

Book review

苏庆华 (Soo Khin Wah) 著《马新华人研究: 苏庆华论文选集》第二卷 *Chinese in Malaysia & Singapore: Selected Essays* (volume II), 雪兰莪: 联营出版(马)有限公司, ISBN: 978-983-01-0431-7, 324页。

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This second volume of selected essays by Soo Khin Wah (the first appeared in 2004) is dedicated to the memory of Professor Wolfgang Franke (1912-2007). The author had been his student at the Department of Chinese Studies of the University of Malaya in the late 1970s. The volume is composed of twelve articles which have been grouped here in two main parts: the first focusing on folk religion and culture presents various case studies, while the second pinpoints a few cultural movements (four articles).

The first part is introduced by a survey of previous studies of the popular religion of the Chinese in Southeast Asia. The author has limited his presentation to the materials in Chinese and in English, so that as regards the Nusantaran world, studies in other European languages (especially Dutch, and French, some of which go back to the 17th and 18th century¹) as well as

1 The oldest description of the Qingyun ting in Malaka (appended with a map of the temple) was made in 1695 by the French traveller François Froger in his *Relation du Premier voyage des Français à la Chine en 1698-1700*, Ms kept at the Library of Ajuda, Lisboa). The printed English version of this travelogue is based on another manuscript and does not include the description of the pagoda.

Indonesian, have been left aside². The following articles deal with various special cults (of Mazu, Yiguan dao, Wufu wangye, Baosheng dadi) as well as with the popularity of a Buddhist monk and a ritual aimed at paying respect to written or printed papers.

The worship of Mazu 妈祖 in relation with the local society and the various sanctuaries in her honor in the main cities of Malaysia is investigated in two in-depth studies, while another piece, based on the author's PhD. thesis (1997), deals with the introduction and roots of a syncretistic religious movement called Yiguan dao (I-Kuan Tao 一贯道 which has been translated as "the pervasive truth, "the consistent path"...). This movement which originates in Southern China was introduced to Taiwan in the in 1970s and to Malaysia (and Indonesia) in 1948. Its success in Malaysia is tremendous and huge sanctuaries have been erected in the main cities of the country. The author notes a new tendency to coordinate at home and abroad the activities of these previously rather autonomous religious communities. The following article reassesses the cult devoted to the five Ongyah (五府王爷) and the *wangkang* procession that was organized in Malacca whenever it was deemed necessary; the author insists on the latest trends. The last case study deals with the worship of Baosheng dadi 保生大帝, "The Great Sovereign Who Protects Life" (real name 吴牵) in Malacca. The deity – said to have been born in 979 and to have died in 1036 – has been worshipped since the Song for his medical prescriptions. The mother sanctuaries which are in his place of birth and his place of death, were founded in 1151 (Qingjiao 青礁) and 1157 (Baijiao 白礁, Tong'an 同安 district, Fujian). The author traces the development of his cult in Malacca with the erecting of a side altar in the Qingyun ting 青云亭 presumably in the last decades of the 18th century,

2 For further references, see inter alia Iem Brown, "Religions of the Chinese in Indonesia", in Leo Suryadinata (ed.), *The Ethnic Chinese in the ASEAN States. Bibliographical Essays*, Singapore, ISEAS, 1989, pp. 97-118.

and subsequently with the founding of a special sanctuary, the Huhai dian 湖海殿, in the 1890s. Brief comparisons are made with Pulau Penang where a temple in honor of Baosheng dadi was reportedly founded in 1886, and also with Taiwan where the cult was introduced in the 1650s. by means of *fen-xiang* 分香 or “division of incense.”³ The author lays the emphasis on the cult as seen from within and concentrates his attention on the managing in the long run of the temple in relation with the local Chinese community. It is worth noting here that a temple to Baosheng dadi already existed in Batavia (present Jakarta) in 1696. It was affiliated to the Qingjiao ciji gong 青礁慈济宫 or Temple of Merciful Salvation of Qingjiao as evidenced by a stele erected in the latter temple by worshippers from Batavia (*Baguo yuanzhu beiji* 吧国缘主碑记) in 1696.⁴

The two last articles are different in nature. One traces the popularity of the Buddhist monk Dao Ji 道济 (1148-1209) and his transformation into a religious cult figure partly thanks to fictional works and even movies which retell his eccentric life. The other concerns a ritual known in Chinese as *jingxi zizhi* 敬惜字纸. It deals with the respect attached to written papers and to the regular ritual practices organized to collect such papers on the roads. Still practiced by the Malaysian Chinese in the 1930s this ritual seems to have completely died out. The author shows that its memory is still kept in some Chinese inscriptions: such as the one dated 1885 engraved on the *huabaolu* 化宝炉 or furnace for the burning of mock money of the Fengshan si 凤山寺 in Taiping (Perak), and the one engraved on a piece of wood kept

3 In this respect, see the article by Kristofer Schipper, “The Cult of Pao-seng Ta-ti and its Spreading to Taiwan – A Case Study of *fen-xiang*,” in E.B. Vermeer (ed.), *Development and Decline of Fukien Province in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, Leiden, New York, Copenhagen & Cologne, 1990, pp. 397-416

4 For a reproduction, a transcript and an English translation of the inscription, see C. Salmon, “Cultural Links between Insulindian Chinese and Fujian as Reflected in Two Late 17th-Century Epigraphs”, *Archipel* 73, 2007, pp. 167-194.

in a temple of Kuching (Sarawak) allegedly founded *ca.* 1870. As a matter of fact, this practice seems to have been very common in the South Seas. It was noticed by the Dutch interpreter W. Young (in office at Padang, West Sumatra from 1879 to 1882), and it was also mentioned in Makassar in an inscription dated 1895.⁵

The second part regroups articles on cultural activities, some of which well rooted in the Chinese past, while others are innovative. The first deals with the renewal of interest within the Chinese world for a collection of aphorisms or maxims composed during the Wanli 万历 era of the Ming by Hong Yingming 洪应明, an eclectic about whom almost nothing is known. The text entitled *Caigen tan* 菜根谭 (literally: “Vegetable root discourses”) is written in so-called parallel style and contains some 360 paragraphs. The author traces the numerous reprints (some well edited and annotated) which have come out in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan during the last two decades, as well as a Chinese-English edition published in Beijing in 2000, and analyses the contents of the book in order to explain its current success.

Two other articles deal with cultural innovations. One presents a movement aimed at developing the recitation of children’s literature, and the founding for this purpose in 1998 in Kuala Lumpur of a Children Literature Recitation Center Malaysia (马来西亚儿童导读推广中心). The other one deals with the new tendency among Malaysian Chinese to create at the international level networks based on their ethno-linguistic origins. The first to start were the Hakkas who in 1974 founded in Taipei a Worldwide federation of Hakkas associations. They were followed by the Chaozhou people who in 1980 launched the first international meeting regrouping representatives of the various Chaozhou associations, and by the Hainanese

5 W. Young, “Processions for written paper at Padang”, *China Review*, X, 1881-1882, pp. 428-431; W. Franke, C. Salmon, A. Siu (eds.), *Chinese Epigraphic Materials in Indonesia*, Singapore, South Seas Society, vol. 3, 1997, pp. 255-256.

who held their first international meeting in 1989 in Singapore, and the following year created a Worldwide Hainanese Internet Centre 世界海南网络中心. It is too early to know if these new kinds of networks will have a real impact on the evolution of these three main diasporic groups.

The fourth and last article traces the efforts made among the Hakkas native to Hepo 河婆, Guangdong but who have settled in Malaysia, to investigate their own history and to create a local cultural life. Attention is focused on the research made by two local scholars: Liu Bokui 刘伯奎 and Zhang Kentang 张肯堂.

All in all, this collection of articles may be of great use to the scholars interested in the way Chinese culture and beliefs are evolving among the Malaysian Chinese but also, on a broad geographic scale, to those interested in making comparison with other Chinese communities of the Nusantaran world.