership list, one can see that the number of Dejiao societies has increased from when I conducted my study in the early 1980s, to 115 from 62. The distribution can be seen in Table 1.

TABLE 1 *Number of Dejiao societies in Malaysia as reported in* Dexun *2011 and in Tan (1985)*

	Dexun 2011 list	Tan (1985) list
Perak	30	20
Johor	18	7
Kedah	12	8
Penang	11	10
K. Lumpur & Selangor	7	3
Negri Sembilan	5	4
Melaka	4	1
Pahang	4	1
Trengganu	2	1
Kelantan	1	1
Perlis	1	1
Sarawak	12	2
Sabah	8	3
	115	62

Table 1 shows that over the years the number of Dejiao societies in the big states of Perak and Johor, where there are more concentrations of Teochew people, has grown a lot; that's also the situation in the two states of Sarawak and Sabah, in East Malaysia. The 2011 (no. 39) issue of *Dexun* also lists the names of Dejiao societies in other countries, showing that Dejiao has spread to different parts of the world. After Malaysia, Thailand has the second-largest number of Dejiao societies: eighty-two societies, plus thirteen affiliated organizations. Singapore is third, with eleven; within the confines of a city-state, that makes for a dense concentration. Hong Kong has four, and Macau now has two. The numbers in other countries are as follows: Australia, four; Brunei, one; Canada, one (in Richmond); Indonesia, three; Japan, one (Kobe); Laos, five; Myanmar, one; New Zealand, one (Auckland); Taiwan, five; and the United States, four (all in California). The distribution in the rest of the world indicates a significant presence of Teochew where Dejiao societies are located.

Malaixiya Dejiao Lianhe Zonghui (United Moral Uplifting Society Malaysia) is the umbrella society of all affiliated Dejiao societies in Malaysia. The umbrella society is the latest development in the effort to unite and represent all Dejiao associations in the country. Originally, the eighteen Zi Group of Dejiao societies in Singapore and Malaysia were united under the umbrella society Nanyang Dejiao Zonghui (Nanyang Moral Uplifting General Society), which was officially registered in Singapore in 1957. The Zi Group also applied to the Registrar of Societies in Malaya for registration under the name of Malaiya Lianhebang Dejiao Zonghui (马来亚联合邦德教总会, United Moral Uplifting Society). Abbreviated as De Lian (德联), the society was officially registered only in 1959. In 1963, the Federation of Malaysia was formed, but in 1965 Singapore left the federation. The Societies (Amendment) Act of 1972 forbids a society in Malaysia to be affiliated with any society established outside the country. This led to Delian, with seventeen Zi societies in Malaysia, to divorce from Nanyang Moral Uplifting General Society. The Nanyang society was left with only Zi Xin Ge (紫新阁), the Dejiao society in Singapore; formed in 1952, this was the first Dejiao society to be established in Singapore or Malaya (Tan 1985, 25). Since the 1980s, there had been some attempts in Malaysia to include different groups of Dejiao societies under one general society. This was realized in 1987 when Delian amended its name slightly to become Malaixiya Dejiao Lianhe Zonghui (马来西亚德教联合总会), abbreviated as Delian Zong (德联总) (Li 2003, 169). Delian was the umbrella society for the Zi Group, and the change of name made it easier for the Dejiao societies of Ji and Zhen Groups to join as well; their addition made the umbrella society the largest Dejiao society in the world.

Dejiao societies are religious organizations that promote doing charity and philanthropy. Like shantang, Dejiao maintains the traditional roles of donating

coffins, assisting in funerals, and providing free medicine and care (*zengyi shiyao*), with some of Malaysia's non-Chinese seeking the group's free medical services, too. This is because Dejiao societies are supported by the better-off Chinese (especially Teochew business people) and are generally well organized and with spacious buildings. In a two-story building, the prayer hall is generally located upstairs, the medical consultation rooms downstairs. Furthermore, unlike typical Chinese temples, Dejiao does not encourage burning joss sticks indoor; this leaves individuals of other faiths with less of a reason to feel uneasy when entering Dejiao premises.

Chinese medical consultation is available in all Dejiao associations, and some of the better-off associations also provide western medical consultation. Zi Fang Ge of Kuala Lumpur & Selangor is an active Dejiao society. In 2011, 5,486 people received medical consultation thanks to the society, 2,512 people received acupuncture treatment, and 4,360 people received medicine, with the total cost of medicine purchased by the society standing at MYR $67,104.45 (Information provided by Zi Fang Ge). Like other Dejiao societies, Zi Fang Ge also donates to old folks homes and orphanages, victims of disasters, individuals who request financial assistance for hospital treatment or operation costs, and others. It organizes religious celebrations and various kinds of social activities, such as Chinese music, dance and Karaoke class. By doing all this, the society makes itself relevant to the local Chinese community at large, and to the community's individual members and its different sections, male and female, young and old. Many individuals join Dejiao activities because of the chance to do charitable giving. And now and then it organizes blood donations, making the group relevant to Malaysian society at large. Since my study in the early 1980s, a number of Dejiao societies have seen their women's wing go beyond providing food service during a religious celebration. The women's section of Zi Fang Ge established a choir in 1996, and many women are active both in the choir and other Dejiao activities. The women's section of Zi Sheng Ge (Che Sang Khor Moral Uplifting Society) in Klang, which was established in 1990, has also been active in various kinds of social and welfare activities.[15]

Overall, Dejiao is an interesting case. We have a Chinese religious organization that was initially established in Chao-Shan in China, and was then introduced by Teochew businessmen to Southeast Asia, where it flourished in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. In fact, it was in Southeast Asia that Dejiao really grew into an established religious organization. The movement's syncretic religious thought was finalized in Malaysia and Singapore, and its practices regarding charity and religious philanthropy were shaped by Chinese migrants'

15 See its twentieth anniversary souvenir magazine, published in 2010.

social needs and the related cultural politics of the ethnic Chinese. The success of Dejiao rests not only on the religious aspirations of the Chinese, but also on the reorganization of the traditional religion to serve both religious and social needs.

Conclusion

In Chinese Religion, shantang temples are directly associated with doing charity and promoting philanthropy, as are syncretic Chinese religious organizations such as Dejiao. The traditional shantang roles of *shiyi zengyao* (施医赠药, providing free medical service and medicines) and *shiguan zengzang* (施棺赠葬, donating coffins and arranging burial) have assumed even greater significance in modern society. The aim of helping the poor and people in need continues to be relevant and has even grown broader, given that help now goes to victims of disasters elsewhere in the country and the world, not just locally. The role of helping in funeral and postfuneral matters has also grown, with shantang temples and Dejiao societies providing ancestral halls and columbaria. There is a great need for these facilities, which the Chinese depend on their religious and clan organizations to provide. Charitable halls, Dejiao societies and other Chinese temples and religious organizations fulfill these important roles and make themselves perpetually relevant to the Chinese in modern-day urban society. Like most major temples in Malaysia today, Chinese religious organizations are also involved in promoting Chinese cultural matters, such as education, the arts and music, thus further involving themselves in the local Chinese communities.

Shantang and Dejiao are two types of Chinese religious organization that originated in China but have taken root in Southeast Asia, especially in Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Other than providing a focused brand of religious thought and worship based on the Chinese *sanjiao* (Three Teachings), Chinese religious organizations generally promote philanthropy, both as a religious mission and as a way to promote themselves. In a changing urban setting, they provide the Chinese masses with essential services, such as the ancestral halls and columbaria. At the same time, they contribute generously to charity and philanthropy that both the Chinese and the Malaysian state see as good public deeds.

Like communal temples, the shantang and Dejiao organizations of each town also organize celebrations of the major Chinese festivals. Of these, the Hungry Ghosts Festival is the most important, since caring for the dead is an important mission of these Chinese Religion organized groups. Thus, these

organized religious groups provide a specific focus and way of worship, such as worshipping particular deities in specified ways, and they facilitate organizing various religious and cultural activities, including activities that offer opportunities for involvement by women and the young. They do not establish themselves outside the Chinese Religion, since they do not reject its many deities or its religious thought. Indeed, they draw their members from the Chinese Religion. The members are free to participate in the worship and celebrations at Dejiao and shantang, as well as at other major Chinese temples. Thus, Chinese religious organizations are really *huaren zongjiao zuzhi*, or institutional organizations of Chinese Religion, and not a separate religion of the Chinese.

CHAPTER 8

Taoist Religion in Malaysia

In writing about Chinese Religion, there is a need to mention *daojiao*, or Taoist Religion.[1] Is there a Taoist Religion in Malaysia, and can we distinguish Taoist Religion from Chinese popular religion? Kristofer Schipper regards Taoist Religion as the highest expression of Chinese popular religion (Schipper 1996, 3), and from this point of view the Chinese popular religion is Taoist Religion. Michael Saso focuses on Taoist rites, and his book *Blue Dragon White Tiger* is "a study of Chinese religion from the viewpoint of the religious Taoist, i.e., the man or woman called upon by farmers, merchants, artisans, and all walks of life to perform village festivals" (Saso 1990, vii). This perspective is closer to our understanding of the Taoist component in the religious life of those who follow the Chinese Religion. While there is a move to call Chinese Religion *daojiao*, the institutional Taoist Religion that developed in China does not exist in Malaysia. But there are Taoist priests who perform important Taoist services for the people. This is in line with the migration history of the Chinese. Since the early Chinese settlement, there have been some Taoist priests on hand to perform funeral services and temple rituals. In recent years, aspects of Taoist Religion have made themselves known not only through the existence of Taoist priests performing Taoist rituals but also through the existence of Taoist organizations.

The Taoist tradition in Malaysia is mainly derived from the Zhengyi sect (正一派) in China. One of the well-known early Taoist movements was that of Tianshi Dao 天师道 (Way of Heavenly Masters). After the end of the Tang dynasty, followers of Tianshi Dao dispersed among the masses and formed the Zhengyi Taoist sect (cf. Li 2007, 113). The sect had a strict system of ordaining priests, and so it was respected by the local society (Li 1996, 463–464). Citing the *Guangdong Nianjian* (Guangdong Yearly) of 1935, Lai Chi Tim points out that "in the towns and villages of Guangdong there were many commercially run *daoguan*" (Li 2007, 129). A daoguan is a place where a Taoist priest lives and operates his business, sort of a "Taoist priest's shop." Zhengyi is the main Taoist tradition in Fujian and Guangdong. As most Chinese migrants to Taiwan and

1 Here I use the traditional English terms *Taoism* and *Taoist*, not *Daoism* and *Daoist*, spellings derived from the pinyin transliteration of *dao*, as in *daojiao*, which I translate as "Taoist Religion," and not the more common "Taoism," because the latter term does not distinguish Taoist philosophy from the organized religion called *daojiao*.

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Southeast Asia were from these two provinces, the Taoist priests in these regions belong mainly to the Zhengyi tradition. An important feature of this tradition is that the priests are *huoju daoshi* (火居道士); that is, the Taoist priests can marry and have children and stay at home. These Taoist priests are known in Minnan (southern Fujian) dialect (Hokkien in Southeast Asia) as *saigong* and in Cantonese as *nam-mo*. In Mandarin, Taoist priests are called *daoshi*.

In this chapter, I will discuss the roles of Taoist priests in the complex of the Chinese Religion in Malaysia. Because of the lack of a label for their Chinese popular religion, some Chinese worshippers use *daojiao* (Taoist Religion) to refer to their religion. However, the development of Taoist Religion in Malaysia, if this can be so described, is related to the activities of Taoist priests and the aspirations of some university-educated Taoist priests and intellectuals to promote Taoist Religion and Taoist philosophy, as well as the political motivation of individuals to unite Chinese temples under the name of Taoist Religion. The effort to form a national Taoist association to bring in Chinese temples has been made easier by the fact that some Chinese already loosely call their Chinese religious practices Taoist, and by the fact that Chinese Malaysians are responsive to calls for community loyalty as Malaysian society, in their view, becomes more racially bigoted and Islamized. In other words, the "development" of Taoist Religion in Malaysia is intertwined with the Chinese experience of settlement in Malaysia, and citizens are feeling more and more encapsulated in the politics of Malay dominance. Furthermore, the Chinese have become more and more connected to the globalized world of Chinese culture, and the transnational networks between Taoist organizations play an important role, too.

There are now many works on Taoism and Taoist Religion. For our purposes here, see Saso (1990) and Schipper (1996). Laozi is considered the religion's founder and is referred to as Taishang Laojun (Most High Old Lord). Sanqing (the Three Pure Ones) is the collective name comprising the three important high Taoist deities Yuqing Yuanshi Tianzun (玉清原始天尊), Shangqing Lingbao Tianzun (上清灵宝天尊) and Taiqing Daode Tianzun (太清道德天尊). When a Taoist priest perform his rites (*dajiao*), it is necessary to set up the altars of Sanqing first and display their large pictures. Given the importance of Sanqing, the name is used in a number of Taoist priests' associations, as we shall see.

Cantonese Taoist Priests in Kuala Lumpur

As Chinese migrants in Southeast Asia formed local communities, they needed religious specialists to conduct funeral rites. From an early period of Chinese

settlement, Taoist priests were invited to come to Southeast Asia, and those migrants who had experience as Taoist priests in China found it convenient to revive their profession. These early Taoist priests established their respective *daoguan* (道馆), also called *daoyuan* (道院). Although *daoyuan* literally means "monastery," a *daoyuan* in Malaysia is really a Taoist priest's "shop," a combination office and residence. Each speech group had their own Taoist priests who conducted Taoist rites in their respective language. To this day there are Cantonese, Hakka and Hokkien Taoist priests in the cities and major towns of Malaysia.[2]

For example, in Kuala Lumpur there is a Hakka *daoguan* called Xiangshui Fayuan Zhu Furen Tan (香水法院朱福仁坛), which was established in 1885 by Zhu Furen, who migrated from Huizhou in Guangdong. Zhu Furen came to Kuala Lumpur together with his two sons. A contemporary of Yap Ah Loy (Ye Yalai), the famed Hakka founder of Kuala Lumpur, Zhu Furen served as a priest for the Hakka in Kuala Lumpur. His great grandson, Zhu Junsheng (朱浚升) and alias K. K. Choo, is the present priest in charge of Xiangshui Fayuan Zhu Furen Tan at Jalan Balai Polis, Kuala Lumpur, and he has trained his son to be the fifth-generation priest. Interestingly, K. K. Choo identifies himself with Xianghua (香花), the tradition of folk Buddhism in the Hakka homeland of Meizhou in Guangdong. His name card bears the character *fo* for Buddha. The main deity of the altar at his office is Pu'an Zushi (普庵祖师, Patriarch Pu'an). Both Pu'an Zushi and Cankui Zushi (惭愧祖师) are worshipped by Xianghua monks, who are allowed to marry and have children. It was likely that Zhu Furen brought along the Xianghua tradition, and that he adjusted it to the Taoist tradition while practicing in Kuala Lumpur. K. K. Choo was English educated and he had to learn Chinese until he could read Taoist scriptures and write messages (*bangwen*) for presentation to deities. He began to learn to be a Xianghua master at the young age of fourteen, when he had to stop schooling after his father passed away.[3]

Kuala Lumpur, like Ipoh in Perak, has a significant Cantonese-speaking population, and Cantonese has remained the Chinese lingua franca. Because of this, Cantonese Taoist priests have been in popular demand. A description of a long-established Cantonese *daoyuan* helps to provide an understanding of the profession of Taoist priests in Malaysia. This is the Xuanzhen Daoyuan (玄真道院), located at Petaling Street and established by Hu Liangzhong (胡良忠, 1919–2000). I interviewed two of Hu Liangzhong's sons: Hu Hanjie

2 I interviewed only one Hokkien Taoist priest in Kuala Lumpur. He was Master Lin De'an of Xianling Tan (显灵坛) at Jalan Ipoh.

3 My research assistant Ms. Wu Mun Yu and I interviewed K. K. Choo on 19 December 2013 at his Kuala Lumpur office.

(胡汉杰), who manages Xuanzhen Daoyuan, and his younger brother Hu Hanxi (胡汉熙), who practices in Kota Kinabalu in Sabah.[4] The eldest of Hu Liangzhong's sons, Hu Hanzhang (胡汉章), had retired as a priest by the time of my research. Hu Hanzhang's daughter Wu Mun Yu (Hu Minyao 胡敏瑶) was my research assistant and helped arranged my interview in December 2012 with Hu Hanjie at Xuanzhen Daoyuan and with Hu Hanxi, who was at home in Kuala Lumpur. Wu Mun Yu was my undergraduate student and wrote an academic exercise on Cantonese Taoist priests in Kuala Lumpur under my supervision (Wu 1994). My research in Kuala Lumpur was thus very much facilitated by her network of Taoist priests provided by her father and uncles.[5]

Hu Liangzhong was born in Panyu, Guangdong. His parents died when he was small and his uncle (father's younger brother) took him to Penang, where he eventually earned his living as a tailor. His uncle was a Taoist priest at the Quanzhen Taoist temple Sanyuan Gong (三元宫) in Guangzhou. Although he did not continue with this profession in Penang, he passed his knowledge to Hu Liangzhong. In the early 1940s, a Taoist priest in Kuala Lumpur whom people called Nam-mo Zhang (Zhang Taoist priest) had conducted Taoist rites for people killed by Japanese soldiers. Unable to bear the horrors he had seen, he became ill and passed away. Hu Liangzhong went from Penang to Kuala Lumpur to take over Zhang's "shop" and renamed it Xuanzhen Daoyuan.

Hu Liangzhong learnt to be a Taoist priest from his uncle, a Quanzhen priest in China. Hu Liangzhong practiced his calling, but he wasn't officially a Taoist priest until his ordination by the sixty-third generation Heavenly Master Zhang Enpu (张恩溥). This was during the Heavenly Master's visit from Taiwan in 1964; Hu Liangzhong, followed by his sons, has identified with the Zhengyi sect ever since. Hu Lianzhong became a leading Taoist priest in Kuala Lumpur. According to K. K. Choo (mentioned earlier), Hu Liangzhong started the *wangshan* (旺山, flourishing the hill) rite. After a tomb has been built, this rite is performed to bring prosperity and success on the descendants of the deceased.

As noted, Hu Liangzhong's three sons all became Taoist priests. This choice is a matter of picking a profession, as is shown by the experience of the eldest son, Hu Hanzhang. He worked as an assistant to a truck driver for five years before deciding to become a Taoist priest at eighteen. Asked about this

4 He went to Sabah in 1989, at first practicing as a Taoist priest part-time while also selling dry meat.

5 Hu Hanjie was sixty years old at the time of interview on 22 December 2012, and Hanxi (fifty-three years old) was interviewed on 17 December 2012. Wu Mun Yu and I gave a PowerPoint presentation in Chinese at the eighth ISSCO Conference (17–18 August 2013) in Kuala Lumpur on the Taoist priests and Taoist organizations in Kuala Lumpur.

decision, he said that he could earn more as a Taoist priest and that he needed money to get married. He learned his new job by reciting and chanting Taoist texts, and by observing Taoist rites in the evening; in three months he was able to practice as a Taoist priest.[6] Hu Hanzhang had a successful career as a Taoist priest. He was a cofounder of Zhaoyuan Tang (昭元堂), together with the Taoist priests of a few other *daoguan*, such as Qingyun Daoguan (庆云道馆) and Cai Qizhu Daoyuan (蔡其珠道院); these two *daoguan* have since ceased operation following the deaths of their Taoist priests.

Zhaoyuan Tang served to provide coordination and mutual help among the *daoguan*. This must be one of the first Taoist organizations in Malaysia,[7] although it disbanded in the 1970s. The fees the group collected were chiefly used as savings for Taoist priests who were members, and every February and December some cash was distributed to members for the New Year and end-of-year expenditures. Some of the funds went to the upkeep and renovation of *daoguan*. An important function of Zhaoyuan Tang in the 1950s and 1960s was to be in charge of recruiting apprentices. These had to be sons or nephews of Taoist priests and bear their predecessor's surname. They were also required to be of good character and voice, and they had to read and write Chinese. A suitable candidate needed to be approved by the committee members of the Zhaoyuan Tang before his name was submitted to the Taoist trinity of Sanqing via divination. The ceremony of acknowledging a master (*bai shi*) involved kneeling in front of the altar of Taishang Laojun (Laozi) and offering the master tea. After acceptance, an apprentice learned to write charms (*fu*), to play Taoist music and to chant a number of Taoist texts, such as *Shi Shenzhou* (十神咒), *Wuludeng* (五路灯) and *Taiyi Qiuku Jing* (太一救苦经). In addition, he helped the Taoist priests conduct rites. Once ordained as a priest, he had to observe the ten rules of conduct (*shijie*), which included showing compassion to animals (cf. Wu 1994, Appendix 2). After Zhaoyuan Tang was disbanded, the surname rule was no longer observed. For their part, of course, the sons of a Taoist priest might not be interested in continuing the family tradition.

In Malaysia, there was no national Taoist organization that could officiate the status of Taoist priests. Accordingly, the visits of the sixty-third generation Heavenly Master Zhang Enpu (1964) and the sixty-fourth generation Heavenly Master Zhang Yuanxian 张源先 (1976 and 1977) were important occasions: this was when Taoist priests in Malaysia had a chance to be officially ordained. On the occasion of the visit of Zhang Yuanxian in 1976, Hu Liangzhong was

6 Because of his advanced age, I did not interview Hu Hanzhang. The information here was supplied by his daughter Wu Mun Yu.

7 Penang, Ipoh and Singapore each had its respective *tang*, according to Hu Hanxi.

appointed Director of the Kuala Lumpur Liaision Office. Hu became a well-known Taoist priest. In 1977, he was appointed by the Taoist Sanyuan Gong in Guangzhou to be *hufa weiyuan* (护法委员), a Taoist Religion committee member. In 1982, he was appointed by the Singapore Sanqing Daojiao Hui (Singapore Sanqing Taoist Religion Society) as its Honorary Adviser.

At the time of study in December 2012, the Xuanzhen Daoyuan that Hu Lianzhong started was managed by Hu Hanjie. Located at Persiaran Jubilee (off Loke Yew Road) near the traditional Chinese area of Petaling Street, the front of the "shop" downstairs was rented out to the owner of a *shenliao dian* (also called *xiangzhu zhizha pu* 香烛纸扎舖), this being a shop that sold candles, incense, paper effigies, paper-made goods (nowadays these include replicas of mobile phones, DVDs, computers, airplanes, space ships and so on) and other religious goods used as offerings. The Taoist priest's paraphernalia was stored at the back of the shop,[8] and the space upstairs was used as his office and residence. According to Hu Hanjie, Petaling Street used to have six *daoyuan*, a number of funeral shops and many shops that sold Chinese religious goods. It was convenient for family of the deceased to visit Petaling Street, contact a Taoist priest and arrange the necessary purchases. Beginning in the 1980s, most of these shops moved away or ceased operation as owners died, rents climbed and urban development made itself felt.

Family no longer matters so much in recruiting Taoist priests, but speech group is still important. A Taoist priest serves people of his own speech group, and a trainee should be able to speak and chant in the same dialect as the priest. The funeral practices of different speech groups can differ regarding detail, which matters as well. A Taoist priest can choose to attach to a *daoguan* owned by a Taoist priest, or he can work freelance with the priests of different *daoguan*. A successful *daoguan* may have a few Taoist priests and musicians. The Taoist priest who owns a *doaguan* is the boss. He pays the Taoist priests attached to his *daoguan* only when they conduct Taoist rites. Their income thus depends on the reputation of the boss; if he is invited to many rites, there will be more income to share. A well-known Taoist priest may occasionally be invited to perform rites in other cities, including Singapore, and occasionally he may also be invited by people of different speech groups. Other than funerals and temple festivals, Taoist priests also conduct post-funeral *gongde* rites (merit rites) for the well-being of the deceased and the living.

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8 During my visit, Hu Hanjie showed me some Taoist robes and other paraphernalia, including a cock that he reared for use in conducting Taoist rites. This cock is called *tihun ji* (啼魂鸡, calling the soul chicken). During the course of a funeral rite, the crow of the cock symbolically calls the deceased to return to the living world.

There are two major categories of rites. *Qingtan* (清坛, pure altar) refers to rites associated with temple festivals, such as celebrating a deity's birthday. *Huangtan* (黄坛, yellow altar) refers to funeral rites (cf. Wu 1994: 8). Taoist priests are in high demand during Zhongyuan Jie (Hungry Ghosts Festival), and so there is more income during this period. An independent Taoist priest who is hired for a funeral or a temple festival can also act like a boss and share the work with one or more Taoist priests of a *daoguan*. This is especially so with a major rite, one needing three or more Taoist priests, at least one Chinese shawm player and a driver. If the independent doesn't have enough in the way of Taoist robes and other paraphernalia, he may have to borrow them from the Taoist priest of a *daoguan*.

Historically, Taoist priests work closely with coffin shop owners. Coffin shops not only sell coffins, they also provide funeral-related services, including contacting a Taoist priest to conduct funeral rites. An established Taoist priest has a good network of relationships with coffin shop owners and with the staff of temples, the idea being to ensure more *fashi* (Taoist rites) to perform. Since the 1990s, well-financed modern undertakers have dominated the funeral services. They provide convenient packages for the deceased's family, packages that include the performance of rites by priests. Instead of being independent professionals, many Taoist priests now must hire out to well-financed funeral undertakers, at pay determined by the employer (who may prefer monks or nuns, given that they charge less).[9] In today's more globalized world, when travel is easier, the local priests also have to compete with priests from China. On the other hand, it is now possible and not so difficult to go to Taoist centers in China—especially the Zhengyi headquarters in Longhu Shan (Dragon and Tiger Mountain) in Jiangxi—for training and to be ordained as Taoist priests, as a number of individuals in Malaysia and Singapore have done. In fact, some leaders of "Taoist" associations that I met add the title *daozhang* (literally Taoist Master, also an honorable address for a Taoist priest) to their name, and they said that they had received Taoist training at the Taoist center at the Dragon and Tiger Mountain. The Taoist priests that I know do not respect these "Taoist" leaders.

Local practices of Taoist rites have changed. Given that Mandarin is now widely spoken, in addition to speech-group dialects, some Taoist priests have

9 According to My Hokkien Taoist priest informant in Kuala Lumpur, monks and nuns hired from China by corporate funeral undertakers are paid MYR $500 compared to MYR $1,000 that has to be paid to a local Taoist priest.

chanted in Mandarin.[10] Perhaps the biggest change is in the length of the rites conducted. According to Hu Hanzhang, in the 1950s and 1960s a funeral rite began around 7 p.m. and ended only at 5 a.m. or 6 a.m., with three or four breaks of an hour each in between. As office life and its fast pace became more widespread, families of the deceased came to prefer shorter funeral rites. The trend began during the 1970s, and two decades on the Taoist rites usually ended at about 2 a.m. (with shorter breaks in between). Today, a Taoist funeral rite usually begins at 6 p.m. and ends before midnight; with urban living, neighbors must be taken into consideration. Even at funeral houses, there are regulations about how late a rite can be conducted. According to my Hokkien Taoist priest informant in Kuala Lumpur, priests don't leave anything out from the rites but do go through them more quickly. Overall, being a Taoist priest in Malaysia is not just a religious vocation, it is an occupation, one now beset by funeral homes and the easy transport of priests from China. Most Chinese don't hold Taoist priests in high esteem, associating them with funerals even though they also perform important temple rites. As Marcel Granet writes about the situation in China, "Respect goes to the practice and not to the practitioner" (Granet 1975, 145). But most Chinese continue to need Taoist priests for funerals, even though many now use the service of Buddhist monks. Other than being hired to conduct Taoist rites, some Taoist priests also work as feng shui experts and practice divination, such as choosing a suitable date for wedding. Unlike Buddhist monks, who can depend on the monasteries for livelihood, Taoist priests have to save for retirement, and so they work for as long as they can.

Taoist Organizations

We have seen that Taoist priests established their *daoguan*, really sort of Taoist shops, from quite early in the Chinese settlement in Malaya. There was no Taoist organization, and it is not surprising that the early Taoist organizations that emerged were organized by Taoist priests. One such organization was the Zhaoyuan Tang in Kuala Lumpur. It was in 1998 that a regional Taoist organization was established. This was Xue-Long Sanqing Daojiao Hui (雪隆三清道教会, Kuala Lumpur & Selangor Sanqing Taoist Society), which was established by Taoist priests of different speech groups. Due to internal conflict,

10 A Hakka Taoist priest from Melaka even inserted some Malay into his Taoist rites when hired by some Chinese in Indonesia to perform postfuneral rites (see *Xingzhou Ribao*, 22 November 2012, p. 8).

some members branched off to establish another society, one called Malaixiya Sanqing Daojiao Hui (马来西亚三清道教会). Although organized and led by Taoist priests, Malaixiya Sanqing Daojiao Hui also accepts laypeople.[11] In 2012, another Taoist society was officially established. Called Malaixiya Daojiao Xiehui (马来西亚道教协会, the Taoist Association of Malaysia), this society was established by a university lecturer who was an ordained Taoist priest. It focuses more on Taoist education and organizes Taoist workshops now and then, which attract young people who want to know more about Taoist Religion.[12] In addition, there is Malaixiya Daojiao Jiaoyi Gonghui (马来西亚道教教义公会, Malaysian Taoist Teachings Society) established in the early 1990s by the priest Li Xing Tianshi (李兴天师, Heavenly Master Li Xing) of the Maoshan sect. Originally the society was for Taoist priests only, but it is now open to lay members, too.

Since the 1990s, there have been attempts to unite all the Chinese temples under the name of *daojiao*, or Taoist Religion. The largest "Taoist" association, Malaixiya Daojiao Zonghui (马来西亚道教总会, the Federation of Taoist Associations Malaysia) was launched in 1994 and officially registered in 1996 with Chinese temples as members. At the time of my research in December 2012, there were close to four hundred temples throughout Malaysia that had become members, including Shabazhou Daolian 沙巴州道联 (the Sabah United Taoist Association), which had more than fifty temples in Sabah affiliated with it.[13] There was a political element in the formation of the Federation of Taoist Associations Malaysia, as it was some members of the Chinese political party Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) who decided it would be useful to organize Chinese temples into a national organization to fight for government allocation of land for building more temples. In fact, at the time of my study the main leaders of the Federation of Taoist Associations Malaysia were MCA members. Thus, the society had cooperated with the MCA Religious Bureau to print a bilingual pamphlet in Chinese and English entitled "Expose Conman's Tactics on Religious Ground" to inform the public about spirit mediums who cheat or misbehave.

There is a regional "Taoist" association that is open to worshippers of Chinese deities. This is Malaixiya Daojiao Xintu Fuli Xiehui (马来西亚道教信

11 Interview with Hu Hanjie, the Vice President, on 22 December 2012. He was also a committee member of the Malaixiya Daojiao Jiaoyi Gonghui.

12 Interview with Dr. Yam Kah Kean (严家建) on 18 December 2012.

13 Interview with the former President, Mr. Tan Bon Sin, and with the then President, Mr. Tan Hoe Chieow. According to them, the main person that promoted the founding of the association was Su Muhua (苏木化).

徒福利协会).[14] The President of the society mentioned that its aim is to promote Taoist Religion as a religion that is not superstitious. Despite the general name of the society, its activities are generally confined to the Kepong area of Kuala Lumpur, where its hundred-odd members come from. It organizes celebrations of major Chinese festivals. For example, on 16 December 2012 the society organized a Winter Solstice (*dongzhi*) celebration at a Nadu Gong temple in Kepong for old people, the handicapped and the poor, as a way of showing concern for these people. Both the Federation of Taoist Associations Malaysia and Malaixiya Daojiao Xintu Fuli Xiehui are not strictly Taoist associations, as they group different kinds of Chinese temples together, including temples of localized Malayan deities such as Nadu Gong. But they are politically relevant.

Conclusion

The presence of Taoist Religion in Malaysia and Singapore first made itself known through the activities of Taoist priests. Each priest established his own *daoguan*, a combination "shop" and residence, rather than residing in a particular Taoist temple. While the Taoist priests trace their practice to that of the Zhengyi sect, they do not emphasize exclusiveness. In fact, they are actually quite open to different traditions. For example, Zhengyi priests will cooperate with Taoist priests who have decided to follow the Quanzhen sect. Interviews with Hu Hanxi and Hu Hanjie showed that they did not worry about the differences between Zhengyi and Quanzhen, although this may be because their grandfather had learned from the Quanzhen tradition. Hu Hanjie received his Taoist Management Certificate (火居道士公务证书) from Li Xing's Malaysian Taoist Teaching Society, dated 23 December 2007. In Singapore, at the time of my study in 2013, the administrator of the Taoist Federation (Singapore) was of the Quanzhen sect, and he worked closely with most other Taoist priests who were of the Zhengyi sect. At the Sanqing Gong where the Taoist Federation (Singapore) is based, both Zhengyi and Quanzhen Taoists are recognized. The lack of an earlier phase of Taoist temples of different sects accounts for the lack of strong identification with any particular sect.

In recent years there have been attempts to build specific Taoist temples in Malaysia. For example, during the course of research in 2012 I learned that Xue-Long Sanqing Daojiao Hui was building a Taoist temple. In addition, Xiangshui

14 Interview with the President, Mr. Vincent Teh, on 18 December 2012.

Fayuan Zhu Furen Tan has built a Taoist temple under the same name at Kampong Matang Pagar in Sungai Buluh, Selangor, although this is open only to those who request the priest to do certain rites. The one in Kuala Lumpur remains a combination office and shop where people can contact the priest or go to see him for divination consultation. The Chinese term *daoguan* (道观) refers to a Taoist temple. The Chinese of Malaysia have adopted the term *guan* in recent years, though some of them stretch it to include any Chinese temple. For example, in April 2014 I visited a new temple in Batu Pahat, Johor, one honoring Guandi and named Sansheng Guan (三圣观, Three Saints Temple).

Earlier we noted that Kristofer Schipper, the Taoist Religion scholar, regards Taoist Religion as the highest expression of Chinese popular religion. This may be considered a personal perspective, given his background. By the time the Chinese brought their traditional religion to Malaysia, Chinese Religion already included Taoist rites generally associated with funerals and performed by Taoist priests. It is as part of the Chinese Religion that the Taoist rites are most elaborate and systematized, creating a version of the rites that may be considered their highest expression. Today, some temples honoring major Taoist deities have become sites where activities promoting Taoist Religion are organized. For example, at the Douyalan Yuhuang Dian (斗亚兰玉皇殿, Tuaran Taoist Yu Huang Temple) in Sabah, at the time of my visit in February 2013, there was a young Taoist priest based at the temple, and the English name of the temple includes the word "Taoist," which is absent in the Chinese name. The priest was a Taiwanese who had married a Chinese Malaysian, and he said that he received his training at the famed Baiyun Guan in Beijing. Founded in 1945 and rebuilt at the present site in Tuaran in 2007, Douyalan Yuhuang Dian is now a grand temple.

The early Taoist organizations were established by Taoist priests to cater to their mutual interests, rather than to teach about Taoist Religion. With the younger generation interested to learn more about Chinese culture—Taoism and Taoist Religion included—new forms of Taoist organization were established to promote Taoist Religion. The Taoist Association of Malaysia is one such modern Taoist organization, and its main founder is an academic who specializes in the study of Chinese culture.

It is necessary to study the development of Taoist Religion in a broader context that includes Singapore, which was part of Malaysia until its independence in 1965. The early Taoist organizations in Singapore were those of Taoist priests too, such as Sanqing Daojiao Hui, which was established by Cantonese, Hokkien and Hainanese Taoist priests. The preparation for the formation of the Taoist Association of Malaysia in 2011 was most likely inspired

by the establishment of Xinjiapo Daojiao Xiehui or Taoist Mission (Singapore) in 1996. The Chinese name Daojiao Xiehui is the same in both Singapore and Malaysia. Lee Zhiwang, the president of Taoist Mission (Singapore), has a postgraduate degree and maintains widespread contacts with academics in Singapore. Both he and the Taoist Mission (Singapore) are based at the Temple of the Heavenly Jade Emperor (新加坡玉皇宫) at Telok Ayer Street. Most significantly, Taoist Mission (Singapore) launched the Daojiao Jie, or Taoist Religion Festival, in 1996. The date for this celebration was set as the fifteenth day of the second moon, the day that honors Laozi. The success of this venture was shown by the fact that the President of Singapore attended the celebration in 2000 and 2004. In 1997, the Federation of Taoist Associations Malaysia organized the Taoist Religion Festival in Singapore. Malaysia and Hong Kong followed, and the festival is now an international event, with the opening ceremony held in one country and the closing ceremony in another. In 2010, for example, the International Taoist Religion Festival was jointly organized by the Taoist associations of Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia; the opening ceremony was held in Italy and the closing ceremony in Sabah. In 2013, the opening ceremony was held in Sabah and the closing ceremony in Kaohsiung, Taiwan.[15]

Since the 1980s, there have been suggestions for uniting all the Chinese temples and selecting a name for the Chinese popular religion. Taoist Religion was once an institutional religion (using C. K. Yang's term) in China, many deities in the popular religion are of Taoist origin, and Taoist rites are performed at most funerals and at temple celebrations, so the idea of grouping Chinese temples under the name of Taoist Religion is not surprising. We have noted the formation of Malaixiya Daojiao Zonghui in 1996 (initiated in 1994). It was Xinjiapo Daojiao Zonghui, or the Taoist Federation (Singapore), that was the first group to bring Chinese temples under its wing. Officially established in 1990, the Taoist Federation in 2013 had more than 500 temples as members. The office of the Taoist Federation is at the grand Sanqing Gong (Sanqing Temple), on Bedok North Avenue. At this Taoist temple, the huge statues of the Taoist Sanqing—comprising Yuqing Yuanshi Tianzun, Shangqing Lingbao Tianzun and Taiqing Daode Tianzun—are at the highest level (equivalent to the third floor), while the statue of Yuhuang Dadi (the Jade Emperor) is on the middle level, and that of the earth god Fude Zhengshen is on the ground floor. An advantage of organizing the temples under one umbrella is that the

15 Interview with Master Lee Zhiwang on 23 September 2013. I thank Mr. Kua Bak Lim for helping me contact Master Lee and Master Chung Kwang Tong of the Taoist Federation (Singapore).

government pays them greater attention. For example, the administrator of the Taoist Federation that I interviewed on 24 September 2013 was a young Taoist priest of the Quanzhen tradition. He was also the Secretary-General of the Taoist Federation Youth Group (Singapore), and a Council Member of the Inter-Religious Organization in Singapore. In the case of the Federation of Taoist Associations Malaysia, at the time of my research both the former and the current President were members of the Committee for Promoting Inter-Religious Harmony and Understanding Amongst Adherents, a national organization in Malaysia.

The move to bring Chinese temples under one organization is no doubt motivated by the quest for greater political representation both in Malaysia and in Singapore. In fact, both the Taoist Federation (Singapore) and the Federation of Taoist Associations Malaysia have urged their respective governments to recognize Laozi Festival (Laozi *dan*) on the fifteenth day of the second moon as a national holiday. The leaders involved also hope to reduce the number of people who take advantage of Chinese Religion for selfish ends; in the case of Malaysia, there had been complaints of some spirit mediums cheating clients. Formation of the Federation of Taoist Associations Malaysia was also linked to Chinese politicians' belief that an association representing many Chinese temples could have greater clout with the government in winning benefits like land for building temples. The current government, which is dominated by the Malay nationalist party UMNO, has adopted a racial agenda and a policy of Islamization, so the support for a national "Taoist" association is not just religious but political, being a strategy in response to state racial policy.

From Taoist priests performing Taoist rites to Taoist associations promoting Taoist teaching and the understanding of Taoist Religion, there is increasing opportunity for developing the faith. For the time being, Taoist Religion provides a convenient label under which Chinese temples can unite. While the government finds it easier to deal with a body that represents "all" Chinese temples, Taoist Religion also provides a platform for relations with other religions in Malaysia and Singapore, and for networking with Taoist organizations overseas, including those in China. This is the case with actual Taoist associations and the ones representing Chinese temples.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

Most Chinese deities, their symbols, and their myths originated in China, and certain of these deities are associated with particular speech groups in Malaysia. The worship of deities was reestablished in Malaysia not only to fulfill individual spiritual needs but also to organize local communities. A god established as a communal deity served to provide a focus for organizing the community. This book has highlighted this organizing significance of temples. Over the years, the prosperity of a local Chinese community is reflected in its communal temple building, which may have been renovated to become grander. While residence houses are built in modern styles, Chinese temples generally preserve at least some traditional Chinese architecture; they are visibly Chinese.

Nowadays in Malaysia, no doubt thanks to the ease of communication and the use of Internet technology, there has been a trend toward bringing similar temples together under a translocal or national organization, or simply to have them perform a religious celebration together. We have seen that the popularity of Jiu Huangye has produced a translocal network dedicated to the deities' worship. In 1990, a national umbrella society called Doumu Gong Jiuhuang Dadi Zonghui was established to represent all Jiu Huangye temples in the country (cf. *Zhongguo Bao*, 3 October 2016, p. A16). Another good example of a translocal network of temples is provided by the worship of Dabogong. Dabogong temples are local; a well-known one may attract worshippers from a number of districts and towns, but it remains a local temple. With so many Dabogong temples all over the country, a Dabogong Jie or Dabogong Festival has been organized to bring representatives from different Dabogong temples together.

On 14 September 2014 (the twenty-first day of the eighth moon), on the occasion of the local celebration of the birthday of Dabogong, a parade of around a hundred Dabogong statues from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Burma, mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau took place in Penang. In the morning, a grand ceremonial worship was held, involving five Taoist priests and an offering of nine roasted pigs, a raw pig and a raw goat. This occasion was the celebration of the sixth anniversary of the Malaysian Dabogong Jie and the seventh anniversary of International Fude Culture Day (*Xingzhou Ribao* 15 September 2014, p. 17). International Fude Culture Day facilitates the international gathering. This is, of course, a grand translocal and even

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transnational gathering and celebration of the worship of Fude, the Chinese earth god more popularly known in Southeast Asia as Dabogong. Interestingly, on the day of departure from Penang, a committee member of the Jiande Tang from Burma went into a trance and indicated that the Dabogong from that temple wanted to stay in Penang, as the statue was originally brought from Baofu She Dabogong temple in Penang to Burma in 1853. After persuasion by the other committee members of the temple from Burma, the god (nonbelievers may say the possessed member) was convinced to return to Burma (*Xingzhou Ribao* 17 September 2014, p. A4).

Chinese temples and some Chinese individuals have always maintained connection with the emigrant regions (*qiaoxiang*) in China in matters religious. Many temples in Fujian and Guangdong have received contributions from the Chinese overseas, especially those of Southeast Asia; that's along with gifts by donors from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. With the opening up of China and the greater ease of transport, temples from overseas have been sending representatives to ancestral temples in China. As noted in Tan (2015), transnational *jinxiang* (pilgrimage) from Malaysia to China has become an important religious connection between the Chinese temples overseas and China; the management committees of Fengshan temples and Mazu temples in Malaysia, for instance, organize such pilgrimage trips regularly.

There has been mutual influence in matters religious through transnational religious networks. In a rural village in Yongchun, where I conducted field research, a communal religious celebration observed in February 2008 included two kinds of entertainment in the evening. The traditional *nanyin* music performance had a small audience of old people. The villagers, old and young, waited for later in the evening and a performance of *qingyin* (light music). This music is the new style; it offers a noisy but exciting staging of modern songs and dances, often with scantily dressed young women dancing. The shows are similar to the *getai* (literally "song stage") performances that have become popular in religious celebrations in Malaysia since the 1980s, alongside traditional Chinese operas. In recent years, a Taiwanese style of "entertainment" at religious celebrations, often staged during religious processions, has been added to some of the Chinese religious celebrations in Malaysia. Called *dianyin santaizi* (电音三太子, Third Prince techno dancing), it features small-size performers who dance down the street to the music of loud electric guitars while dressed in colorful traditional Chinese costume with oversize childlike masks; these last are colored red. For example, *dianyin santaizi* musical groups was performed for the first time at the 2014 Mid-Autumn Festival celebration at the Nine Emperor Gods temple (Doumu Gong) in Butterworth (*Xingzhou Ribao*, 9 September 2014, p. 10).

Chinese temples are thus essential and dynamic aspects of Chinese Religion. While maintaining Chinese traditions, a temple will constantly transform itself to organize and serve the local Chinese community; it will strive to keep itself, and Chinese Religion continuously relevant to changing times. Chinese temples in the Chinese diasporas provide important identity symbols in the local politics of identity. This is especially so in Malaysia, whose racial politics have spurred the Chinese to be very ethnically conscious. The majority of the Chinese follow Chinese Religion, and supporting temple festivals is a way of supporting not only the local Chinese communities but also Chinese culture.

Communal and major Chinese temples promote Chinese cultural activities as well as provide charity and philanthropy. Shantang and organized religious groups like Dejiao have even made doing charity and philanthropic works the central part of their religious mission. Nowadays all major temples donate to philanthropic causes that link them closely with the local Chinese communities. These include giving donations to support Chinese education and old folks homes. When I did research on Chinese Religion in Malaysia in the 1980s, I often came across well-educated Chinese who thought that Chinese Religion would decline. They saw Chinese Religion in terms of offering joss sticks, burning joss papers and consulting spirit mediums, all of which they deemed superstitious. But Chinese Religion is more than this. It is very much a part of local Chinese organization and the politics of identity. We have seen that it is dynamic and thriving, and I predict it will continue to be so.

But Chinese Religion is above all important to individual worshippers. Religion provides hope: for a better life, for better health, for salvation, and so on. In this respect, all religions are the same: gods or God, the symbols of religion provide hope, including hope that science cannot provide. For a person dying of cancer, praying to a particular god or God provides a last hope or final consolation; this is so for a Christian or a follower of the Chinese Religion. Bronislaw Malinowski's simple observation that religion serves to cope with anxiety (Malinowski 1948) touches on the basic function of religion and why it is so important to individuals. But anxiety is only one side of the coin, and not the most important. Hope for something better, for something beyond human ability to provide, is what makes religion so important to individuals. If a religious act of a particular religion is described as superstitious, then all religions are superstitious. And most individuals need superstition, or some form of illusion, to live a life that's bearable, let alone happy. The beauty of Chinese Religion is that its followers are generally not controlled by an exclusive religious doctrine. The relationship between deities and worshippers is one of reciprocity. Worshippers give offerings and conduct proper rituals, and the deities are expected to give back. If a god or goddess does not do his or her

part, the worshippers can shift to another god or goddess. Worship is voluntary, and the individual worshipper has particular reasons for praying to one deity or another. This pragmatic view of the relationship with the supernatural finds an echo in the pragmatic world view of the Chinese: strive hard for success and hope for the best, and all problems can be solved, one way or another. This is the attitude that worshippers take toward their deities. If a wish is not granted, try to phrase the request another way, or come back again later to present the same request, or adjust one's relationship with that deity.

Anthropologists have been interested in analyzing the relationship between religion and society. Emile Durkheim was the earliest in providing a comprehensive analysis of that relationship, even though his reduction of god to society has been rightly criticized by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, as we have noted. Evans-Pritchard's analysis of religious thought and social order is relevant to our analysis of Chinese religious thought and social order, as reflected in the hierarchical arrangement of the pantheon. Chinese Religion in Malaysia is inherited from the Chinese popular religion in China and is largely free of official orthodoxy. People can add or subtract from the content of cumulative religious thought, and are free to worship the deities that they choose. New deities can be added, and in contemporary China there have been "natural" attempts to deify Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and other modern-day leaders. Despite official suppression of such deification, it is fairly common to see drivers hanging pictures of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai as talismans in their cars, just as many drivers in China and Malaysia will hang a talisman of Guanyin. In my visit to various places in rural China, I have come across some families that had installed a picture of Mao Zedong in the part of their living room that used to be occupied by a patron deity's altar. When asked, the people generally say that it was just to honor Mao, not worship him as a god; this, of course, is a politically correct answer.

Our study of Chinese Religion, including the religion's reterritorialization, shows us the continuity of religious thought. But we also see the addition and subtraction undergone by the thought's content. In some places, the Chinese have become so localized that their deities must accept a "creolized" existence. In northeast Kelantan, the localized Chinese (i.e., the Peranakan-type Chinese) prefer to stage the Thai *menora* instead of Chinese opera, for they can follow the Thai language but cannot follow the standard Hokkien or Teochew used in a Chinese opera. More significant is the reinterpretation of the Chinese earth god to allow the incorporation of Sino-Malayan guardian spirits, in the form of Tang-Fan Dizhu and Nadu Gong. In a sense, the religious world of the Chinese has undergone localization, too. But, while becoming local, it remains historically Chinese and linked to the religious dimension of Chinese civilization.

Despite some major weaknesses in his work, Durkheim provides us with many reflections about religion and society. "Religions are the primitive way in which societies become conscious of themselves and their history," says Durkheim (1958, 160). We can say that through staging and participating in Chinese rites of communal renewal, the Chinese Religion followers in Malaysia are continuously made conscious of themselves as Chinese, and they're made aware of their history: one of settlement in Malaysia, and one with deep roots in the heritage of larger Chinese civilization. Furthermore, their perception of belonging to a local Chinese community is concretized through the organization of temple festivals and religious renewal rites.

There is a tendency to assume tension between Chinese Religion and modernity (cf. DeBernardi 2002, 2004; Goh 2009). The term modernity, often taken to mean modern changes, may be rendered too broad if used to cover racial politics in Malaysia. Let us say that Chinese Religion has been adjusting to changing times, with an emphasis on political and economic developments. We have seen the impact of racial politics, global influences and the advance in Internet technology on the Chinese organization of their religion in Malaysia. In Singapore, to give another example, the present trend of organizing united temples (Hue 2012), each of which houses a number of temples in a building, is an interesting response to state and market forces in the competition for space in the highly urbanized city-state.

The forms that Chinese Religion take are shaped by the processes that reproduce them, and they cannot be understood merely by relying on concepts such as hybridity and modernity. In this respect, Fredrik Barth's generative approach is relevant, for it emphasizes studying the process that produces cultural forms. By *process* Barth (1987, 79) refers to "the aggregate consequences of events of communication." And culture is "an ongoing system of communication and contains a corpus of replicated messages" (Barth 1975, 15). In our study, organizing religious events not only serves internal communal function, it also provides an ongoing communication in time and space about being Chinese in a local setting. Our emphasis on individual agency shows the dynamics of Chinese Religion. At the same time, the discussion on the religion of the masses highlights the different meanings of religion between the masses and the elite.

We can conclude by returning to the common statements of the Chinese with regards to religion: *xiaozai qifu* (消灾祈福, ridding misfortunes and praying for blessings) and *hejing ping'an* (合境平安, peace throughout the community). The former expression is relevant to both individuals and the community. The purpose of worship is to hope that the deities will help drive off misfortunes and keep them away, and to bless all facets of human life.

The latter expression, *hejing ping'an*, is often also expressed as *guotai min'an* (国泰民安, country at peace and people live in peace). This wish for peace is not just for the community but also for individuals, since individuals can't live in peace unless their country is at peace. The expressions *xiaozai qifu* and *hejing pingan* (or *guotai min'an*), often seen inscribed at temples, express what Chinese Religion is about. They express the most significant hopes of living in this world, and hence the significance of Chinese Religion.

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