

Chinese civilizational techniques and their hybridization in Southeast Asia:

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In his intriguing account of the crowds offering of incense at New Years at the Kwan Im Thang in Singapore, Daniel Goh (2015) describes ritual as stronger than culture and more powerful than modernity. The ritual “infects” secular space, as the crowds push forwards from the street into the temple, and then move down the street into the Hindu Krishna temple nearby, again offering incense to a pantheon of Hindu Tamil deities. The ritual is made up of countless personal actions, like eddies in a powerful river. Some of these are the actions of the temple personnel, who direct the flow of worshippers and remove incense sticks when they threaten to overflow the incense burners, or to burst into flame. Rather than an “as-if” space-time apart from the everyday in which one can repair a broken world through ritual means, in Goh’s account, the ritual creates real social and spatial effects, transforming everyday life and making life “as-is”.

These Chinese New Year’s offerings of incense go back to the beginnings of the Chinese settlement in Singapore. 19th century accounts describe kilometer long processions through the streets of Chinatown during Chinese New Year. And they go back before that to the ritual practices of migrant communities in their home villages and cities in Fujian, Guangdong, and Hainan. The rites may be Chinese in origin, but they have transformed into a hybrid form of worship in Singapore, with the inclusion of the Hindu temple and members of the Indian community.

This paper will explore other ritual practices, which I will call civilizational techniques in reference to Marcel Mauss’ essays on transnational flows of civilizational forms and his essay on the techniques of the body (Schlanger 2006). In the latter he concludes “I believe precisely that at the bottom of all our mystical states there are techniques of the body that we have not studied, but which were perfectly studied by China and India, even in very remote periods. This socio-psychobiological study should be made. I think that there are necessarily biological means of entering into ‘communication with God’.”

The civilizational techniques I discuss in this paper are:

- 1) Daoist rituals; 2) networking strategies; and 3) spirit medium rites.

Daoist rites in Southeast Asia

Daoist rites are performed in Singapore and Malaysia by Daoist masters who carry on elements of the regional ritual traditions their forefathers brought along in the course of their immigration (Dean 2016). Most of these local Daoist ritual masters maintain their own private altars in their homes, and are hired to perform rituals in temples on the birthdays of the gods, and on the ritual nodes in the annual calendar. In some traditions they are also available for hire for funerals, exorcisms, and minor rites. Daoism in China is roughly divided into the hereditary Celestial Master tradition and the Quanzhen (Complete Perfection) monastic tradition. The former has had a base since the Song dynasty in the Celestial Master Headquarters in Longhushan, Jiangxi. This center was important symbolically, and operated as a parallel bureaucratic power to that of the imperial court through the ordination of Daoist masters (many from divergent regional ritual traditions), and the Daoist enfeoffment of local gods (in parallel though sometimes out of step with the court canonization process, see Goossaert, 2004, 2011). But already in the Song there were frequent new revelations and elaborations of exorcistic and other ritual traditions which challenged the abilities of the Celestial Masters to absorb all the new developments into a comprehensive system (Davis 2001). In the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties, Celestial Masters were summoned to the imperial court to assist in the performance of rites (much of court ritual was conducted by Daoist ritual masters trained in the Shenyueguan (Office of Divine Music), and for the compilation (7 to 8 times) of various editions of the Daoist Canon, to which the last supplement was added in the Wanli period (1572-1620)¹. Daoist ritual masters trained at the imperial court were also sent to serve as ritualists in the Ming princely courts, of which there were several hundred by the end of the dynasty, scattered all over the empire. These princely courts consumed 15% of the imperial budget, mostly on ritual activities (Wang 2012)..

Kristofer Schipper and Vincent Goossaert (2007) have traced the decline of the role of the Celestial Masters under the Qing, especially under and after the Qianlong Emperor. The decline of the power of the Celestial Masters, the lack of an edition of the Daoist Canon, and the abolition of the Ming princely ritual centers during the Qing meant that regional ritual traditions grew increasingly diverse and independent. Many Daoist ritual masters still traveled to Longhushan in search of Celestial Master endorsement and credentials, and the Celestial Masters still sent out officers to ordain local Daoist masters. The Celestial Master continued to make ritual progresses

¹ The Daoist Canon was edited and printed outside the court only once by a Quanzhen monastery.

around the Jiangnan region all the way to Shanghai, giving out Daoist enfeoffments to temples dedicated to local gods along the way. But the decline of the center had an impact of the growing localization of Daoist ritual traditions. The destruction of the Celestial Masters Headquarters by the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace troops marked the further decline of the symbolic center.

The attack on the property rights of Chinese temples, from the late Qing calls to replace temples with Confucian schools, to the Republican campaigns against temples, to the CCP Socialist Education Campaign and the Cultural Revolution, all profoundly impacted Daoist ritual masters of all regional ritual traditions. Perhaps as many as a million temples were torn down or seized, and vast quantities of religious art and ritual objects, scriptures and liturgical manuscripts were destroyed across the country. Countless Daoist ritual masters were beaten, imprisoned and attacked during this process.

The reconstruction of regional ritual traditions has been gradually building since 1978 and is now into its fifth decade. Ethnographers and religious studies scholars developed models of the role of the Daoist liturgical framework within Chinese popular religion, beginning with the “discovery” of contemporary Daoist ritual traditions in the 1960s in Taiwan by scholars such as Liu Zhiwan, Schipper and Saso. Early models and generalizations, based on research in Tainan, proposed a model of a Daoist liturgical framework fundamentally structuring local religious worship. In his essay entitled “Vernacular and Classical Ritual in Taoism”, *Journal of Asian Studies* 65 (1985): 21-51, Kristofer Schipper extended this model to a binary relation between on the one hand the Daoist ritual master, who employs written texts in classical Chinese in intricate rites based on court audiences, and on the other hand the vernacular chanting of the spirit medium bands led by a local Fashi (ritual master) outside the temple. The spirit mediums would become possessed and perform martial acts including self-mortification. Their blood was used for talismans distributed to worshippers.

As fieldwork on Daoist ritual traditions expanded, the limitations of this model became evident. John Lagerwey discovered a primarily exorcistic tradition of Daoist in Taipei that originated in the Zhaoan area of southern Fujian and which was distinct from the Quanzhou/Zhangzhou Lingbao Daoist tradition of Tainan (the Taipei Daoists did not do funerals). Subsequent research in Putian revealed that ritual events there were formed by the simultaneous interaction of multiple liturgical frameworks (Dean 1998). This could be clearly seen when two to three groups of ritualists

(Daoists, Buddhists, and Three in One scripture masters) performed parallel rites within the same ritual. Meanwhile Confucian masters of ceremonies organized the distribution and presentation of food offerings and spirit mediums traversed the ritual space (Dean 1998). Further research in other widespread ritual traditions such as the Lushan or Sannai tradition that spread from the Fuzhou region into southern Zhejiang and down the mountains to southwest Fujian, and the Yuanhuang ritual traditions of western Hunan, which show evidence of distinct historical layers of Daoist ritual traditions, some indigenous or earlier and some from Jiangxi in the Ming, all complicate the early models of a unitary and unifying Daoist liturgical framework. The Hunan case has different classifications of ritual specialists and even refers to spirit mediums as a separate religious category (Wujiao – spirit medium teachings). Thus research is still at a preliminary state, and more discoveries are likely. Multiple volumes of Daoist scriptures and liturgical manuscripts and descriptions of local or regional Daoist ritual traditions have been published in recent years²

Daoist ritual traditions also moved to Southeast Asia (Dean 2016). In Singapore one can still find Daoist ritual traditions from Quanzhou, Sanyuan traditions from Yongchun and Nanan, some elements of Lushan traditions from northern Putian, Guangdong Daoists, Hainan Daoists, Hakka

² *The Daoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, edited by Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, was published by the University of Chicago Press in 2004, after thirty years of collective research. Collections of scriptures and liturgical manuscripts in the collections of local Daoist masters were published by Wang Qiugui in 20 volumes. A new series of some planned 20 volumes is being edited by John Lagerwey and Lu Pengzhi. Li Fengmao and his students based at Zhengzhi University in Taipei have conducted extensive fieldwork on the Daoist altars and ritual traditions of Taiwan, and they, together with Japanese scholars including Murayama, have extended their research to Quanzhou and Zhangzhou in Fujian. Ye Mingsheng and his student Huang have documented multiple local versions of Lushan or Sannai Daoist ritual traditions from southern Zhejiang, to northern Fujian, to Southwest Fujian, and beyond. Several scholars have studied the Jingming Daoist ritual tradition which may go back to the Tang (Schipper, Mao Limei). Patrice Fava, Marc Meulenbeld, Alan Arrault have explored the rich local ritual traditions of western Hunan. Lai Chi Tim has studied Daoist temples, inscriptions, and altars in Guangdong and Hong Kong. Tam Wailun and David Palmer have described Puan Buddhist-Daoist rites in northern Guangdong, and has described the Xianghua (fragrant flower) hereditary Buddhist ritual masters of the Hakka regions. Lee Chee Hiang has written on the ritual traditions of the Chaozhou (Teochew) diaspora. Stephen Jones has published on Daoist ritual traditions and musicians in Northern China. Murayama and other Japanese scholars will soon publish their fieldwork on Daoist traditions of the Yao in Hunan – on this area see also Paul Katz.

Daoists, and Teochew Shantang and Dejiao ritual traditions. Even more local traditions can be found in Malaysia, including Fuzhou Daoist (Lushan) traditions in Sibuan, Sarawak. Recent studies of Malaysian Chinese temples and Daoist traditions include Tan Chee Beng (Chen Zhiming, 2018) and Lee Fengmao (2018)

I have elsewhere described the Daoist altar as highly portable, something that can be carried in a trunk (Dean 2012). The technique used to transform a space into a Daoist Land of the Way are easy to apply – they involve hanging up paintings of the Daoist deities and distributing talismans around the four directions and the center of the altar. The talismans attract the powers of the gods summoned from the heavens (joining the ling spiritual power of the gods to the bao – the treasure of the talisman). The Daoist master uses meditation and visualization, talismans, mudras, and dance steps to summon gods from his own body to send them to their counterparts in the heavens and to invite the higher gods to attend the ritual. His body functions like a Moebius strip to connect his microcosm to the macrocosm. The Daoist altar is a highly overcoded space, which transforms the space of the temple and the courtyard into a simulacrum of the Heavenly Court. A court audience is held with the high gods, and a memorial is read before them asking for their blessings and listing the names of the sponsors of the ritual. The scriptures recited during the rites describe the cosmogenesis of the universe, and the laying out of the talismans, the recitation and the ritual is a re-enactment of this cosmogenesis.

In Southeast Asia as in China, many elements of Daoist ritual have been absorbed by spirit medium traditions, local cults to local Chinese deities, and by sectarian groups who have spread across Southeast Asia. One finds for example the use of the Lushan Dafayuan (Great Ritual Court of Mount Lu) in the *guanjie* (confined to the temple to receive prohibitions) collective spirit medium training sessions of the Jiangkou region of northeast Putian, which have spread to Southeast Asia. There they mutated and began to include spirit medium training for women, an innovation which has now spread back to Putian (Dean 2011, 2018). In the case of the Nine Emperor cults of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia (Bintan), we find the use of Daoist “seats” for the gods of the Nine Dipper Stars (two of the nine stars are visible only to Daoists, and to the Dipper Mother, who gave birth to these gods). Some temples in this tradition (including perhaps 20 in Thailand, over 100 in Malaysia, and 16 in Singapore, and one or two in Bintan) invite Daoist ritual masters to preside over the invitation of these gods from the sea, others do not. The role of spirit mediums is far more important in this tradition, as I will discuss below.

Nonetheless, there are Daoist rites dedicated to these same deities in the Daoist Canon, and temples and rituals devoted to them were held in the Jiangnan region in the late imperial period. In Southeast Asia, however, the mythological justification for the rites has changed, and many versions of the stories of these gods link them to accounts of either drowned migrants or pirates. In any case they are invited to come on land from the sea (referring back to China) and they are returned to the sea at the end of the nine days of fasting (vegetarian meals), abstinence, and rites of worship featuring spirit possession and processions through the streets (where this is allowed). Even in Singapore, there is a clear “infection” of secular spaces at the high points of these rituals. These occasions suggest a temporary sharing of a cosmological framework on the part of the state and the devotees, who attribute agency to the gods during the ritual. Similarly, during the Xinghua spirit medium trainings mentioned above, the gods frequently descend via spirit writing sessions to instruct the trainees, the temple, and the community on correct moral behavior and necessary ritual actions.

Daoist understandings and rituals explain the burial under the floor tiles in 1898 of a Daoist text and talismans in the Temple for the Protection of the Pure, the Chen surname lineage hall in Singapore. The text is a legal document declaring that the Daoist Gods have taken power over the site, and entrusting the Daoist master to exorcise the original spirits of the site so that the new proper deities, Chen Yuanguang, the Sacred Lord who Opened up Zhangzhou, and other Chen clan members can occupy the premises (for a translation and analysis see Dean 2016). Daoist understandings underlie the presence of shrines to Nadugong, a Malay Muslim earth god within Chinese temples across Southeast Asia. These original rightful tutelary deities are not exorcised, but instead are given a side altar and special offerings (excluding pork) to indicate acknowledgment of their continued protection over the territory. These gods often possess spirit mediums in Malaysia and sometimes also in Singapore. Daoist “enfeoffment” practices have been borrowed by local religious communities for the “canonization” of local gods in Southeast Asia such as the goddess Lin Guniang (Maiden Lin) in Pattani (Dean 2015).

Sectarian groups like the Yiguandao have borrowed extensively from Daoist and Buddhist ritual to compose their own hybrid ritual forms. In Singapore, and in China up until Liberation, these methods are combined with modern business management and human resource development methods to rapidly indoctrinate visitors into the religious movement. I visited one unregistered Yiguandao temple in Singapore on the occasion of a free vegetarian feast. Within 90 minutes, I

had been brought into the temple, registered by a team of computer data specialists, given an introductory lecture on Buddhist philosophy, participated in a brief ritual in which I was given a mudra, a mantra, and had my third eye opened, and then given a briefing in which these three treasures (mudra, mantra, third eye) were carefully explained. As I left the temple, a computer generated membership card was pressed into my hands, along with a schedule of follow-up sessions to deepen my appreciation of the three treasures. An honours student who is a member of the Yiguandao in Singapore (which now counts over 80,000 adherents) described the intensive management training and human resources development programs within the Yiguandao designed to cultivate talent which is primarily re-invested into the movement, in contrast to Ciji (Merciful Salvation) humanistic Buddhism, where more emphasis is given to public charitable works. My point here is simply that certain Daoist ritual elements have been incorporated into a new intellectual and organizational syncretic synthesis in this and other sectarian movements,

Networking

Networking is a prominent feature of Chinese culture that has attracted considerable attention from anthropologists. In Southeast Asia, networking appears to go into overdrive, producing some interesting effects, as shown in the work of Aihwa Ong (1999), Mayfair Yang (1994) and many others. G.W. Skinner developed social network charts of the intell in his *Leadership and Power in the Chinese Community in Thailand*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958 (T'ien Ju-k'ang (1953) noted that people with a common surname in Kuching decided to invent a common ancestor and bury him in a grave to consecrate the union of their two hitherto unrelated groups. When I recently visited the town of Sibu in Sarawak, I attended a dinner for 3000 people all surnamed Liu. The front of the banquet hall had seats for the important Liu in government, business, and the Methodist Church (still the dominant community in this city). People described returning from all over the extended secondary migration – from Singapore, New Zealand, the US, Canada, Europe, etc., to attend this event held just after Chinese New Year each year. The celebrations included a blessing by a Methodist minister as well as hongbao passed out to everyone by two Gods of Wealth. A recent handbook of Chinese associations in Malaysia lists over 40,000 associations. Research in Singapore has found that one individual could be a member of up to 40 associations, at every scale of activity, from street and local community organizations, to regional or city-wide organizations, to transnational and global organizations. Here I would like to introduce a recent networking effort with a particular focus on the autonomy of the Southeast Asian Chinese communities involved.

Sibu is located at the juncture of the Rajang and Igan rivers, some 130 km up the river from the South China Sea. Early Chinese migrants include one Cai Zhiyong from Haifeng, Zhangzhou, Fujian, who settled in 1846. James Brooke built a fort in Sibu in 1862. According to reports of the Rajang Residency, there were 45 Chinese settlers in the region mid-century. A report dated 1871 stated that there was already a bazaar in Sibu, with 60 shops mostly owned by Chinese (Minnan) migrants, along with a Chinese temple. Another 10 shops were under construction. In addition, some 40 Cantonese were involved in trading salt and timber to Hong Kong (*Sarawak Gazette*, 24 January 1871).³

The Yonganting Dabogong temple in Sibu is an impressive complex with a large temple and a seven story pagoda dominating the riverfront. The temple was founded by 1871 at the latest. The temple was renovated in the late 1870s, when the temple director Chen Wenzhong sailed to Xiamen to bring back a statue of Dabogong, the earth god. The temple was expanded in 1897, as documented by two large stone inscriptions. The sponsors were Zhangzhou and Quanzhou merchants, with several based in Kuching and Singapore. This indicates that the temple was the center of an extensive trading network.

The temple was an active center for the raising of funds for China during the Japanese invasion, and this allowed temple leaders to expand beyond their Minnan base. They joined forces with the Tongleshe (Society for Collective Entertainment) based in the other major Chinese temple of Sibu, the Tanhuaifu, dedicated to the god of theater, Tian Gong Yuan Shuai, and founded by a Fuzhou opera troupe in 1928. Devotees of the Dabogong temple evaded bombing raids by the Japanese by crowding into the temple, and the statue survived an Allied bomb raid that did level the temple in 1945. All these events enhanced the reputation of the temple. The temple was rebuilt by 1957, and the front hall was expanded in 1980. In 1984 the temple established a constitution and board of directors including representatives from the Fuzhou, Xinghua and Guangdong communities, and was recognized as a religious site by the Malaysian government. In 1989 the temple built a seven story Guanyin pagoda behind the temple.

Over the past ten years, the Yonganting Dabogong has become of the center of a major Chinese temple networking project, linking Dabogong earth god temples around Sarawak to those

³ Tian Ju-kang (1953) claimed that there were 2 Chaozhou and 28 Minnan residents of Sibu living in 30 atap roofed shops in 1883 (Tian 1997, 146). Recent historical work in the early cemeteries of Sibu has located tombs dating from the 1860s..

situated in each of the major port cities along the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. The slogan for this networking effort is a clever response to Xi Jinping's "One Belt One Road" (a call for expanded PRC international influence). The temple slogan is "One Sea One Temple" - in this version each earth god looks out for its own autonomous polity and the network supports each temple in this mission. Instead of converging in a nationalist vision of cultural unity spreading across the globe, this vision emphasizes local powers and particularities. Temple leaders from Sibuhayuan have personally visited over 60 Earth God temples in port cities around the South China Sea. They have held several gatherings of the leaders of these temples, and published two commemorative volumes. The network seems to be gathering strength and power. Similar networks have been developed of City God temples, and statues of major deities such as Mazu, Guangze zunwang, etc., have toured branch temples around Southeast Asia. A flow of ritual specialists, opera singers, artisans and craftsmen moves around the temple networks of Southeast Asia, as do innumerable material objects used in rituals such as incense, spirit money, deity statues, etc. These circuits are also the conduits for forms of ritual change (Dean 2011).

Spirit mediums

Spirit mediums were key figures in the Chinese diaspora to Southeast Asia (Dean 2018). They were often the inspiration for the construction of a temple to the gods that possessed them. To this day, spirit mediums play important roles in temples and communities across the region. The question I would like to explore today is whether there is any specificity to the Chinese spirit mediums, and whether aspects of their ritual techniques have interacted or merged with other indigenous or migratory spirit possession traditions. Early evidence of hybrid forms of possession come from the 1919 inscriptions above the keramat of an Islamic saint and his wife and daughter on Gusu Island south of Singapore island. Three inscriptions, in Chinese, Malay and Jawi, describe the same event, the possession of a Chinese spirit medium living on Rangoon Street in Singapore by the spirit of the keramat, and the subsequent visit to the temple to make offerings and seek blessing (Dean and Hue, 2017).

Further evidence of a ritual form proving stronger than cultural boundaries can be found in the Nine Emperor Festivals held across Southeast Asia. This ritual tradition may have originated in Phuket, Thailand. According to Tatsuki (2012) there are at least 46 Chinese temples in Phuket, all unregistered as religious organizations due to Thai regulations (most are registered as charitable organizations with the Ministry of Interior, while at least 18 are unregistered). Several of these

temples include shrines to the Nine Emperor Gods, and participate in the spectacular rituals and processions in honor of these gods held during the first nine days of the ninth lunar month. Over the course of the nine days of the ritual, different temples around Phuket hold invitations to the gods, and then hold processions around the city on different days, and then send off the gods back to the sea. The most prominent feature of the processions is the extreme form of self-mortification practiced by primarily young male Thai spirit mediums. These men have extensive tattoos and have an entourage of devotees. These rites have been described by Eric Cohen (2001). More recently Cohen (2012) has published an account of a hybrid ritual developed within the Nine Emperor Vegetarian Festival by the town council of Krabi, who since 2005 have grafted a rite of consecration of a town pillar (an action also performed by the Thai King – city pillars were made part of Thai official religion in 1992) onto the overall ritual. Cohen speculates on the impact of this intrusion of official Thai state power into the rite, amplifying and attempting to overcode what he sees as the spectacularizing effects of the extreme piercings by spirit mediums associated with the ritual. He is interested in commercialization, commodification and effects on tourism. He notes the rising number of participating Chinese temples and shrines in the Krabi Nine Emperor festival, currently up to over over 60. Comparatively, he explores whether changes in festivals are imposed or organic, and whether these changes are orthogenetic or heterogenetic, in the latter case leading to hybridization. Unfortunately, Cohen does not provide very detailed accounts of the ritual process across the different temples, or across the wider area (see Mowan on Nine Emperor rites in southern Thailand).⁴

Another ritual which transcends ethnic boundaries is the Thaipusan ritual in Singapore, where Chinese participants make up between 5 to 10% of the procession. Fabian Graham (forthcoming) has described one Chinese medium's participation in the ritual as a personal rite of atonement, done without entering trance. However, the Chinese spirit medium groups I observed in 2015 appeared to enter into trance during the procession. There are many trance elements in the ritual, especially during the skewerings in preparation for mounting the kavalai (metal cage) on the body of the worshipper. At that time, there is intensive chanting and music and some participants enter into trance states (Ward 1984). These vast public processional rituals of self-mortification and

⁴ A project in Singapore led by Koh Keng We at NTU has documented the ritual process of 16 temples and spirit altar shrines that independently carry out the Nine Emperor God rituals. For accounts of this festival in Malaysia see Lee 1983, 1986 and Cheu 1988, 1996.

atonement would have entered into a complex religious ecology in the Straits Settlements during British colonial rule. While *Thaipusan* was outlawed in Madras, it was allowed in the colonies. In addition, many Dalit communities in Malaysia continue to practice trance possession and bodily mortification (Sudheesh Bhasi 2017). The presence of spirit possession across India is well attested in Indian classical literature as well as contemporary ethnography (Smith 2006). The question becomes what impact does the specific ritual technology employed – the *kavali* or the Chinese spirit medium chair – and specific actions such as skewering or cutting the tongue – have on processes of hybridization.

This question leads me to my final case study, the Dayak spirit mediums in Kalimantan. Another example of the transmission of spiritual techniques beyond the Chinese state and Chinese ethnicity occurs during the lantern festival (the first full moon of the lunar calendar, this year on March 2, 2018). I attended a procession of 1038 spirit mediums and their entourages through the streets of Sinkewang in Kalimantan, Indonesia (Borneo). The procession culminates in a large altar in the center of the city where the mediums pray to the Jade Emperor and bless donated offerings which are later auctioned off to the community. Many spirit mediums were possessed by familiar deities, including the monkey god, Guangong, Jigong, Guan Yin and many more – but what struck me as more difficult to explain was that over one third of the spirit mediums were Dayaks dressed in hornbill beak and feather headdresses, with garlands of small animal skulls, and extensive tattoos. These men (and some women) were performing self-mortifications and ecstatically climbing all over standard issue Chinese spirit medium chairs made of swords, nails, spikes, and sharp knives. To make things even more complex, I was told that many local Chinese young people dressed up and joined the Dayak groups because they were drawn to their energetic performances.

In the days leading up to the officially organized procession, I observed ritual visits between teams of spirit mediums connected to the various temples. This region has many Chinese temples, and is referred to as the city of a thousand temples. Exact figures are hard to come by, but the registration of over 1000 spirit medium entourages (including musical troupes, banner carriers, escorts and supporters and the all important Chinese spirit medium chair) implies a high number of active ritual units. The procession began some ten years ago and first attracted around 200 units. Now it has expanded to over 1000, causing cultural conflicts when the music and chanting encroached on the timing of Muslim prayers (Chan 2009, 2013; Hertzman 2017).

The presence of Dayaks raises questions about ethnic interactions in this region, which turned violent in the 1990s. The primary conflict and death toll was between Dayak and Madurese, but many Chinese had their land seized. Nonetheless, there is a longer tradition of intermarriage between the Dayak and the Chinese merchants of Singkawang (Peluso 2009). The city served as an entrepot for Hakka gold miners in the mountains to the west, where they formed various republics (Yuan 2000, Heidhues 1990). The majority of merchants and agriculturalists in Singkawang were Chaozhou or Cantonese. Thus there is a wide mix of temples to deities from Chaozhou, Fujian, Cantonese and Hakka regions.⁵

The origins of the Cap Goh Meh festival procession in Singkawang are said to date back to the era of the Lanfang Republic, as an exorcistic response to an epidemic of small-pox (Hertzman 2018: 276). The processions were revived after Independence by the major Boon A Hiong, but were prohibited during the Suharto New Order. Small scale activities revived in 1993, but the larger processions only began in 2001, after the fall of Suharto. In 2008, the organization of the festival and the procession was taken over by the Panitia Cap Goh Meh Committee, with the support of the first Chinese mayor of Singawang. The committee collects donations, registers the spirit mediums and their entourages, and pays out funds to these groups.

Several of the Dayak groups used gamalan music in place of drums and gongs, and carried their own deities in sedan chairs. Nevertheless, their performances were carried out on top of standard issue Chinese spirit medium chairs, where they climb all over the different blades, spikes, and beds of nails embedded in the chairs. They did however add elements related to Dayak culture, such as the beheading of a small dog and the drinking of its blood. At the conclusion of the performance, some of the mediums went one by one to the Chinese deities on display in a former Chinese marketplace to ascertain if their performance was accepted by the gods by casting divination blocks.⁶

⁵ On the conditions of the Chinese minority in Indonesia, see Coppel 1983, 1999, 2006; Davis 2009; Heidhues 2006; Hoon 2006, 2011; Hue 2011; Kuhn 2008; Lindsey 2011; Reid 1997; Sai 2013).

⁶ There is little ethnography available on the Dayaks of Western Kalimantan. Peter Metcalf (2010) argues that ritual differences are used to differentiate “ethnicity” amongst diverse Iban cultures in central Sarawak upriver from Brunei. Peluso (2009) outlines the complex histories and evolving ethnic identities in the region. Most Dayaks in Singkawang soeaj Sakalo (Ba Dameo) or Kanatatubn (Ba-Ahe). In Dutch colonial legal theory, Chinese were “foreign orientals”, Malays were Muslims, and Dayaks were Dayaks. However, mixed children of Chinese and Dayaks were referred to locally as Bantangfan (half Chinese barbarians), a term pronounced as “petompang” or “Pantokng”. This term did not survive the 1990s, when ethnic categories hardened.

As in the case of the Nine Emperor God festival in Krabi studied by Cohen (2012), the procession of the spirit mediums of Singkawang has been decisively influenced by the state, in this case the Bureau of Tourism, which heavily promotes this event and that sent the Minister of Tourism to give a speech to start off the procession in 2018. The Cap Goh Meh procession was launched in 2001, and only a couple hundred spirit-mediums joined the parade. In 2011 there were 410, and in 2012 there were 765 spirit-mediums and over 20,000 spectators (Hertzman 2018: 272). In 2018, there were 1028 spirit mediums and an estimated 30,000 spectators. The night before the Cap Goh Meh spirit medium procession, a series of decorated trucks and floats drove through the streets, showcasing local political leaders, Chinese associations, businesses and cultural themes.

However, the Cap Goh Meh does not involve the mixing of discrete traditions as in the case of the insertion of the worshipping of the city pillar as in Krabi (which involved a formal Thai state religious ritual during which spirit mediums all knelt quietly). The procession in Singkawang has however reached or exceeded a kind of natural limit, as it is now too lengthy to avoid spilling over into Muslim prayers. Thus some kind of change is to be expected in the next iterations of the event.

One element of all the religious festivals mentioned above that deserves special attention is the ubiquity of social media – these are rituals in the age of digital dissemination. The return of the repressed (popular religion and spirit possession) in the age of mediated spectacle suggests that one of the motivating factors in the extreme forms of self-mortification is precisely the power of social media to disseminate shocking images. While Cohen argues that such practices are not likely to attract Western tourists, the reality of tourism in Thailand is that it is increasingly Chinese. In Singkawang, tourists are still primarily Indonesian Chinese. In addition, great numbers of out-migrating former residents of Singkawang return for these festivals. As Hertzman (2018) points out :

“while it is generally understood that participation in Cap Go Meh is decided by the gods who choose that day to come down, possess the bodies of spirit-mediums, and celebrate their annual holiday together, there is now also a new aspect of self-promotion on the part of the spirit- mediums themselves who are increasingly using Cap Go Meh as a time to spread information about their healing services. Among the hundreds of video clips of Cap Go Meh posted on YouTube since around 2007, there are now several promotional videos. One in particular depicts Cong Jau Hin,

a spirit-medium from Singkawang who has a *Pakkung* in Jembatan Lima, a Singkawang Chinese-dominated neighborhood of Jakarta. The video lists the name of the spirit-mediums patron deity, *Thien Shie Fap Thong*, the name, address, and phone number of the *pakkung miao* where this spirit-medium practices and the kinds of conditions and illnesses for which healing may be sought. The video documents his preparations for Cap Go Meh in Singkawang, including his prayers, self-mortifications, and procession atop his bladed palanquin. This video acts like an electronic business card, providing contact information but also visual proof of his spiritual strength and ritual expertise, in the hopes of generating further consultation and healing seekers. This can be seen as a strategy for social mobility, which is part of the system of social reproduction in Singkawang. By turning spirit-medium practice into an enterprise, mediums who market themselves in this way can tap into the values associated with entrepreneurship, which as I have shown, are central to the system of Hakka Singkawang mobilities. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYNKFXPGc9U&index=8&list=PL9B7F74AF90E3AAD1>) (Hertzman 304). Hertzman concludes that “Margaret Chan interprets the spirit-medium parade as an expression of a commitment to Indonesia as the homeland (2009). She argues that the event is wrapped up in inter-ethnic politics, which ultimately affirm a patriotic Chinese Indonesian identity. Hui (2007) argues that people’s involvement in territorial cults with *Dabogong* (Hak. *Thai Pak Kung*) or *Datuk* (Hak. *latok*) deities (represented by the spirit-mediums in the Cap Go Meh ritual and parade) are part of a set of religions practices which “introduce a provisional homeliness into everyday life where estrangement is the condition of existence” (197). (Hertzman 307). Hertzman argues instead that in the Cap Goh Meh it “is not quite a sense of Indonesian patriotism that is being expressed, as Chan has suggested. Neither is it a sense of loss or estrangement, which demands constant refutation or deferment, as Hui has suggested. .. Cap Go Meh, and the other acts of presencing the gods, are moments of articulating a shared ethnic and cultural identity that is territorially bound up in the local landscape. For the majority of local people, this is an expression of their relationship with their hometown. I prefer to view these continual acts of the presencing of gods as expressions of ethnic

identity that help to construct a narrative of autochthony, which as I have argued, is a key aspect of gaining recognition for one's legitimacy to belong in that place. (Hertzman 307-8)

Conclusions:

These cases all require further investigation, but they allow us to see civilizational techniques of the body (in Mauss' sense (Schlanger 2006) that have been transmitted to Southeast Asia – elements of Daoist ritual, networking and spirit possession – entering into new hybrid ritual forms and festivals that create new social effects.

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