

Dejiao: A Chinese Religion in Southeast Asia

YOSHIHARA Kazuo

吉原和男

*The Origin of Dejiao*¹

The social upheaval which followed in the wake of World War I gave birth to numerous new religions around the world. The Chinese world was no exception. Many religious organizations arose by modifying and breathing new life into existing religious traditions. Many movements with doctrines attempting to unify all teachings, such as Daoyuan 道院, Tongshanshe 同善社, Wushanshe 悟善社, and Yiguandao 一貫道, arose and spread in and around northern China up to the days of World War II. Some of these new religions were transmitted abroad by overseas Chinese merchants. In this article I will examine one of these relatively unknown new religions, Dejiao 德教, which arose in southern China and was transmitted abroad by overseas Chinese merchants.

Dejiao arose in the Chaozhou 潮州 area of Guangdong (Canton) Province in southern China in 1939, the year of the outbreak of World War II. The central city, Shantou, was a famous trading port and was also well known as one of the important ports of departure for Chinese emigrants bound for Southeast Asia. Many emigrants have spread out from this area since the nineteenth century, building strong commercial networks and merchant guilds, and establishing powerful positions in Thailand, the Malay region,² and Hong Kong.

Soon after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war, three men named Yang Ruide 楊瑞德, Ma Desan 馬德三, and Wang Dezhao 王德藻, after

¹ The romanization of Chinese words follows the Putonghua Pinyin system, except for names which have been incorporated into the English language, e.g. Lao-tzu and Confucius.

² The "Malay region" refers to the area now covered by the contemporary nations of Malaysia and Singapore.

purifying themselves for a month, sought an oracle from the gods by means of their local, traditional religious rites in Chaoyang 潮陽 Prefecture. Two Taoist deities, Liu Chungfang 柳春芳 and Yang Yunsong 楊筠松, responded to a necromantic ritual called *fujū* 扶乩, saying that the three men should establish Dejiao to save the world. The oracle also went on to say that they must provide medical and material assistance to those in the area who suffered from disease and poverty. This kind of charitable activity is continued by the Dejiao organizations even after spreading to areas other than the Chinese mainland.

Fuji, the central religious ritual of Dejiao, can be traced back to the Song period (960–1276), and is said to have been popular among the literati of the Ming and Ch'ing (14th to 20th centuries). It is usually conducted by two men. Each hold one end of a Y-shaped willow branch and hold it over a tray on which has been sprinkled a thin layer of sand or ashes. The branch moves when the men enter a trance, leaving traces on the sand which are read quickly by an "interpreter" and recorded by yet another man. The message given to the men during the trance is called *jūwen* 乩文. Many take the form of a verse. After being written down it is revised and edited into booklets known as *shanshu* 善書, then distributed free of charge. The publication and distribution of these writings is even today one of the main activities of the Dejiao organizations.

After 1940, Dejiao spread throughout the Chaozhou area, growing into twenty-five organizations with over 10,000 families as members. New organizations can still arise based on divine messages to that effect. The first organization founded in Chaoyang Prefecture was named Zi Xiang Ge 紫香閣, followed by organizations such as Zi Qing Ge 紫清閣 and Zi He Ge 紫和閣, all beginning with the character "Zi."

In the fifth month of the lunar calendar, 1944, a willow branch drew a picture of a rooster, signifying that peace was eminent. Members of Dejiao from throughout Chaozhou gathered to proclaim and disseminate Dejiao. At the same time there was an oracle that the Zi Qing Ge and Zi Yang Ge would be the leading groups within Dejiao. In spring of the next year, the members of the Zi Xing Ge received an oracle that their cohorts in Singapore and Thailand awaited their arrival. The year after the end of the war, Chaozhou was hit by a severe drought, and the Zi Deng Ge played a central role in distributing food and medicine. In this way the making of decisions based on the *fujū* oracles and charitable activity in times of trouble are characteristic of Dejiao to this day.

The Spread of Dejiao to Hong Kong, Thailand, and the Malay Region

In 1946 a Dejiao member named Zhang Deze 張德澤 visited Hong Kong and exhibited pictures painted in ink with a willow branch on bambooduring *fuji*. The next year a group of Dejiao members crossed to Hong Kong from Chaozhou and founded the first branch, the Zi Yuan Ge 紫苑閣. Many other branches followed. Later these branches united to form the Hong Kong Dejiao Association. The present structure and activity of this Association, the umbrella organization for all the Dejiao organizations, cannot be confirmed after 1950. There used to be around twenty to thirty organizations belonging to this Association, and one of these, the Zi Xiang Ge, was officially recognized as a limited company under the Hong Kong Company Ordinances in 1962. In 1965 some of the active members of the Zi Xiang Ge broke away and formed the new Zi Jing Ge 紫靖閣, due to differences in opinion over financial matters. The Zi Jing Ge was officially recognized as a limited company in 1969.

The Hong Kong Dejiao Association has not been registered under the Hong Kong Company Ordinances. Most of the leaders of this Association are associated with the Zi Jing Ge, and it appears that the Association ceased all activity after 1969. Records from 1965 and 1966 show that there were fifteen organizations affiliated with the Hong Kong Dejiao Association at that time. Among these were organizations such as the Ci Yun Ge 慈雲閣 and Ci Xin Ge 慈心閣 which have no relations with the Zi Jing Ge.

Thailand was the second country to which Dejiao was transmitted. It was introduced for the first time by a man named Lin Xiuwu 林修悟, a local-born Chinese. He was sent to Chaozhou during his youth in the 1910s for his education, and graduated from college in Guangdong. After World War II he visited Shantou on business, where he became a believer in Dejiao. After returning to Thailand he gathered together a number of friends and organized the Zi Chen Ge 紫辰閣 branch of Dejiao. At the time there were strict controls over Chinese organizations, so *fuji* was conducted at private homes under careful guard. The second branch, the Zi Xuan Ge 紫玄閣, was established by a man named Chen Detai 陳德泰, but later these two branches merged to form the Xuan Chen Shantang 玄辰善堂 in 1953. The mother-in-law of the Thai Prime Minister, Phibun Songkhram, was a supporter of Dejiao, and assisted in officially registering the group as a charitable organization.

The Zi Zhen Ge 紫真閣, a powerful organization in Thailand, was established in 1952. Since it was difficult for all Chinese religious organiza-

tions to be officially recognized by the government, it became affiliated with the Jinfusi 景福寺, a Buddhist temple established by order of Rama III in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Jinfusi is an unusual case in that it is a Mahāyāna temple in a Theravāda country. For this reason it was natural that Chinese were more comfortable there.

The Zi Zhen Ge purchased its own building in 1973, and began publishing the periodical *Ziying chuanzhen* 紫影伝真. The leader, Li Zhimian 李之綿, became a member of Xuan Chen Shantang in 1953. He is an influential businessman, having held posts such as Chief Director of the Rice Exporters Association, Vice Chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and so forth.

The Shi Jue Shantang 世覺善堂, another influential group of the Thai Dejiao, was established in 1961. One of the founders was the father-in-law of General Thanom Kittikachorn, Secretary of State in the Sarit Thanarat cabinet. It was officially recognized, like the Xuan Chen Shantang, as a charitable organization, but its character was completely different than that of the Zi Zhen Ge. Its officially registered purpose, for example, clearly stated its goals:

1. Propagation of Dejiao.
2. Disaster relief work and charitable activity towards the poor.
3. Providing charitable medical care and burial of unclaimed dead.
4. Establishment of clinics, homes for the aged, and cemeteries.
5. Financial support for the administration of schools and providing scholarships.

The Dejiao organizations in Thailand continued the activities which started on the mainland in Chaozhou, along with the use of the general term *shantang* 善堂.³ The Dejiao organizations of Shi Jue Shantang and Xuan Chen Shantang were, among ethnic Chinese in Thailand, second in importance only to the Bao De Shantang 報德善堂 (no relation to Dejiao). In addition to the above-mentioned organizations, there are about forty Dejiao groups in Thailand, with most of the members being Chinese originally from Chaozhou.

³ *Shantang* is a general term for a religious organization involved in charitable activity. The leaders of *shantang* were usually intellectuals, and their role was to express and interpret divine messages and collect these message in booklets for distribution to the community. Most of the members of *shantang* were laymen, but the successfully organized individual *shantang* would often grow into a large religious collective. This growth of sect-like religious organization from shamanistic cult is a characteristic feature in the history of religion in Chinese society, and the tendency can be found today in Taiwan and the ethnic Chinese societies of Southeast Asia. Dejiao is a typical case.

Compared to Dejiao in Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore, the special characteristic of Thai Dejiao is the ranking of the objects of worship. There is a strong awareness that they dwell in a Buddhist country. Usually an image of Śākyamuni is placed in a prominent place on the altar, and at times a special altar is made for Buddhist worship (see Yoshihara, forthcoming).

The first Dejiao organization in the Malay region, the Zi Xin Ge 紫新閣, was established in 1952. Li Huaide 李懷德, the key person in this region, had already established another Dejiao organization, the Zi Yang Ge 紫陽閣 on mainland China in 1944. However, he received an oracle through *fujī* one day in 1946 that he was to transmit Dejiao to Southeast Asia. He eventually emigrated to Singapore and founded the Zi Xin Ge. In 1954 new Dejiao groups sprung up one after the other in the Malay regions of Malacca, Johore, Penang, and Perak. Eight more groups were born in the 1960s, and by 1981 there were at least thirty Dejiao organizations in the Malay region.

In addition to the above-mentioned Dejiao groups, another group of Dejiao began its activity in the Malay peninsula in the 1950s. Most of the Dejiao groups which belong to the general Dejiao league called the Nang-yang Moral Uplifting (Dejiao) General Society 南洋德教總會 have names beginning with the character Zi, but another group, including the Ji De Ge 濟德閣 in Perak, have names beginning with the character Ji. According to Tan Cheebeng (1984), the Ji group of Dejiao does not have its origin in mainland China, not having received incense ashes from there. The founders are from the mainland, but they emphasize the performance of *fujī* as the central ritual, and founded Dejiao in the Malay region. As with the Zi group Dejiao organizations, most of the members are originally from Chaozhou, but there are some groups which have a majority of members from Fujian Province. The central deity for the Ji group is Jigong Huofo 濟公活佛, from whom they get their prefix Ji. The Ji group Dejiao had nine organizations as of 1982. In addition, there are ten organizations affiliated with Zan Hua Ge 贊化閣 of Penang, which was established in 1957, eleven organizations affiliated with the Zhen Yi Ge 振義閣 established in 1966, and some others. These each have different deities as their central objects of worship.

All of the Dejiao groups in Malaysia and Singapore differ in detail with regard to their central deity and the performance of *fujī*, but all agree in emphasizing their claim that the central features of "the world's five great religions" (Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and Islam) are

included in the teachings of Dejjiao. Let us now take a look at the teachings and practices of this movement.

*The Hong Kong Dejjiao, Zi Jing Ge*⁴

Teachings, Rituals, Organization, and Activities

The basic teaching of Dejjiao is abstracted in its name, the “teaching of moral uplifting.” In 1943, along with the founding of the Zi Yang Ge in Chao An, a man named Master Liu Chunfang wrote a book called *Dejjiao Yishi* 德教意識. This book contains the fundamental teachings of Dejjiao, and is used widely among the organizations of Dejjiao in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. There is also another book of almost identical content called *Dejjiao Xu* 德教序, which has its origin in a possession at the Zi Peng Ge 紫蓬閣 of Malaysia in 1957. This work was also published in installments in Hong Kong. The following teachings are emphasized in these works.

“Morals” (德, *de*) consists of ten virtues: filial piety 孝, loyalty 忠, obedience 悌, righteousness 義, propriety 礼, faith 信, wisdom 智, unselfishness 簾, sensibility to shame 恥, and benevolence 仁. The purpose of Dejjiao is to encourage people to uphold these virtues and propagate these ideals throughout the world. It is claimed that the five great world religions have these virtues in common with the Dejjiao. The sympathetic understanding 忠恕 of Confucianism; the compassionate consideration 慈悲 of Buddhism; the virtuousness 貴德 of Taoism; the universal love 博愛 of Christianity; the magnanimity 慈恕 of Islam: all of these virtues are fundamentally the same. Therefore all of these so-called five world religions are but branches of Dejjiao.

The objects of worship in Dejjiao differ somewhat according to organization, but in this article we will concentrate on the Zi Jing Ge of Hong Kong. In this organization, the central altar 祖師殿 celebrates the “founders.” In the center is an image of Lao-tzu, with portraits of Master Liu Chunfang on his right and Master Yang Yungsong on his left. Various folk deities and heroes such as Yu Huang 玉皇 (Guan Di 閻帝; see Watanabe, 1983), Lu Zu 呂祖, Master Hankang Shizun 韓康師尊, and Master Lan Caihe Shizun 藍彩和師尊. On both sides of the central altar are, on the stage right, an altar for Master Dao Ji Shizun 道濟師尊 (or Jigon Huofo), and on the left, an altar for Guang Yin 觀音.

On the walls of the worship hall are portraits of Confucius, Lao-tzu, Śākyamuni, and Christ, and a frame with a moon and star signifying the

⁴ For details on the Zi Jing Ge, see Yoshihara 1978 and 1979.

founder of Islam. Publications of the Zi Jing Ge list a number of deities, buddhas, and religious founders as objects of worship. Usually Guan Di is primary, followed by Lao-tzu, Confucius, Śākyamuni, Guang Yin (Avalokiteśvara), Jesus, and Mohammed. Guang Ping 闕平, the son of Guan Di, is one of the most popular religious figures, and he is an important figure in Dejjiao. He has appeared in a possession in the early twentieth century and has played an important role in the so-called "revival" of Dejjiao.⁵ Lu Zu is one of the most popular figures in Hong Kong. He often appears in Dejjiao possessions. The deity Hua Tuo Shizun 華陀師尊 cures disease and Yang Yunsong provides relief from poverty. Master Liu Chunfang was a T'ang dynasty scholar and is honored as a virtuous man. Hankang Shizun is another folk deity. Chi Xon Shizun 赤松師尊 is particularly famous in Hong Kong as a beneficial deity. Tien Hou Shizun 天后師尊 is a famous goddess who offers protection on the high seas. Master Song Dafeng 宋大峯, a Song dynasty monk and cultural hero of Chao Yang Prefecture, is honored for his contributions to social welfare. Finally, there is Master Dao Ji, who is remembered for his many miracles. The *fuji* is performed in front of the altar of Dao Ji.

As for the rituals of Dejjiao, the birth dates of various deities and founders are celebrated nineteen times a year. There are also two major celebrations, the spring festival on the twentieth day of the second month, and the autumn festival at the beginning of the eighth month. In both cases the members gather to perform ceremonies honoring the family ancestors. Memorial tablets are set up in the hall of the Zi Jing Ge. New Years and the Yulan Fahui 盂蘭法会 (Hungry Ghosts Festival) are celebrated as annual events. Buddhist priests are invited to perform Yulan Fahui. These events follow the customs of Chinese society, and all follow the traditional lunar calendar.

The ritual on the birth dates of deities or founders is called Daji Lijie 大祭礼節. The participants gather in front of the main altar in the worship hall by eight o'clock in the evening, with the leaders in the front row. The participants then chant the *Dejjiao Xindian* 德教心典 three times. This scripture explains the virtues which are at the heart of the Dejjiao faith. Then praises of the figure whose birth is being celebrated are read from a document (天表, *tianpiao*), which is then burnt in the fire. Next five offerings of vegetarian foods, sweets, flowers, wine, and tea⁶ are offered. The Chaozhou dialect is used throughout the ceremony. The ritual is per-

⁵ It is believed by members of Dejjiao that Dejjiao has existed since the beginning of time, and the appearance of Dejjiao in the twentieth century is a "revival" of this timeless teaching.

⁶ The tea offered is the unique Chaozhou tea.

formed by the leaders of the organization, all lay people. Buddhist priests participate only in the aforementioned Yuelan ceremony. There are no ceremonies which require the presence of Taoist priests.

The Shouwang Lijie 朔望礼節 is performed on the first and fifteenth days of the month and consists of the same ritual as the Daji Lijie, except for the chanting and reading of the *tianpiao*, and after the ritual a possession is performed at the *fujū* altar. The *fujū* is performed by mediums (*jizhang* 乩掌) who enter a trance and draw characters with a Y-shaped willow branch on a tray covered with sand. These marks are interpreted and read out loud by a reader (*changdu* 唱誦), and this is written down by a recorder (*luwen* 録文). There are two mediums, the primary medium and his assistant. The assistant holds the right side of the Y-shaped branch, merely supporting the activity of the primary medium who is possessed in a trance by the deity and moves the branch with quick movements. It goes without saying that this state of trance/possession is the explanation offered by those involved, but the author has personally witnessed mediums experiencing this trance state. This ritual is performed standing up, and the medium often collapses in the midst of its execution. This could be called a type of shamanism.

The Y-shaped branch sometimes has a brush attached to its end, with which poems can be written on paper.

The purpose for conducting a *fujū* can be classified as follows: 1) to gain suggestions or oracles for solving problems extended by individual believers; 2) to gain a message from the deities for the members in general; 3) to receive directions from the deities concerning the policy and activities of the organization, or to receive final approval of decisions made by the board of directors.

The message is given in either prose or poetic form. Since the message is considered to express the will of the deities, the letters copied from the sand are carefully rechecked by the medium as it is read out loud by the recorder. The divine messages, in whatever form or content, are carefully proofread by certain leaders. These messages are distributed to the members in mimeograph form a few days later. They are then gathered together, printed in booklets, and distributed to members and non-members alike as *shanshu*. Variant types of *fujū* use a brush attached to the end of the branch and 1) paint with black ink, 2) produce amulets for members by marking with red ink on yellow paper printed with spells; 3) identify diseased areas by marking the body with dots or circles using red ink; and 4) confer spiritual power by marking the body with red ink. These actions are taken by the medium while he is possessed by deities. As in previously mentioned rituals, the

Chaozhou dialect is used exclusively for the ritual.

Participants number from thirty to fifty members, with women making up about 20% of the group. As for age groups, those in their fifties and sixties are most common, followed by those in their forties and thirties. There are also quite a number of younger participants, many of whom cannot freely understand the Chaozhou dialect.

On the occasion of these ceremonies, besides the rituals already mentioned the participants individually may perform various popular fortune telling techniques, such as *mubei* 木杯 and *qian* 籤, and worship at various altars situated within the sanctuary, and ancestral tablets placed by the members at the Bao Peng Tang 報本堂.

Let us now examine the organizational structure and activities of the Zi Jing Ge. The eight formal organizers who first registered the Zi Jing Ge as a Limited Company in January of 1969 all listed their occupation as businessmen. The structure of the organization as of September 1977 consisted of one President, four vice-Presidents, and one person each in charge of the departments of General Affairs, Financial Affairs, Organization, Propagation and Religious Rituals, Medical Services, Education, Welfare, Public Relations, Archives, Auditing, and Women. Each department has an assistant director. These people make up the cabinet. There are also fifteen permanent honorary Presidents, six temporary honorary Presidents (who serve only during the term of the current cabinet), ten permanent honorary advisers, four temporary honorary advisers, and eight candidates for the post of director. This large number of honorary posts is quite significant, and will be discussed again later.

The term of office for the cabinet is two years. Candidates are chosen by the Electoral Committee and passed by the General Assembly. However, the honorary posts are separate, being recommended and appointed by a special committee from among either members of the Zi Jing Ge or non-members. Clause 15 of the registered regulations defines the qualifications for honorary posts as the elders of the Dejiao, or people who have made contributions to social welfare. The first type is not limited to members of Zi Jing Ge, but may be members of other Dejiao organizations, and there are many such honorary post holders. The second type, put simply, consists of those who make major monetary contributions to the social welfare activities of Zi Jing Ge. According to the regulations, the number of honorary post holders is not defined, and during the terms of the first and second cabinet, there were no actual post holders. The first appointment to an honorary post was made during the term of the third cabinet in 1973.

An application for membership is required to join the organization.

Qualifications include being an upright citizen between eighteen and sixty years of age, without regard to nationality or sex, who will have faith in and worship the deities of Zi Jing Ge. There are no restrictions as to place of origin or dialect. However, the actual members, including those with honorary posts, are almost all of Chaozhou descent.

The social activities of Zi Jing Ge are based on their teachings. First, they provide free medical services such as diagnosis by traditional Chinese physicians and provide simple treatment and medications. Except for holidays, two part-time physicians alternately provide medical attention for three hours in the afternoon. Most of the patients are people who live in the neighborhood of the Zi Jing Ge facility. The number of visits by patients during the one month period of November 1977 totalled 302. Most of the patients, and the two physicians, are of Chaozhou descent, and most of the medications are imported from Chaozhou of mainland China.

Second, the Zi Jing Ge contributes emergency funds and materials in times of disaster, and is also involved in providing clothing and bedding for the poor in winter time. The financial report for 1975 showed disaster relief provided six times, rain damage relief once, as well as providing 1,020 rolls of bedding and clothing, and HK\$12,000 in cash for the poor and homeless (*Huaqiao Daily News* 華僑日報, July 1975–June 1976). Funding for these activities, according to the financial report, were all paid for out of special donations for charity, and offerings made during various ceremonies.

Dejiao in the Chaozhou Community of Hong Kong.

The Zi Jing Ge is located in Xiyingpam, in the northwestern part of Hong Kong island. This area was economically developed relatively early, and has been the home of many Chaozhou merchants. Many Chaozhou associations are located here. Here is a row of Chaozhou businesses which import rice from Thailand, an enterprise dominated by Chaozhou merchants. Wholesalers dealing in herbs, tea, and seafood products from the mainland are concentrated in this area. The Zi Jing Ge facilities are located on the fifteenth floor and roof of a skyscraper within this commercial zone. As with other areas of Hong Kong, the area is made up of people of various dialects, but the percentage of people from Chaozhou is relatively high.⁷

⁷ According to the 1971 census, the main language for daily life in this area is Cantonese 55.1%, Chaozhou dialect 18.9%, Sezya 16.5%, and other Chinese dialects 8.8% (total 99.3%). The average percentages for Hong Kong as a whole are: Cantonese 88.1%, Chaozhou 4.2%, Sezya 1.2%, and other Chinese 5.0% (total 98.5%).

The main structural organization for the Chaozhou ethnic group in Hong Kong is the Hong Kong Chaozhou Commercial Association 香港潮州商会. The trading activity of Chaozhou merchants was brisk even before the ceding of Hong Kong through the Treaty of Nanking in 1842. The Chaozhou merchants were actively involved in the trade between mainland China and southeast Asian countries.

The people with the most influence in the Chaozhou community are the businessmen. However, there are also many other kinds of organizations. First, the local organizations of Chinese of Chaozhou descent in Hong Kong, Kowloon, and the New Territories. Second, the regional associations based on one's prefecture of origin. Third, guilds of those involved in the same line of work, such as commercial guilds. Fourth, religious or cultural organizations. Many of these are organized for the purpose of celebrating the Yue lan festivals. Other organizations provide funeral services. Dejiao organizations belong to this fourth category.

There are many Protestant Christian churches in Hong Kong. The Baptists in particular have many churches which are specifically organized for the Chaozhou community. The only officially recognized private university is the Hong Kong Baptist College affiliated with the Chaozhou community. In this way the Chaozhou people tend to remain cohesive and form ethnic organizations, whether it be of a religious, commercial, or cultural nature. Dejiao is an example of a religious organization which reflects this tendency.

What, then, is the role which Zi Jing Ge itself as a religious organization plays in the Chaozhou community? In other words, for Dejiao members who are mostly of Chaozhou descent, what significance does the existence and activity of this organization have?

Zi Jing Ge consists of two types of believers: the central leadership group consisting of the members of the cabinet and the holders of honorary posts, and the ordinary members. The first group is made up mostly of influential Chaozhou businessmen. They are well known in many areas of the Chaozhou community. Some of the members of the cabinet also serve as board members of the above-mentioned local, regional, and commercial associations. The fourth cabinet was made up of thirty-five members, of which eight were owners of their own companies, and twenty-two store owners. Two of the holders of honorary posts were appointed during this time as Justice of the Peace 太平紳士.⁸ This title is conferred only to those

⁸ According to the 1977 *Annual Directory of Hong Kong*, there were 309 Chinese with the title "Justice of the Peace" in that year.

who have contributed greatly to their local community and social welfare. Many people who want to attain an honorary post or high ranking position make large contributions to this kind of organization. Generally an honorary post can be gained even through such donations, and it is clearly spelled out in the regulations of these organizations that the level of such appointments is determined by the amount of the donation. The reason for the large number of honorary posts in the Zi Jing Ge is very clear.

In addition, the Tax Law in Hong Kong was revised in 1971-1972 so that donations to charities from HK\$100 up to 10% of one's income (or total profits in the case of a company) can be deducted for tax purposes. This tax deduction came into effect during the term of the second cabinet of the Zi Jing Ge, during which there were no persons filling an honorary post. After this time, however, thirty new post holders appeared. The conclusions that can be drawn from this fact are clear.

Some members of the cabinet and holders of honorary posts are in fact constituent members of the Zi Jing Ge, but they are concerned mainly with the administration of the organization and they do not present a complete picture of Dejjiao. The involvement of such leaders is different from the faithful participation by the ordinary members in the religious ceremonies of the organization. The attainment of prestigious posts through large donations is but one aspect of Zi Jing Ge as a lay organization.

What are the reasons for people, including members of the cabinet, to join in the religious ceremonies of the Dejjiao organization? Let us examine the background to these lay organizations in the Chaozhou community.

The fact that maintaining tradition is a very strong force in the consciousness and attitude of the Chaozhou people is clearly shown in the following examples. First, the Hungry Ghost Festival is considered very important in the Chaozhou community. During this season (the seventh month of the lunar calendar) distinctive events are performed with great festivity in the Chaozhou community. Special organizations (mentioned above) are set up for this occasion. Other ethnic communities have fewer such organizations, and the Chaozhou celebrations of the Hungry Ghost Festival is of the largest scale in Hong Kong. Many Chaozhou companies and organizations, from the Chaozhou Commercial Association on down, support the maintenance and preservation of the Chaozhou opera, which is performed during the Hungry Ghost Festival.

The Dejjiao Zi Jing Ge also reflects this tendency of the Chaozhou community, in its *fujū* ritual. The calligraphy and pictures attained through *fujū* are, compared to other rituals, particularly appealing to the participants. They are zealous in their interpretation of these calligraphs and pictures,

and in discovering their religious meaning. The messages in sand or on paper may be in either poetic or prose form, but few contain a direct and concrete meaning. The interpretation is therefore another important aspect of the *fuji* ritual. The interpretation of the message requires considerable literary acumen and a profound knowledge of the Chaozhou cultural heritage. However, the sometimes difficult and complicated nature of these messages does not seem to bother the participants. Once when I observed one of the regular ceremonies (celebrated on the first and fifteenth of each month) and asked about the interpretation of one of these messages, the answer, in addition to the literary explanation of the words and phrases themselves, included a much broader interpretation of the divine message. This was not merely for my benefit as a foreign observer, but was a service offered also to newcomers of Chaozhou descent who were potential members.

The following conclusions can be drawn from these observations. Dejjiao is a religious organization which originated in Chaozhou and has been supported by the Chaozhou people. To join is to actively participate in the Chaozhou community. Through this the members can expand and make more intimate, through the mediation of the deities, their human relations within the Chaozhou community. The site for the performance of religious ceremonies is also a place for businessmen to exchange information. People of different background and social class can meet on common ground as Dejjiao believers. The strong cohesion of the Chaozhou ethnic group may be reflected in this religious organization, and this in turn may act to strengthen the ethnic cohesion of the community.

However, there is an even more important point, i.e. the place of an ethnic group within the Chinese community, and of the Chinese community in multi-ethnic societies (such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand). The example of the Hong Kong Dejjiao Zi Jing Ge suggests that the ceremonies conducted by Dejjiao succeed in transmitting the traditional culture and customs of Chaozhou. In addition the common use of the Chaozhou dialect within Zi Jing Ge reconfirms and strengthens their cultural identity as Chaozhou descendants, and also as ethnic Chinese. In fact most of the members of the Zi Jing Ge have the Chaozhou dialect as their mother tongue, and they still form the core of the organization.

The Sarawak Dejjiao, Zi Xia Ge

The Dejjiao Zi Xia Ge 紫霞閣 established in 1961 in Kuching, the provincial capital of Sarawak, Malaysia, is an officially registered organization. Es-

essentially it is a religious organization, like other Dejiào organizations, but the provincial government recognizes it as a charitable organization.

Chen Zhishan 陳芝珊,⁹ currently an honorary adviser, had visited the Zi Xin Ge of Singapore in the summer of 1960 and participated in a *fúji* ceremony. The deities which descended at that time were Song Dafeng, a Buddhist monk who is fervently worshiped by people of Chaozhou, and Lu Zu, a folk deity. These deities gave a message to Chen that he should establish the Zi Xia Ge in Sarawak in order to propagate Dejiào.

This was not the first time Chen had witnessed a *fúji*. A number of *shantang* in his home town had practiced *fúji*. He recalls that charitable activity and fortune telling to find lost objects were performed there.

In April of 1961, eleven Chaozhou businessmen gathered around Chen to prepare for registering the organization. Local supporters and Dejiào organizations from around the Malay region provided financial assistance to purchase a building which would serve as his headquarters. The number of members at that time was about three hundred.

In 1962, it was decided to build new facilities based on a divine message. The dedication ceremony was performed in 1964, and many influential members of the Chinese community of Sarawak, including the directors of the Kuching Chaozhou Association, were invited. Departments of Medical Services, Welfare, and Recreation were established from the beginning, and they began to provide free medical diagnosis by traditional Chinese physicians, medications, support for people in mourning, charitable activity, scholarships, and so forth for people in general. They also ran the Chaozhou opera group and sponsored charity shows. The ancestral hall (named Xian De Tang 顯德堂) was built in 1968 to enshrine the family ancestral tablets of the members, and perform the biannual spring and autumn festivals. These ceremonies are conducted in the traditional style.

Teachings, Rituals, Organization, and Activities¹⁰

The teachings, scriptures, and rituals of the Sarawak Dejiào Zi Xia Ge are very similar to the other Dejiào organizations of the Zi group. The fundamental teachings are to practice the ten virtues (filial piety, loyalty, obedience, righteousness, propriety, faith, wisdom, unselfishness, sensibility to shame, and benevolence), follow the divine messages given by the

⁹ Chen had left his home village in Chaoan prefecture in 1941 at the age of twenty-six, passing through Shantou and Singapore before settling in Kuching. His elder sister's family had a business in Kuching, and they helped him settle down.

¹⁰ I would like to acknowledge here advice received from Professor Kubo Noritada concerning deities in Taoism and Chinese folk religion.

various deities worshiped in Dejjiao, and keep the regulations and volunteer to assist in the activities of the organization. Syncretism is the characteristic feature of their teachings, which is based on the idea that all teachings are fundamentally unified.

The *Dejjiao Yishi*, said to have been written in the mainland, has an introduction given by Master Liu Chunfang in 1944 through a divine message. It adds Islam and Christianity to the three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism as the five religions whose basic teachings are included in Dejjiao. However, the clarification and emphasis on this type of teaching is introduced rather late in the history of Dejjiao. It is first seen around the time of the establishment of the Nanyang Moral Uplifting General Society in Singapore in 1957. The documents showing the teachings of Dejjiao before it expanded beyond mainland China show that, even if the idea of the unity of the five teachings was there, it had not been concretized or much emphasized. As far as I can tell, the first occasion for displaying and worshiping the portraits of the “founders of the five great teachings” in all Dejjiao facilities was decided by the planning committee for the Nanyang Moral Uplifting General Society at the Zi Ming Ge 紫明閣 in Perak, Malaysia, in October of 1956 (see Nanyang Moral Uplifting General Society 1959, p. 82).

As for rituals, the Zi Shu Ge 紫書閣 of Johore published a list of events in 1961. The birth dates of Christ and Mohammed are included in this list, whereas I have not found any publications by other Dejjiao organizations before this date which include rituals concerning these two teachings. It is significant that the intent to pay respect to Islam and Christianity coincides with the date from which Dejjiao was to be propagated throughout the Malay region:

The objects of worship in Dejjiao are, according to their own publication (Zi Xia Ge, 1976), Guan Di, Lao-tzu, Confucius, Śākyamuni. These are followed by Mohammed and Jesus Christ. However, these last two figures are merely listed in the publications and have their portraits included among those hung in the worship hall, and none of their symbols or pictures are included on the altars.

There are many more objects of worship in addition to these “founders of the five great teachings,” but they differ between organizations. In the case of the Zi Xia Ge of Sarawak, Lu Zu, Hua Tuo, and Song Dafeng are prominent. However, the figures enshrined on the altar itself are, in the center, a portrait of Lao-tzu, Liu Chunfang, and Yang Yunsong, surrounded by portraits of eight immortals. Thus among the objects of worship the “Taoist” element, in a wide sense, is very strong. The fact that the

actual objects of worship lean heavily toward the popular Taoist deities reflect the fact that it is these deities which most often possess people during *fuji*.

Dejiao maintains the character of a *shantang*, and thus founders are not deified nor considered to have charismatic spiritual powers, and the historical founder of this organization is not elevated to a position of an object of worship, nor does he come to wield absolute administrative power.

Dejiao rituals include the annual celebrations of the birth dates of various deities, including that of Mohammed in August and Jesus Christ in December. At the Zi Xia Ge there are twenty-six annual celebrations of birth dates of various deities (see Yoshihara 1982, pp. 96-98). These deities include popular Taoist and Buddhist deities, and also such figures as the Buddhist monk Song Dafeng from the Chaozhou area. On each occasion a *fuji* is performed. *Fuji* is also performed on the first and fifteenth day of each month of the lunar calendar. The general pattern for this birth date celebration is as follows.

Usually the ceremony begins at eight o'clock in the evening. The President and a number of leaders line up in front of the central altar, and the rest of the participants line up in rows behind them. Incense is offered, and then the *Dejiao Xindian* scripture is chanted three times in the Chaozhou dialect. Five offerings are made, such as tea, flowers, wine, and fruit. Then the praises of the deity whose birth date is being celebrated is offered. Finally all the participants perform a ritual of triple kneeling with nine bows.

Until 1966 a *fuji* would be performed after a brief rest. However, in this year the board of directors decided to abolish all *fuji*. The reason, according to a certain director, was that the organization was already firmly established in Sarawak, and there was no reason to continue to attract people by performing superstitious rituals such as *fuji*. However, the real reason for this decision was that it was determined that such superstitious rituals went against the educational policy of the province. *Fuji* is not performed any more by this organization, but it remains a fact that this ritual and the divine messages received through it were an extremely important aspect of Dejiao. After 1966, *fuji* has not been performed at Zi Xia Ge, but other Dejiao organizations continue to perform *fuji* and distribute the pamphlets containing the divine messages thus obtained.

According to the regulations registered with the provincial government, this organization is structured as follows. The highest authority lies with the General Assembly, which elects thirty-one members as the Board of Directors and Board of Auditors. The Board of Directors consists of a President (one), Vice-Presidents (four), and directors and assistant directors of

the Departments of General Affairs, Financial Affairs, Chinese Archives, English Archives, Communications and Public Relations, Welfare, Medical Services, Education, Propagation and Religious Rituals, Recreation, and Assistant General Affairs. In addition there are two deputy directors. The Board of Auditors consists of seven people. Also, there are two advisers appointed by divine message through *fujī*. There are also many honorary directors who are not members of Dejjiao. Honorary presidents include the Prime Minister of the state of Sarawak (not ethnic Chinese), the Deputy Prime Minister and Representatives (ethnic Chinese), for a total of forty-one influential political figures. There are also seventy-four honorary presidents (influential members of other Dejjiao organizations) from Singapore and Malaysia. Eight honorary advisers have been appointed from within Sarawak, including the former Chairman of the Chaozhou Association and influential businessmen. Ten honorary advisers have been appointed from among influential members of other Dejjiao organizations in Singapore and Malaysia. These include Ma Guide 馬貴德 who founded Dejjiao in Chaozhou, and Chen Lijian 陳立健 who helped established the Dejjiao Zi Xia Ge in Sarawak.¹¹

Of these many honorary positions, all except the provincial Prime Minister are ethnic Chinese. Most of them are influential and well-known figures. Their connection with Dejjiao reflects the status of Dejjiao within the Chinese community in Sarawak and the Malay region, and suggests the position of this Dejjiao organization with regard to the society in which it exists. These honorary positions are usually filled with people who have made large donations to the Dejjiao organization.

The term for directors is one year, with the possibility of renewal. The President, for example, was the same person from the first term (1961) to the twelfth term (1973), and another person from the thirteenth term (1976) to the twentieth term (1980). The place of birth, or patrilineal place of origin, for the directors, in 1980, was Chaozhou for twenty-seven out of a total of thirty-eight. Even those who are not originally from Chaozhou can understand the Chaozhou dialect. Seventy-one percent of the directors are of Chou Zhou descent, about the same percentage as for the ordinary members.

The financial base of the Zi Xia Ge is supported by, first, the new members' admission fees (M\$20), annual membership fees (M\$12), and fees for the use of the ancestral hall; second, donations; and third, income from performances by the Chaozhou opera group. The directors, physicians,

¹¹ These figures represent the officers in 1976.

and pharmacists serve without pay, and members volunteer their services by helping with the social activities of the organization.

The major activity of the Welfare Department is to administer the funds for disaster relief, provide expenses for those involved in conducting funerals, and pay for the rental of ceremonial instruments and hearses. The beneficiaries of this charitable work can be either Dejjiao members or non-members. The Zi Xia Ge has preserved musical instruments for performing traditional Chinese ceremonial music for religious rituals which has been handed down for centuries in Chaozhou. These are used for funeral ceremonies. There are forty-five members in the Welfare Department, who provide these service as needed without remuneration.

The Department of Medical Services is as important as the Department of Welfare. Diagnosis and simple treatment, and dispensing of medicine, is provided by a Chinese physician six days a week. These services are provided for everyone, not just ethnic Chinese, and in fact many patients are not ethnic Chinese. In 1976 there were 5,518 visits by adults and 930 visits by children, with 17,949 dispensing of medicines (for a total value of M\$14,800).

The activity of the Department of Education began in 1974, providing scholarships to elementary, Junior High, and Senior High students in public and private schools (one student annually for each school). In 1976 ninety-one students received such scholarships without regard to race or nationality.

The Department of Recreation sponsors the Chaozhou opera, which performs plays with a Confucian moral. The goal in supporting these performances is to maintain Chaozhou performing arts and promote moral virtues. This group also performs charity shows to raise funds for homes for the aged. Since 1974, however, a shortage of active members brought an end to this opera group, and at the present time a professional group is invited to perform. Another activity by this Department is promoting friendly relations through sports, such as in the formation of a ping pong club which participates in various meets. The ping pong and basketball courts in the Zi Xia Ge are open to the public.

Observations on Dejjiao and the Sarawak Ethnic Chinese

So far I have not defined the difference between "overseas Chinese" (*huaqiao* 華僑) and "ethnic Chinese" (*huaren* 華人). The character *qiao* means "temporary dwelling," implying that these people will eventually return to mainland China. Therefore this term is not suitable for the cur-

rent situation in Southeast Asian countries.¹²

In China the Communist party has come to power, which along with other economic and social factors led many residents of these Southeast Asian countries to acquire local citizenship rather than returning to the mainland. The second and third generation of these immigrants cannot be properly described as "overseas Chinese." People who are of Chinese ancestry, and preserve the language and social customs of Chinese tradition, are best described as "ethnic Chinese."

In the case of Sarawak, the ratio of ethnic Chinese is higher than in western Malaysia. The role of the ethnic Chinese in the development of this area is also more recognized (Tien 1953, Chin 1981). The ethnic Chinese community of Sarawak should be characterized as a "residual China" (Skinner 1979, p. xiv; Kani 1986, p. 161)¹³ and is an ethnic community in a multi-ethnic nation. Through an examination of Dejiao, in which most of the members are ethnic Chinese of Chaozhou descent, one can observe what strategy of adaptation was followed when a religious organization was transplanted to a different social and cultural environment.

The most powerful organization in the Sarawak Chaozhou community is the Kuching Chaozhou Association, which was founded more than one hundred and twenty years ago. There are also regional associations of groups according to place of origin, clansmen associations of those who share the same family name, and guild-like associations, with a similar structure as other dialect communities.

The social cohesion of the Chaozhou community is very strong compared to other dialect groups. Their economic wealth, as seen in the Chaozhou Association, allows them to keep and maintain the traditional culture of Chaozhou. There is a great concern for preserving Chinese traditions and regional cultural heritage among ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, but this tendency is particularly evident in Sarawak of eastern Malaysia due to the strong sense of, and pride in, ethnic identity based on the relatively large contribution by ethnic Chinese in the economic development of Sarawak.

The strong concern for cultural identity in the Sarawak ethnic Chinese community in general, and especially the Chaozhou community, is reflected in the Dejiao Zi Xia Ge as a lay organization. That is, the people who

¹² In Singapore the term "Singaporean" is used to emphasize the transcendence of ethnicity by the people of this nation.

¹³ According to Skinner, Freedman characterizes Hong Kong and Taiwan in this way. Kani includes the ethnic Chinese communities of Southeast Asia and Macau in this characterization.

become members and participate in Dejiao ceremonies are reconfirming their own ethnic identity while deepening their social relations with people of the same cultural background and also widening the scope of their personal associations.

These kinds of functions are of course not limited to religious organizations, but the psychological dimension which is created through sharing a common faith cannot be ignored. This emphasis on and maintenance of Chinese culture can easily lead to misunderstanding and friction in a multi-ethnic nation. In response, the universal nature of its teachings is often emphasized, and its charitable activities are not limited to ethnic Chinese, in an attempt to transcend ethnicity and appeal to the wider public. In fact, the Zi Xia Ge has received certificates of commendation from the Sarawak provincial government recognizing its charitable activities. The charitable activities such as providing medical services, scholarships, and disaster relief, which were part of Dejiao from its very beginning,¹⁴ play a significant role in the attempt of this ethnic Chinese religious organization to avoid confrontation and make a contribution to their local society within the context of a multi-ethnic nation.

Dejiao perpetuates this aspect of the *shantang* through its charitable activities. These activities are welcomed not only by those of Chao Zhou descent and ethnic Chinese in general, but also by people of all races and ethnic groups.

As I have mentioned above, since the 1960s some Dejiao organizations have tried to change their image through doctrinal shifts in order to break out of a limited ethnic position. They have used symbols from Islam, the state religion of Malaysia, and from Christianity, which claims a large number of followers among the Dayaks of Sarawak. Since an image of Mohammed is taboo, Arabian letters, the moon, and a star are used as symbols in place of a portrait, and place within the worship hall along with the portraits of the founders of the other "four great religions." However, the fact that the symbols of these two religions are not included at all among the objects on the altars shows that for Dejiao the partial inclusion of Christian

¹⁴ Dejiao, as mentioned above, originally took the form of a *shantang*. The ideology and activity of *shantang* are based on the scriptural *shanshu* which were popular in the Ming and Ching periods, such as the *Taishang Ganying Bian*, *Wenchang Dijun Yinzhi Wen*, and *Gongguo Ge*. The divine messages gained through *fujī* were also published and distributed by local *shantang* and called *shanshu*. These *shanshu* teach that by accumulating virtue through secretly performing good deeds, one can attain good fruits in this present world. "Accumulating virtue" means, concretely, the support of the publication and distribution of *shanshu* by giving donations.

and Islamic symbols are merely convenient ways to emphasize the claim to the universality of their doctrine.

This point is clarified if one compares this situation to that of Dejjiao in Thailand. Buddhism is the major religion in Thailand, and the Dejjiao of Thailand places great emphasis on the image of Śākyamuni. Until recently Christian and Islamic symbols were not to be seen. In fact, symbols of these two religions first appeared in the commentary on the *Dejjiao Xindian* 德教心典 积義 published by the Zi Zhen Ge in 1983.

The claim to universality in its doctrine and charitable activity have been a part of Dejjiao since its foundation on mainland China. However, it is also true that these aspects were an important part of the development of Dejjiao in new social and cultural environments. On the other hand, the *fujī* ritual which should be of fundamental importance in Dejjiao, has in some cases even been put to an end in response to the modernization policy of the provincial government. This must have been a painful adjustment which was accompanied by much psychological resistance.

The Dejjiao Zi Xia Ge of Sarawak, like other Dejjiao organizations, have adopted the portraits of the five great religious founders to emphasize the universality of Dejjiao. Nevertheless the objects of worship enshrined on the altars are all deities and figures with Taoistic and folk religious features. The central identity of Dejjiao has thus not been greatly changed by the introduction of Islamic and Christian elements. Also, the aspects lost through abandoning *fujī* are supplemented by the *shanshu* which are received from other Dejjiao organizations, and so there has not been a great shift in the identity of Dejjiao. These sorts of adaptations are necessary for Dejjiao Zi Xia Ge to continue and develop.

On the one hand, Dejjiao has clarified and made explicit one of its original aspects, that is the universal nature of its doctrine, by introducing the Christian and Islamic symbols. On the other hand, though it required a painful psychological adjustment, an important original element (*fujī*) has been discarded. However, the identity of Dejjiao has not been conclusively lost, and Dejjiao continues to serve as a way for ethnic Chinese, especially those of Chaozhou descent, to maintain and reconfirm their ethnic identity.

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