

A *Danggi* Temple in Taipei: Spirit-Mediums in Modern Urban Taiwan

D*anggi* 童乩 (*tongji* in Mandarin; also expressed as *jitong* 乩童) is the Taiwanese term for a type of spirit medium who serves as mouthpiece for the deity that possesses him or her.¹ The etymologic origin of the term is still in debate, especially that of the character 童. The conventional meaning of this character as “lad,” or “child” seems to be an accurate rendition. In classical times, youngsters performed exorcist rituals; and records from Song times show that ritual masters (*fashi* 法師) often employed adolescent males (referred to as 童子 in the sources) to be the mouthpieces of spirits in order to communicate with the other world.² However, as Lin Fushi 林富士 contends, the rendering “lad/child” is not appropriate in the case of *danggi*, for they are mostly adults.³ In addition, linguists have pointed out that the phoneme *dang* is used in more than one Austroasiatic language in words that refer to shamans or the phenomena of spirit possession.⁴ It is probable that the

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¹ Liu Zhiwan 劉枝萬 asserts that *danggi* is a designation for male shamans, and the female shamans were called *wangyi* 尪姨; see *Taiwan no Dōkyō to minkan shinkō* 台灣的 道教と民間信仰 (Tokyo: Fukyosha, 1994), p. 146. Yet, the differences between *wangyi* and *danggi* evidently go beyond gender as demonstrated in Liu Zhiwan's own accounts of their performances. Scholars have long been aware of the existence of female *danggi* who are differentiated from *wangyi* (e.g., Suzuki Seiichirō 鈴木清一郎, *Taiwan kyūkan kankonsōsai nenjū gyōji* 臺灣舊慣冠婚喪祭年中行事 (Taipei: Rixin baoshe, 1934), p. 90, and Li Yih-yuan 李亦園, “Shizhen shijia hua jitong” 是真是假話童乩, in *Xinyang yu wenhua* 信仰與文化 (Taipei: Juliu tushu gongsi, 1978), pp. 101–66 (first published in *Zhongguo luntan* 中國論壇 3.12 [1979], pp. 25–29). Yet, it is Cai Peiru 蔡佩如 who really made a point of differentiating female *danggi* from *wangyi*, see her *Chuansuo tianren zhiji de nüren, nü jitong de xingbie tezhe yu shenti yihan* 穿梭天人之際的女人童乩的性別特質與身體意涵 (Taipei: Tangshan chubanshe, 2001), pp. 15–19.

² See, for example, Edward L. Davis, *Society and the Supernatural in Song China* (Honolulu: U. of Hawai'i P., 2001).

³ Lin Fushi 林富士, *Guhun yu guixiong de shijie* 孤魂與鬼雄的世界 (Taipei County: Beixian wenhua chubanshe, 1995), pp. 159–64.

⁴ See Jerry Norman and Tsu-lin Mei, “The Austroasiatics in Ancient South China: Some Lexical Evidence,” *MS* 32 (1976), pp. 274–301; Jerry Norman, “The Min Dialects in Historical Perspectives,” in William S.Y. Wang, ed., *Languages and Dialects of China*, Journal of Chinese

character 童 in 童乩 connotes no ideographic meaning, but only serves as a phonetic symbol to transcribe the sound of *dang*. In this article, I use the word *danggi* as it is pronounced in Taiwanese without rendering it into English.

Danggi are believed to transmit oracles, in trance, to those who come to séances for divine help. A séance of this kind is called “aiding the world 濟世,” or “managing affairs 辦事.” The purported divine instructions, either spoken or written, are often less than comprehensible to the ordinary ears and eyes of the seekers, and thus interpreters are needed.⁵ The relationship between *danggi* and their interpreters varies in different locations. For instance, we might consider Penghu 澎湖, main island of the Pescadores and a center of fishing and tourism located in the southwest corner of the Taiwan Straits. It is historically a midway stop for migrants from the mainland to Taiwan. There, *danggi* interpreters are in effect the trainers and masters of the *danggi* for whom they interpret. In Jinmen 金門 (Quemoy), a farming island facing the coastal Chinese province of Fujian and administered by the military until 1993, and in Yilan 宜蘭, the interpreters are merely assistants to the *danggi*.⁶ In addition to séances, *danggi* also appear to be possessed by their guardian deities at temple fairs. Many of them, in trance, practice self-flagellation by sharp weapons or other forms of self-mutilation at the parades. The blood-spattered scenes are powerful images for the audiences.

Official Taiwanese records from the nineteenth century already took note of *wu* 巫 (shamans): “There are [people] working as *jitong* who lean upon the [divine] sedan-chairs and leap up and down, illicitly give out prescriptions, hold knives or swords in their hands, loosen their hair and cut their forehead in order to show divine efficaciousness 有為乩童, 扶輦跳躍, 妄示藥方, 手執刀劍, 披髮剖額, 以示神靈.”⁷ During the Japanese occupation, both government and academics produced extensive records of the *danggi* practices and contributed greatly to the field by

Linguistics, Monograph Series 3 (Berkeley: Journal of Chinese Linguistics, 1991), pp. 325–60. I thank Philip Clart for bringing the two articles to my attention.

⁵ For a fine study of “*danggi* rhetoric,” or the arts of message-deliverance of *danggi*, see 戴思客 (Lawrence Scott Davis), “Yu yu nü, shitan jitong xiucixue” 語與女試探乩童修辭學, *Si yu yan* 思與言 35.2 (1994), pp. 267–312.

⁶ Yu Guanghong 余光弘, “Taiwan diqu shenmei de butong xingtai” 臺灣地區神媒的不同形態, *Bulletin of The Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica* 88 (Autumn 1999), pp. 91–104. For the relationship between *danggi* and ritual masters in Penghu, see also Huang Youxing 黃有興, “Penghu de fashi yu jitong” 澎湖的法師與乩童, *Taiwan wenxian* 臺灣文獻 38.3 (1987), pp. 133–57.

⁷ Chen Peigui 陳培桂, [Tongzhi] *Danshui tingzhi* [同治] 淡水廳誌 (1871; rpt. Taipei: Taiwan yinhang jingji yanjiushi, reprint, 1964) 11, p. 303.

preserving valuable details from the earlier part of the twentieth century.⁸ Unfortunately, however, there was little scholarship in the field for nearly three decades after the early 1940s. It was not until the beginning of the 1970s that scholarly publications on the subject came back, including both ethnographic accounts and general discussions.⁹

Temples of popular religions in rural China have rarely been under the charge of clergy, as C. K. Yang pointed out.¹⁰ Daniel Overmyer emphasizes that, in general, it is really lay temple-committee members who govern temples of popular religion and hire caretakers to keep up the routine duties. Only during the festivals are religious specialists hired to perform ceremonies. In present-day Taiwan, small temples hosted by *danggi* at their homes are, however, increasing rapidly.¹¹ In such temples, *danggi* perform rituals, spread teachings, train novices, recruit followers, and make plans to build large “palatial 宮庭” temples in independent building complexes, following traditional architectural style. Studies on Taiwanese society and religion illustrate that *danggi*

⁸ Taiwan shūkyō chōsa hōkokusho 臺灣宗教調查報告書, compiled under the leadership of consular-general Marui Keijirō 丸井圭治郎 in 1919, gave the earliest account of useful details; see vol. 1, pp. 102–7. Two superb studies on *danggi* published during the period of Japanese occupation are *Tankii* 童乩 (compiled and published by the Bureau of Public Health, Tainan Prefecture (Tainan shū eiseika) 臺南州衛生課, 1937), and Kokubu Naoichi 國分直一, “Tankii no kenkyū” 童乩の研究, *Minzoku Taiwan* 民俗臺灣 (1941) 1.1, pp. 10–13, 1.2, pp. 2–5, and 1.3, pp. 7–9. A few words about the authorship of *Tankii* are in order here. The printing house Guting shuwu 古亭書屋 reprinted it under the title “Taiwan Tankii 臺灣童乩” in 1975 but mistakenly attributed it to Masuta Fukutarō 增田福太郎 and thus caused confusions in later bibliographic accounts. For a clarification, see Wang Chien-ch’uan 王見川, “Taiwan minjian xinyang de yanjiu yu diaocha, yi shiliao yanjiuzhe wei kaocha zhongxin” 臺灣民間信仰的研究與調查以史料研究者為考察中心, in Chang Hsün 張珣 and Jiang Tsann-terng 江燦騰, eds., *Dangdai Taiwan benti zongjiao yanjiu daolun* 當代臺灣本土宗教研究導論 (Taipei: SMC Publishing, Inc., 2001).

⁹ For a critical review of research into *danggi* up to 1992, see Ji Tong 稽童 (i.e., 林富士), “Tongji yanjiu de lishi huigu” 童乩研究的歷史回顧, *Beixian wenhua* 北縣文化 37 (June 1993), pp. 36–42. Important studies on *jitong* in or after 1992 include Lawrence Scott Davis, “The Eccentric Structure of Shamanism: An Ethnography of Taiwanese Ki-Thong, with Reference to the Philosophical Anthropology of Helmuth Plessner,” Ph.D. diss. (Cambridge: Harvard University, Dept. of Anthropology, 1992), Cai, *Chuansuo tianren zhiji*, and Zhong Youlan 鍾幼蘭, “Guan’ao chamo Fo de chubu yanjiu” 官澳查某佛的初步研究, in Yu Guanghong 余光弘 and 魏捷茲 (James Wilkerson), eds., *Jinmen shuqi renleixue tianye gongzuo jiaoshi lunwenji* 金門暑期人類學田野工作教室論文集 (Taipei: Institute of Ethnography, Academia Sinica, 1994), pp. 129–62.

¹⁰ See C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1961), p. 309–10.

¹¹ Julian Pas, “Religious Life in Present Day Taiwan: A Field Observation Report; 1994–1995,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 24 (1996), pp. 31–167; Song Guangyu 宋光宇 “Shentan de xingcheng, Kaohsiung shi shentan diaocha ziliao de chubu fenxi” 神壇的形成高雄市神壇調查資料的初步分析, in The Center of Sinology 漢學研究中心, eds., *Simiao yu minjian wenhua yantaohui lunwen ji* 寺廟與民間文化研討會論文集 (Taipei: Wenjianhui 文建會, 1995), pp. 97–128. While his statistics of temples in Kaohsiung are based all kinds of temples, his discussion focuses on spirit-medium run altars (*shentan*).

in the countryside have usually worked closely with fellow villagers. David Jordan describes a *danggi's* role in a village as a jade seal that endorses the opinions of the community.¹² Kristofer Schipper points out that the blood that emerges when *danggi* flagellate themselves or practice other types of mortification of flesh symbolically exorcises the community, and Donald Sutton argues that the ritualistic symbolism behind the self-torture of *danggi* serves as a tool of harmony and social order.¹³ Gary Seaman proposes that shamans act between gods and humans as “middle-men,” crucial to the functioning of social networks, while Zhang Gongqi 張恭啓 reveals the complex traditional Chinese cosmic order reflected in the séance given by a *danggi*.¹⁴ Last but not least, scholars of medical anthropology have explored the faith-healing dimension that is central to a *danggi's* professional profile.¹⁵

Much scholarly attention has been given to socio-religious functions of *danggi*, yet little interest has been placed on the temples that *tonggi* run which, as mentioned above, are growing rapidly in urban Taiwan. Scott Davis's excellent research on a *danggi* in suburban Taipei primarily explores the arts of spirit-mediumship, and Cai Peiru's book, another fine study of *danggi*, takes the approach of gender studies. The focus in Taiwanese studies is still in terms of community temples; only few studies are concerned with medium-run temples.¹⁶ This article, therefore, concentrates on one specific spirit-medium run temple. By examining the temple's annual schedule, daily routine, and members' involvement, we can gain a deep appreciation of the religious life of ordinary people dwelling in related to temples in contemporary urban Taiwan.

¹² David Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: Folk Religions in a Taiwanese Village* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1972), p. 85.

¹³ Kristofer Schipper, *Taoist Body*, trans. Karen C. Duval (Berkeley: U of California P., 1993), p. 54; Donald S. Sutton, “Rituals of Self-Mortification: Taiwanese Spirit-Mediums in Comparative Perspectives,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 4.1 (1990), pp. 99–125.

¹⁴ Gary Seaman, “In the Presence of Authority: Hierarchical Roles in Chinese Spirit Medium Cults,” in Arthur Kleinman and Tsung-yi Lin, eds., *Normal and Abnormal in Chinese Culture* (Boston: D. Reidel, 1980), pp. 61–74; Zhang Gongqi 張恭啓, “Duochong yuzhouguan de yun-yong, Zhubei mou jitan wenji guocheng de fenxi” 多重宇宙觀的運用竹北某乩壇問乩過程的分析, *Zhongyuan yanjiuyuan minzu suo jikan* 中央研究院民族所集刊 61 (1986), pp. 81–101.

¹⁵ Catherine Gould-Martin, “A Medical System in a Taiwan Village: Ong-ia-gong, the Plague God as Modern Physician,” in Arthur Kleinman et al., eds., *Medicine in Chinese Cultures: Comparative Studies of Health Care in Chinese and Other Societies* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1975), pp. 115–41; Song He 宋和, “Taiwan shenmei de shehui gongneng, yige bi renleixue de tantao” 臺灣神媒的社會功能一個逼醫療人類學的探討, M.A. thesis (Taipei: Taiwan University, Institute of Archeology and Anthropology, 1978); Arthur Kleiman, *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1980); and Chang Hsun 張珣, “Minsu yisheng, jitong” 民俗醫生乩童, in Chang Hsun, *Jibing yu wenhua* 疾病與文化 (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe, 1989), pp. 73–82.

¹⁶ Chang, “Minsu yisheng, jitong”; Song, “Shentan de xingcheng.”

The temple that is the focus of this paper is called Zhendong Gong 鎮東宮, “Palace of Pacification of the East,” a small, typical spirit-medium-run private temple, if there is such thing as “typical” in popular religion. I spent six months in Taipei from August of 1997 to January, 1998, observing the temple. During the period of time, I visited the temple regularly, attended the séances, and conducted informal interviews through conversations with the temple’s leader, his family members, the core members of the temple, and visitors who came for divine help. I also participated in the major events sponsored by the temple, and assisted in its preparation of the annual three-day temple fair.

THE HISTORY OF THE ZHENDONG GONG AND MASTER LIN

Located on the border between the Nangang and Xinyi districts of Taipei, the Zhendong Gong is not in the traditional architectural style of a temple, which would somewhat resemble an imperial palace-like individual building; but it is situated on the first floor of an apartment building. The temple’s name is written with red ink on three yellow lamps, one character on each lamp, hanging outside the temple. As if the lamps cannot catch the eye sufficiently, the temple suspends another sign, lit by fluorescent light, above the sidewalk to denote the temple’s name again and the spirit’s specialties: *shoujing* 收驚 (gathering souls scattered by a fright), *fengshui* 風水 (geomancy), *gaiyun* 改運 (changing luck), *bazi* 八字 (horoscope), *ancuo* 安厝 (determining the location of an accommodation), commonly found on the signs hanging outside obscure temples of the same type. The front part of the apartment, facing a street barely wide enough for passing buses, is arranged as a shrine, and includes the main altar, which occupies four-fifths of the rear wall, a small altar on the right side of the shrine, and a reception area between the small altar and the front door. Between the main altar and the small altar is a door that leads to the medium’s family living area: a bedroom for the medium’s younger son, daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren, a kitchen and a bathroom. A stairway at the back leads down to a basement divided into three rooms: the master bedroom; a bedroom for the medium’s elder son; and a spacious living room with a big bed where the temple members can spend the night when they need to.

It is impossible to surmise – either by the temple’s name, by the specialty signboard, or by a quick look of the altar arrangement – which deities this temple is devoted to until one walks in. At the top of the rear wall of the shrine, above the main altar where the images of gods sit, a placard reads: Xuantian san shangdi 玄天三上帝, that is, “The Third

of the [Three Brother-] Emperors of the Dark Heaven.”¹⁷ Clearly, this temple is devoted to Xuantian shangdi, which is a short form for the exalted imperial title bestowed upon Zhenwu 真武, the Perfected Warrior, a personification of the spirit of a constellation. His cult is traditionally connected to an ancient worship of heavenly bodies and has been active across China since the Song dynasty (960-1279). Today, it can be found in mainland China, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities.¹⁸ The Zhenwu cult spread to Taiwan no later than the takeover by Zheng Chenggong in 1661. Under Zheng’s rule, the Zhenwu cult reached the top rank in the Taiwanese pantheon.¹⁹

Just like other temples in Taiwan, the Zhendong Gong enshrines numerous images of a variety of deities. The main altar is about 1.5 meters in height, 1.8 meters wide, and 1 meter in depth. On the top level of the altar there are four big images of Xuantian shangdi (three are owned by the temple and one by one of the believers) and one image of Master Ji, the living Buddha (Jigong hufo 濟公活佛) at the right end, as well as an image of Mazu 媽祖, the Heavenly Empress, at the left end. Between the first and second levels, there are two images of Guanyin 觀音, the Goddess of Mercy. On the second level sits Mazu (with black face and empress’ headdress) and a smaller Jigong, several “royal lords” (Wangye 王爺). The third level connects with the offering table to form a platform that holds more royal gods, another set of three Xuantian Shangdi in a smaller size, another Jigong, an Emperor Guan (Guandi, namely, Guan Yu 關羽, a god symbolizing loyalty and righteousness), and two figures of the Third Prince (San taizi 三太子). There are more small images belonging to the temple’s members who for various reasons prefer that the temple take care of their images.

On the front side of the table, there are two flower vessels, two incense burners, and several pairs of pineapple-shaped candle holders, called “pineapple lanterns 鳳梨燈.” Believers may light a pair of

¹⁷ In Taiwan, it is widely believed that Xuantian shangdi is a group of three brother-gods; they are referred as the Eldest Supreme Emperor, the Second Supreme Emperor, and the Third Supreme Emperor. This multiplication is one of the most striking and unique development of the godhead of Xuantian shangdi in Taiwan. Gao Lizhen documented their distinctive iconographic traits, such as facial composition, hand gestures, and postures; see Gao Lizhen 高麗珍, “Taiwan minsu zongjiao zhi kongjian huodong, yi Xuantian shangdi jisi huodong weili 臺灣民俗宗教之空間活動以玄天上帝祭祀活動為例,” M.A. thesis (Taipei: Taiwan Normal University, Department of Geography 臺灣師範大學地理研究所, 1988). Nevertheless, the exact process of multiplication awaits investigation.

¹⁸ See my dissertation, “Zhenwu: The Cult of a Chinese Warrior God from the Song to the Ming Dynasties (960-1368)” (Vancouver: Dept. of Asian Studies, University of British Columbia, 2003).

¹⁹ Cai Xianghui 蔡相輝, “Ming Zheng Taiwan zhi Zhenwu chongsi” 明鄭台灣之真武崇祀, *Mingshi yanjiu zhuankan* 明史研究專刊 3 (1980), pp. 171-81.

pineapple lanterns to pray for special divine blessing. At the bottom of the altar, under the offering table, a small chamber enshrines the Tiger Spirit 虎爺. A bowl of water and an incense burner are prepared for it. The under-table area, which is right in front of the Tiger Spirit's shrine, is filled with jars of herb liquor or plastic containers, and a small divine chair, arranged in a haphazard way. On an obscure spot of the left wall near the door, there is a small placard reading: Yunlin 雲林, Mailiao 麥寮, Zhendong Gong. It indicates where this temple and its head, medium Lin, originated, namely Mailiao village, Yunlin prefecture, in southern Taiwan.

Medium Lin, fifty-nine years of age in 1997, has been a spirit medium for thirty-seven years. I will refer to him as Master Lin in this paper since people in the temple all call him "Laosai 老師" in Hokkien, or "Shifu 師父" in Mandarin. He used to be a farmer; his occupation on his ID is still "farmer" even now, when he is hundreds of miles away from his rice fields and has not touched a hoe for fourteen years. His religious life began as repayment for the divine cure of his mother. He mentioned several times that before this incident, he had never worshipped gods. "Which young person would worship gods!" he asserted. (This is a popular perception about youth, which I found to be untrue during my observation of the temple.) His call to religion started with his mother's long-term hospitalization. Since Lin could not afford the expense of medical care, he went to a temple dedicated to Mazu (he never uses the more honorable title, Empress of Heaven) to ask for help.²⁰ According to Master Lin, that very afternoon, after drinking talisman water acquired from Mazu, his mother fully recovered and was able to leave the hospital. "I owe Mazu a favor," he said. In return for this favor, in 1960, he became a spirit medium, and maintained a family shrine at his Mailiao home, the very first Zhendong Gong.

However, Master Lin never acts as simply a mouthpiece of Mazu. According to him, Mazu told Xuantian Shangdi that "I have a student for you. You teach him."²¹ He calls the three Supreme Emperors of the Dark Heaven his masters 老師, the so-called "guardian" in shamanism.²² He proudly maintains that he never had any human teachers; it

²⁰ Lin did not mention the name of this Mazu temple but only referred it as a temple with a 300-yr. history. There is only one Mazu temple in Mailiao with such a long history, that is the Gongfan Gong 拱範宮 built in Kangxi's reign. For a survey, see Zhang Shenyuan 張審源, *Mailiao xiang Gongfan gong yange zhi* 麥寮鄉拱範宮沿革志 (Mailiao: Mailiao Gongfan gong guanli weiyuanhui, 1986).

²¹ According to Master Lin, Xuantian Shangdi possesses a very high rank, but Mazu has an even higher one.

²² According to Master Lin's son, the Master reached a deal with Xuantian Shangdi that he would serve as a mouthpiece for Shangdi in exchange for an extra thirty years of life for

is the Supreme Emperors who come down to teach him in trance and in dreams.²³ He passed “isolation training 坐禁” and various tests 劫,²⁴ and was finally recognized as a skillful and powerful spirit medium.

As an efficacious spirit-medium, Master Lin attracted an increasing number of believers. His son remembers people coming to his house every day and asking for help whenever his father was not working in the rice fields. The master was active too. Every year he organized a pilgrimage to famous temples to “cut incense 刈香.” In addition to his initiator, Xuantian Shangdi, he acquired another guardian, Jigong. He obtained an image of Jigong from Qishan 旗山 (in Gaoxiong prefecture). In 1971, his supporters began work on a temple in palatial style. The new Zhendong Gong, a splendid two-story temple in Mailiao built in the traditional palace-building style, was established in 1973. Master Lin himself took full credit when he recalled the story. What he did not mention was the role played by two of his major clients, Mr. and Mrs. Wu.

Mr. Wu, a neighbor of Master Lin from across the street, in Mailiao, was a generous supporter in one way: he donated to the Zhendong Gong project 100,000 NTD (approximately 2,500 U.S. dollars in the early 1970s) – among the highest donations. His generosity undoubtedly was related to the mystery of his wife. His wife’s health was once in a hopeless state. When she finally recovered, she lost all her memory and had a new memory, or, using her own explanation, a new soul. She claimed to have a different identity: a young woman named Zhu Xiuhua 朱秀華 from the island of Jinmen 金門 (Quemoy), who seemingly had been murdered in a boat on the way to Taiwan. The alleged murder is unverifiable. Yet, in this case, what Mrs. Wu believes happened is more important than what really happened. She believes herself to be a reincarnation of a murder victim and conducts herself accordingly. The murder was a mistake, however, since Zhu had not been destined to die young. But when, finally, Zhu was allowed to return to the living world, her corpse was gone. The soul needed a body to reside in, and coincidentally Mrs. Wu was about to die. The “royal

his mother. Since the Master’s mother died in 1990, we can presume that the alleged arrangement was for twenty years.

²³ Even today, he still keeps a small chamber under the main altar where he can sleep and receive divine instruction from gods. (He and his wife also have a normal bedroom.)

²⁴ His son once recalled a miracle in which he was awakened by Xuantian Shangdi from a dream while the house was on fire. Yet, on another occasion, when he talked about the training of *danggi*, he maintained that *danggi* have to go through various disasters 劫 as tests. The tests may include floods, fires, and sexual seduction. Not every *danggi* can pass these tests and those who cannot have to withdraw. The “disaster-test” theory explains misfortune happening to spirit-mediums.

lords 王爺” told Zhu to take over Mrs. Wu’s body so she could return to the living.²⁵ After the reported possession,²⁶ Mrs. Wu’s health was significantly improved except for sudden faints, but she complained that the ghosts she met in the underworld kept coming to assault her. When Master Lin took on the career of a spirit medium, Mrs. Wu came to ask for help to get rid of the ghosts, and Master Lin complied. The story was made into a movie, and a local television station tried to interview her not long before my visit, almost a half-century after the purported events. This is, to date, the biggest case of Master Lin’s religious career, and he actually has placed a picture of the Wus on the back of his business card.

During my interview with Mrs. Wu, she claimed that she had initiated the big Zhendong Gong project. She recalled that she encountered Xuantian Shangdi in a rice field, dressed in a casual style of ancient costume (not an emperor’s outfit, or armor), and he demanded a temple. He pointed to the supposed location for the temple, not far from her home. That was a piece of land owned by the Taiwanese Sugar Company, a government-run business. In 1971, the Zhendong Gong project started, and her husband was one of the biggest financial supporters. His name heads the list of the donors hanging on the wall of the Zhendong Gong. He was, and still is, the chairman of the committee board of the temple. In 1973, the temple was finished but its name was changed to Zhentian Gong 鎮天宮, the Palace of the Pacification of Heaven. The Zhentian Gong is the second largest Xuantian Shangdi temple in Mailiao. Groups of pilgrims from all over Taiwan come to “present incense.” Master Lin no longer led his believers in pilgrimage to other temples; now they had their own.

However, ten years later, in 1983, Master Lin and his immediate family moved to Sanchong, a satellite city of Taipei, and brought the image of the third brother of the Supreme Emperor with them. He and his family first stayed with his sister who had moved to Sanchong after having married. Then the Lins moved to the Nangang district of Taipei, close to the Futian Gong 福天宮 (Palace of the Blessing of Heaven), whose leader became Master Lin’s disciple after Lin moved to Taipei. The Futian Gong had acquired the image of the Second Shangdi from the Zhentian Gong to be its “founding 開基” image. Master Lin lived

²⁵ Among the two oldest temples in Mailiao, one, as mentioned above, is devoted to Mazu; the other is for a Royal God Li 李王爺. This might explain why it was the “royal lord” who interfered (or was chosen to be the one who interfere).

²⁶ According to a newspaper interview, Mrs. Wu could describe places in Jinmen, where she has never been but which is the native place of Miss Zhu, and she speaks in a different accent from that of Mailiao natives; 徵信新聞 *Zhengxin xinwen*, March 11, 1962.

nearby and was invited to supervise séances at the Futian Gong regularly.

In 1990, the Master again built his own temple in his home with the old name Zhendong Gong. Master Lin's mother was unwilling to allow her son to continue his religious career when they first moved to Taipei. However, according to Master Lin's son, the Third Shangdi demanded his own temple since the First and the Second both had their own.²⁷ Since that time, they have moved more than once. They rented an apartment in a military residential community 眷村 whose inhabitants are primarily mainlanders. At times, the mainlander-neighbors went to visit the temple to ask for help as well, but the major clients are still Taiwanese. Later, the government launched a relocation project for this military residence, so the Lins were forced to find a new place again. In 1993 they moved to their current address and lost almost all of their old believers.²⁸

Neither Master Lin nor his believers explained to me why he left his big temple behind and moved to Taipei until one afternoon when I chatted with them about my visit to the Zhentian Gong in Mailiao. Master Lin blamed the Wus for coveting riches and ruining his temple, while the others implied that Mr. Wu employed unjustified means to steal Master Lin's temple, taking advantage of his illiteracy. It is hard to say who owns the Zhentian Gong, since Mr. Wu, as mentioned above, was the primary donor and the chair of the temple committee. Even more, he has a wife who possesses the quality of a spirit-medium, and so does not really need Master Lin. This was a battle that the Master was doomed to lose from the beginning.

ORGANIZATION AND BELIEVERS

The current Zhendong Gong takes in a small territory, in numbers of believers and in funds. The temple was first registered under a committee of seven people, the minimum number required by government regulation. Master Lin is the head of the temple, but it is the committee members who take care of the temple's daily business, especially the five people with positions: the chairman; the vice-chairman; the executive; the vice-executive; and the treasurer. I will call them the "managers." The total number of committee members is not

²⁷ The statue of the eldest of the three Supreme Emperor-brothers (Da shangdi) stays in Mailiao, and that of the second brother (Er shangdi) went to the Futian Gong.

²⁸ Master Lin's son told me that five or six old members still visit the Zhendong Gong at the new address, but I did not meet any of them.

fixed; it was forty at the temple's best time, but now there are no more than twenty. There is no formal way to become a committee member. Someone, a committee member perhaps, names a person and asks other members' approval. If more than half agree, then the appointment is made. In order to select people to fill the five positions, the committee members hold a meeting and whoever disagrees with the nomination raises his or her hand, an event which has not yet happened. For a small temple like the Zhendong Gong, the positions confer responsibility rather than power or prestige. Those who hold the positions are supposed to be replaced every year according to the rules, which are often bent. For example, the treasurer has remained in his position for three successive years. The temple is small, the organization is simple, and the rules are loose.

Although the temple is a small one, the responsibilities of committee members are diverse. Day and night, the temple has to keep incense and candles burning, and every day the temple burns enormous amounts of spirit money. The Zhendong Gong produces its own charms in two types, one big and one small. Someone must go to the printing house regularly to make sure that the supply of charms is large enough. When visitors to the temple make their donations, they frequently put the money into one of the five people's hands without asking for receipts. When the temple holds a special activity, the five people are expected to be the organizers. For example, for the annual temple fair (*fahui* 法會) they prepare invitations, hire scripture readers 誦經團, book caterers, pay the bills, and keep the accounts in case anyone has any doubts about expenditures. It is also their job to pull together offerings, build up and arrange the temporary altar (see below), and watch over the temple during this period because it cannot be closed, even at night.

Another group is the *Luzhu* ("master of the incense burner") group, including the master of the incense burner, three vice-masters of the incense burner, and a number of "heads 頭家." According to the announcement on the wall, they have to donate 1,000 NTD (approximately \$36) every lunar month for the ritual of "appreciating the [spiritual] soldiers (賞兵, 或 犒兵)." It is believed that gods are accompanied by soldiers, who carry out the gods' orders such as exorcising evil spirits and protecting the temples. The bimonthly reward ritual, in the believers' minds, not only functions as a nice gesture but also as a necessary means of keeping the spiritual soldiers satisfied. The members of the *Luzhu* group are not elected by humans (as are the committee board or the managers). Every year, a new "master of the incense burner" is

produced by casting a pair of crescent-shaped wooden blocks (*jiaobei* 筊杯) in front of the altar. In other words, their appointment has to be approved divinely. The ceremony takes place on the birthday of the Supreme Emperors, the third day of the third lunar month, discussed below. What does the “master of the incense burner” do? In the case of the Zhendong Gong, it is unclear. People joke that his job is really to write checks. Nevertheless, when the Zhendong Gong carries out the annual pilgrimage, the master of the incense burner has added responsibilities, such as holding the burner in the “cutting incense” ritual. Of course, holding the burner during the incense-cutting ritual is more a privilege than a responsibility, as Chang Hsün argues.²⁹ This master of the incense burner of 1997 was Mr. Chen, who owns a plastic factory, among other businesses. People in the temple jokingly call him “the junior Wang Yongqing 王永慶,”³⁰ most often, he is called “Uncle Luzu (Luzhu bo 爐主伯).” He comes to the Zhendong Gong very often although he does not live nearby. The distance between his house and the Zhendong Gong is about twenty minutes by car. His family has lived in the neighborhood for over a hundred years. He was brought to the Zhendong Gong for his first visit by a friend, and has continued to come “because Master Lin is numinous (*ling* 靈).” He then brought his family and friends to the temple. His wife then brought one of her sisters to come. The sister was pleased by Master Lin’s help (which I will discuss below) and she took her husband and children with her. Now all the four sisters of Uncle Luzu’s wife and their families come to this temple. Even the mother, who lives in Miaoli prefecture, about a hundred kilometers south of Taipei, visits the Zhendong Gong when she comes to Taipei.

Uncle Luzhu comes to the temple mostly on holidays. He sits with others, drinks tea, and chats. On the first and fifteenth of each lunar month, he comes to the temple to participate in the “appreciating soldiers” ritual and have dinner with Master Lin, members of the committee, and the Luzhu group. During the annual temple fair, or *fahui*, he and his wife came on the first day and stood behind the scripture readers for one section. He disappeared on the second day but re-

²⁹ See Chang Hsün, “Dajia Mazu jinxiang yishi kongjian de jiechengxing” 大甲媽祖進香儀式空間的階層性, in Ying-kuei Huang 黃應貴, ed., *Space, Power and Society (Kongjian, li yu shehui 空間、力與社會)* (Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 1995), pp. 351–90.

³⁰ Wang Yongqing is *the* plastics industry tycoon in Taiwan. Mr. Chen’s wealth is certainly far behind Wang, but large enough to impress the members of the Zhendong Gong. For example, for his son’s wedding reception, he invited about 600 guests and hired an entertainment troupe. Members of Zhendong Gong were all invited and talked about it when they chatted in the temple.

turned for the conclusion of the ceremony. At the banquet celebrating the completion of the *fahui*, he held his wine cup and, with Master Lin and other core members, traveled to each table for toasts to express his hospitality and gratitude. It was particularly noteworthy that, when he finally sat down, it was next to the ex-chairman of the temple. While the hierarchy in the Zhendong Gong has not yet developed, a hint of it is visible on such occasions.

Another important person is the treasurer, A-tuan 阿傳, a single male of thirty-three who runs a small factory in Taipei county. He lives with his parents in Jilong 基隆 (a port-city about twenty kilometers north of Taipei) despite the fact that he owns an apartment near his factory. An image of Guanyin, or the Goddess of Mercy, which is a family heritage, is enshrined in his parents' house. His parents are not members of the Zhendong Gong, although A-tuan claims they have been there occasionally. However, when he is away on business, his parents are not even willing to care for the image of Xuantian Shangdi that he acquired from the Zhendong Gong. The choice of Zhendong Gong is, for A-tuan, more a personal decision than one of family influence.

Before coming to the Zhendong Gong, he was a member of the Yiguan Dao ("Way of Unity"), which is a major sectarian organization in Taiwan. Introduced by a friend, A-tuan first came to visit the Zhendong Gong in 1993 when the temple had just moved to its current address. A year later, he was nominated by Master Lin and elected by the committee members as the treasurer. He related that, in the meeting, the committee members wanted young men in such positions to speed up the temple's development. Since then, A-tuan has held his position for three years.

Though he has only a ninth-grade degree certificate, he can discuss religious issues eloquently. When I asked him where he acquired his religious knowledge, he recalled the pamphlets obtained from temples and lectures he attended. Obviously, he is self-taught in the field of religion. The fact that he was once a member of the Way of Unity must also have helped, since it is routine to give lectures during its assemblies.

A-tuan comes to the Zhendong Gong whenever he has time, usually on holidays. I never saw him at a séance; "too busy to come," he said. He started his own factory only a year ago. Before this, he worked in a factory in which he was a minor shareholder. When I asked him "why do you come to the Zhendong Gong," he answered: "So I have one more place to go on holidays." He obviously interpreted my ques-

tion to be “why did you join a temple organization?” Nevertheless his answer was intriguing since he did not lack a religious affiliation before coming to the Zhendong Gong; he was a member of the Way of Unity. As a matter of fact, he gradually estranged himself from the latter after he attending the Zhendong Gong. In other words, he made a deliberate choice.

He is unable or unwilling to articulate why he chose the Zhendong Gong, but he can describe Master Lin’s performance of miracles. He told me a story about Master Lin’s rescuing a man who was dying from stomach cancer. The person was in an intensive care unit when his family came to the Zhendong Gong for help. The Master went back and forth between the hospital and the temple to feed the man water mixed with the ash of charms and to plea with the Supreme Emperor of Dark Heaven. He quickly recovered in what A-tuan thought to be a miracle. Most temple members whom I interviewed assured me of the powers of Master Lin, but they did not give me specific cases. A-tuan, on the other hand, related this story in an excited tone and with such vivid narration that it was not surprising to hear him claim that he witnessed the whole thing. Whether the miracle occurred or not is unimportant. A-tuan believes that it happened, and thus truly believes the Master possesses divine power.

A-tuan believes in Master Lin, and Master Lin trusts him. It was the Master who nominated A-tuan as treasurer. Uncle Luzhu also praised A-tuan to me. During a conversation one afternoon in the temple, I was told how honest and responsible A-tuan is and how rare good young men like him are in today’s society. Everyone present nodded as a sign of agreement. Someone then maintained it was unfair that such a fine young man like him did not have a girlfriend; every agreed in nodding again. Evidently, he is adored in the temple.

In sum, A-tuan is a young man who grew up in a religious atmosphere and keeps searching for a belief to which he can truly belong (or, in his words, where he can go on holidays). His affection for the temple has a religious reason: the healing power of Master Lin. In return, his affection is acknowledged and rewarded by his fellow temple members. A-tuan made it into the inner circle of the temple organization within a year thanks to the laxness of that organization. In a small temple organization like the Zhendong Gong, a person does not need to be a local phenomenon, be involved in a local faction, or even wait a long time for seniority in order to join the committee board. One’s devotion receives instant reward, and this is appealing to people like

A-tuan who, with or without a disadvantaged background, are willing to work hard to establish themselves.

A third type of core member is composed of students of Master Lin, and among them is the chairman. The chairman told me that he came to the temple in order to seek a more healthy life. Before, he drank and indulged himself to excess. Since he came to the Zhendong Gong, he has spent most of his free time drinking tea, a much more healthy beverage, and has reformed his once indulgent lifestyle. He expressed gratitude that he could finally lead a moral life. He did conceal one bit of information from me: he has learned the skill of falling into a trance. He is half way to becoming a spirit-medium.

Everyone in the temple told me that the temple does not give out numbers that are supposed to be auspicious for winning the *Dajia le* (“all are happy”), a lottery that was once a popular fixation in Taiwan.³¹ After I was no longer viewed as a stranger, however, I found out that they did announce numbers, and they did it in my presence. Master Lin himself was not present. A few members, including Master Lin’s son, took out the divine chair from under the table and put three incense sticks on it. The offering table that the Master uses while giving oracles was now covered with incense ash from the burner. The chairman and another disciple of the Master stood barefoot on the floor to prepare for the spirit possession. They held the divine chair and in less than five minutes they fell into trance. They started to wave the chair and tried to use an arm of the chair to write on the incense ash. Yet they were only making circles. The audience tried to figure out numbers from the circles but was unable to do so. The two ecstatic men waved the chair so violently that one of them was hit by it. The wound was bleeding, but they did not stop. The bleeding person, in trance, did not seem to be aware of his injury. Still, no one could read anything. Finally, someone made a phone call and a middle-age man came by motorcycle. He was the person they asked to help. He started by asking the identity of the spirit, then asked the spirit to write slowly, and to repeat the divination again and again. He apologized for unable to comprehend the spirit’s words, but did not let the god go easily. Fi-

³¹ Qu Haiyuan 瞿海源, “Jiexi xinxing zongjiao xianxiang” 解析新興宗教現象, in Xu Zhengguang 徐正光 and Song Wenli 宋文里, eds., *Taiwan xinxing shehui yundong* 臺灣新興社會運動 (Taipei: Juliu chubanshe), pp. 229–43; also Taili Hu 胡台麗, “Shen, gui yu dutu, Dajiale duxi fanying zhi minsu xinyang” 神鬼與賭徒大家樂賭戲反映之民俗信仰, in Editorial Committee of the Proceedings of the International Conference on Sinology Sponsored by Academia Sinica, ed., *Zhongyang yanjiu yuan dierjie guoji hanxue huiyi lunwenji* 中央研究院第二屆國際漢學會議論文集 (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1989), pp. 401–24.

nally, the spirit wrote some numbers, two of which were clear to me, and the temple members somehow figured the rest.

The next day I asked about the result of the lottery. They won 1,000 NTD (about \$37). It is not a big amount. But at least people could not complain that the deity was not numinous (*ling*). Furthermore, the chairman, as a shaman-apprentice, proved that the gods were willing to select him as a vessel. In this case, the focus was not the lottery numbers but the procedure by which the numbers are acquired. Winning means more than money; it is evidence of the deity's responsiveness and recognition. Master Lin does not have to participate in every séance, but he provides his members a holy space, the basic skill of falling into trance, and the belief that the gods are efficacious. The rest is left to the members' own imaginations.

SÉANCES

The Zhendong Gong holds séance on the fourth, seventh, eleventh, fourteenth, seventeenth, twenty-first, twenty-fourth and twenty-seventh days of the lunar month, unless the date falls on Sunday or public holidays. The ritual starts around 8:30 p.m., or earlier if there are more visitors than usual, and later if vice versa. Although Master Lin's guardians are the three brothers of the Supreme Emperors of Dark Heaven, the deity who possesses the Master is usually Jigong, the living Buddha; the Supreme Emperors only reveal themselves occasionally. Master Lin, his son, and a couple of core members all explained to me at various occasions that the Shangdi are awesome and authoritarian. They give orders and make no compromises. Jigong is different. As an unruly monk, he drinks, makes jokes, laughs with his devotees and is willing to explain details and to answer questions.

Whoever wishes to ask questions must register first. Registration can be made on the night of séance or a couple days in advance. On the séance night, people walk into the temple, fill out the registration form (if they have not done so already), and light incense sticks (the temple suggests eleven sticks). After paying respects to the gods, the person should put the incense sticks into different burners for different gods. All of these are written on the wall, although people hardly need to look at it. Then they sit down to wait for the call. There are usually about ten people registering for one séance, but there can be less people when, for example, it is raining, or more people if, for example, there is a flu epidemic.

Prior to a revelation, Master Lin's helpers cleanse the area by holding pieces of burning paper-money while going around the table and the seat.³² This is meant to exorcise the area, and a sacred space is then created. The Master sits barefoot in front of the table waiting to be possessed by the god(s); it takes a quarter of an hour or so. During this period of time, his helpers continue to prepare the altar, doing tasks such as taking out the box containing talismans, filling a bottle-gourd with rice wine, and serving a handful of peanuts on a piece of paper-money. When the Master appears drunk (before drinking the wine), Jigong descends from heaven. The helpers dress the Master in the costume of Jigong: a black robe, a mountain-shaped Buddhist monk hat, a straw fan, a bottle-gourd, and a pair of shoes made of black fabric. All of these must be cleaned, first by being passed over the incense burner. Then a helper starts to read the registration paper containing the questioners' addresses, names, ages, birthdays and questions. On being called, the questioners stand on the left side of the master, facing him, and give a detailed description, since the question on the form is extremely simple, such as "career 事業" or "health 身體."

Being possessed by Jigong (whose trait is drunkenness), Master Lin drinks rice wine from the bottle-gourd and chews peanuts. He claims to dislike alcohol, and that he would ordinarily not drink. Yet in trance, he can drink about a bottle of rice-wine, ostensibly transformed into water. I can verify that it is true that he does not smell of alcohol after a séance – another of his "miracle" performances, as explained by his disciples to impress me.³³

In trance, the Master makes jokes with the questioners and chats with them about their families, which shows that he knows the questioners well without having been informed. A newcomer told me, after her first inquiry: "The Master is really numinous, he knows what my house is like." If the questioners have not visited the temple for awhile, the Master, in a joking manner, will blame them for not coming to the temple often enough, and for thinking of the Master only when troubles occur. The questioners of course apologize to the Master, but not in a serious manner either. Most of the time, the atmosphere of a séance is extremely casual. The Master uses ambiguous expressions and repeats

³² The helper's job is the same as *zhuotou*, or interpreters, discussed above. They clarify the Master's divination to those who have questions.

³³ The same phenomenon is mentioned in Song Guangyu's article on a spirit-medium cult; see Song, "Cong Zhengzong shuhuashe zhege anli tan ji shi shenma" 從正宗書畫社這個案例談乩是甚麼, in Li Fengmao 李豐楙 and Zhu Ronggui 朱榮貴, eds., *Yishi, Miaohui yu shequ* 儀式廟會與社區 (Taipei: Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy 中研院文哲, 1996), pp. 179-96.

himself often, so that the helpers have to explain the Master's words. It can take ten minutes or longer to answer a simple question.

No matter what type of questions they may be, the Master will at least give the questioners a talisman to eat, the so-called "small talisman" 小符." One should burn a "small talisman" into ash, dissolve the ash into water, and then drink the water with the ash. Beside the "small talisman," there is the "big charm," which can be taken in the same way as the "small talisman" or placed on a wall or door, depending on Master's instructions. The talismans were designed by the Master, according to A-tuan, and produced by a print shop. Before distributing the talismans to those who ask, the Master wields his fan as a brush-pen to write invisible incantations on the talismans. Only after this process are the machine-printed talismans empowered.

Three of each talisman per questioner is the routine, but sometimes only the small charms are given. A questioner may ask for more if he or she is too busy to come to the next séance. The Master always generously agrees to double the charms. The helpers display the charms one next to the other on the table in front of the Master, and the Master waves his fan on each of the charms. On each charm, the helper writes down how to use it, such as to eat it or to place it on the door, if the questioner appears not to know how to use the charms. Then the helper puts the charms into a small plastic bag for the questioners. Meanwhile, the Master waves his fan around the person's body to bestow protection.

In addition to answering questions, the gods are also believed to make decisions on the temple's activities. For example, one of the Supreme Emperors revealed himself to declare the schedule of the temple's annual fair. For the temple's two-day annual pilgrimage, Jigong, through Master Lin in trance, announced the exact route in detail: when to set out, at which temple to stop for lunch, and at which temple to stay the night. After the date of the annual pilgrimage is decided, Jigong as the séances ensued told questioners to "go out for pleasure" with him together 一起去玩. The helpers explained that Jigong was referring to the pilgrimage. In other words, the deity was requesting the questioners to participate in the pilgrimage.

Requests about Health

Among questions asked of the gods during séances, health is one of the most popular. As Kleinman has pointed out, one-half to two-thirds of the questions posted to spirit-mediums that he recorded at his

fieldwork are health-related. The spirit-mediums he interviewed also indicated that healing is their major activity. As a matter of fact, a male informant told me that most people only come to the temple when they encounter problems, and he justified this by saying: "It is just like not going to see a doctor unless you are sick." In his mind, there is a parallel between doctor/patient and medium/questioner.

During the healing procedure, the Master first explains the cause of the person's illness. It can be the patient's destiny or the "outside 外 yin" interruption or the debt accumulated in previous lives and so on (explain). There is no clear routine for the Master's explanation. For example, after the flu had raged in Taipei for half a year, the chairman of the Zhendong Gong came down with the disease. In one séance in December, the chairman registered for treatment, but somehow Uncle Luzhu, who was then healthy, joined him at the session. They both stood facing the Master and received the miraculous fan waving. Afterward, the chairman sat down on a chair and took his western-style medicine prescribed by a doctor. It is just like a certain Taiwanese saying: "[For curing the disease, you] need both doctors and gods 要醫也要神," something I heard at the temple from more than one person.³⁴

In another case, a vice-chairman of the temple first asked the Master about his career, then called his wife, who carried their little ill son in her arms, in order to obtain divine cure and blessing. The Master gave them charms and waved the fan around them. After their session was finished, the father, right in the temple, burned a piece of charm in a paper cup half-filled with water and gave it to his son to drink.

In still another case, a male mainlander, who looked about thirty, came accompanied by his Taiwanese girlfriend and her mother who live in the neighborhood. The young man's father was in an intensive care unit and probably in a hopeless situation. This time the Master gave the young man not only charms but also spirit money for burning at home to offer to evil spirits that, in the master's diagnosis, were surrounding his father and disturbing the doctor's treatments. The spirits had to be removed before the father's medicine could work. In order to send away the evil spirits, Jigong promised (through Master Lin) to visit the sick father. Paper money is supposed to be burned for the harmful spirits, in order to make them go away. The young man double-checked with Jigong to make sure if the paper money should be burned outside their home instead of the hospital, a reasonable query, since the evil spirits should be with his father in the hospital. Yet the

³⁴ Gould-Martin, "A Medical System."

answer was “Yes, it has to be burned at home.” Then, the young man gave a nod as a sign of understanding. He did not take the medium’s advice uncritically but tried to make reason out of the divine instruction. However, when human logic failed to explain the divination, he surrendered easily.

A final example of divine healing is the case of the sister of the wife of Uncle Luzhu. The sister was warned of a forthcoming misfortune by a fortune-teller, so Uncle Luzhu’s wife took her to see Master Lin. The sister told me that she came to ask for blessing, and Master Lin waved his fan around her as he always did. Yet, she felt a breeze blowing on her neck. Later that year, she was diagnosed with a tumor in her throat. She immediately made the connection and was convinced that Master Lin had already known of her ailment. She came back to the temple for help, and, the master advised her where to find such a person – the *guiren* 貴人 (literally, venerable person). Accordingly she found a good doctor, who she interpreted to be the *guiren*, and had a very successful surgery. Since then, she said, all four of her sisters came to visit the Zhendong Gong.

Chang Hsün, Scott Davis, and Arthur Kleiman, among others, all write that females are the major clients of healing rituals.³⁵ Scott connects this to the fact that women are traditionally responsible for caregiving in the Chinese family. Chang Hsün argues that one’s status in the household is a critical factor in determining whether or not one would go to the hospital. Less important members of the household would receive homeopathic treatment, including divine healing. However, in the case of the Zhendong Gong, everyone – grandparents, parents, and grandchildren – may come to séance for consultations on health matters, for either serious or minor problems. Financial concerns, on the other hand, were not factors that led people to seek divine assistance. People like Uncle Luzhu, the chairman, and many others, can easily afford to go to the hospital, and indeed had gone to doctors before they came to Master Lin. The economic appeal of divine healing should not be overly emphasized. Divine healing is neither an option solely for the poor, nor is it an exclusive alternative to western medicine. Far from competing with each other, ritual curing and western medicine are believed to work together to provide mutual supportive benefits to the patient.

³⁵ Chang Hsün, “Taiwan Hanren de yiliao tixi yu yiliao xingwei, yige Taiwan beibu nongcun de yixue renleixue yanjiu” 臺灣漢人的醫療體系與醫療行為一個臺灣北部農村的醫學人類學研究, in idem, *Jibing yu wenhua* 疾病與文化 (Taipei: Daoxiang chubanshe 1989), pp. 101-47 (first published in *The Bulletin of Ethnography, Academia Sinica* 56 [1983], pp. 29-58). Davis, “Eccentric Structure”; Kleiman, *Patients and Healers*.

Questions about Fate

One's fate, in career and daily life, is another common divination topic. One night Uncle Luzhu took a friend who had started his own business not long ago with him to the temple. As the Master said in trance, "your business is small," the man answered "yes, so please help me to make it bigger and then I can build a big temple for you." This man explained to me that he comes here in the expectation that the gods could advise him where the obstacles are, so he might "detour" around them and reach his goal without unnecessary problems.

A woman of forty was on her first visit to this temple when I interviewed her. She did not know who the main deity of the temple was and could not recall if she had ever heard of the Supreme Emperor of Dark Heaven. She came on the recommendation of her sister-in-law, a young woman who was a student at night school. Her business, which she shared with her husband, was facing a critical point. A new branch office was scheduled to open, and they needed to know the most auspicious location to place the office desks (one of the most common issues of inventory *fengshui*). They happened to come just before the annual temple festival, so they were told to purchase a *doudeng* 斗燈 ("bushel-lantern") and come again the next séance. When they did come, they made an appointment with the Master to go to take a look at their office.

Changing one's luck is also a common request. Ms. Li, forty-one, divorced, a regular visitor, came one night because she had found a dead dog under her car. She was concerned that she might have run over the dog without being aware of it, and that killing the dog would bring bad luck. Even if she had not killed the dog, it might have been an ominous sign. She wanted to know if she had to sell her car, a white, shiny Mercedes-Benz, which she was, understandably, reluctant to give up. Master Lin, possessed by Jigong, performed certain rituals to remove any possible bad luck for her. Afterwards, she bought a gold plate for Master Lin to show her appreciation; it seemed to her that cash was just too vulgar.

In another case, a woman living upstairs the Zhendong gong came to the séance with a statue of the Buddha in her hand. This statue, she said, had been in the family for a long time. However, her son had seen the Buddha staring at him in his dreams since their recent move to Taipei where her husband had a new job. She maintained that the Buddha was upset about moving since the old house was bigger and better than the new apartment. She probably spoke for herself and her

son instead for the Buddha, but now it was the Buddha she had to deal with. After the Master performed certain rituals to the image and told her that the image was pacified, she left with the image and a smile of satisfaction.

Another family came to the temple with all kinds of problems: the husband asked for a solution to his business crisis (his partners were withdrawing their investment); the wife had chronic health problems; and the baby had just caught the flu. The wife did not know who the Supreme Emperors of Dark Heaven were, although they came to the Zhendong Gong regularly. They were introduced to the temple by their aunt who was also there the night I interviewed them. The aunt brought her two teenage children with her to seek special favors from the god, such as improvement in school, good health, and good behavior 乖. While waiting, the two families chatted, but not in a particularly close manner. Later I learned that the two families only see each other on special occasions, such as wedding receptions and traditional holidays. Thus, coming to a séance becomes another opportunity for relatives to gather in a social setting.

THE ANNUAL TEMPLE FAIR (*FAHUI* 法會)

To pray for the peace of the country and the safety of the people 國泰民安, so it is said, the Zhendong Gong annually holds a temple fair. It cannot compare with the five-day Jiao/Offering that prestigious temples carry out, but it is the climax of events in the Zhendong Gong's yearly calendar, conducted on the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth days of the tenth lunar month. The fifteenth day is also the Lower-primordial Day (*xiayuan jie* 下元節) and the birthday of the Great Emperor of the Water Office (Shuiguan dadi 水官大帝). Several months earlier, when I first visited the temple, the second Supreme Emperor possessed Master Lin in order to announce the date of the temple fair. About a month or so prior to the ceremony, the request for donations for the ceremony was placed in the wall of the temple on a large red sheet. Donations were to be made in the form of purchasing a "bushel" (*dou* 斗). These "bushels" were of various prices; the most expensive one was the "Jade Emperor Bushel" priced at 36,000 NTD (roughly \$1,333).

One week before the festival, the temple stopped holding regular séances. The Gods possessed Master Lin only for the purpose of making festival-related announcements, for example, the auspicious hour for the initiation of rituals. The night before, several male members came to put together a temporary altar. They covered the altar with

red cloth and arranged all the “bushels” on it. Each “bushel” denoted a donor who could be an individual, a family, or a company. The “bushels” were red iron cans: each containing raw rice, a ruler, a pair of scissors, and a mirror. The mirror was placed in the middle of a red paperboard, which I was told had been cut in the shape of a flaming sun. In addition, there were rectangular paperboards in the “bushels” on which were written the types of the bushels, the donors’ names, addresses and the names of the beneficiaries. On the front side of the altar, there was a black table for those who recited the sutra. The area between the table and the altar was a forbidden area. The altar took up most of the temple; only a narrow corridor was maintained for entry and exit from the living area at the back of the temple. Temple members sat on the sidewalk outside the temple.

On the morning of the first day, at the divinely chosen auspicious hour, firecrackers were set off in the temple. The altar was prepared and blocked with a red ribbon, forming a forbidden area, which people call *tan* 壇, the altar. No one was allowed access except those who recite scriptures. At nine o’clock, a group of four women and one man arrived. Three of the four women recited scriptures and the other two people played musical instruments: a small drum, a small bell, and an electric piano. On the first afternoon, a young man came to replace the man playing the bell and drum. Yet instead of playing the instruments, the new man read the sutra, and one of the women who was reading sutra earlier in the day now played the drum and bell instead. During the later two days, I saw a new face in the group every half day. Nevertheless, they all knew each other; they have worked together for longer than a decade.

The Zhendong Gong paid the group reciting scriptures forty thousand NTD, plus two meals a day, roughly a hundred U.S. dollars per person per day. They maintained several times that they did not recite sutra for a living. The man who came on the first morning could afford a vacation in the United States. One of the women recalled that she started reciting scriptures twenty years ago after learning at a temple in her neighborhood. A teacher showed them how to read the sutra. It is not simple reading, she maintained. The verse part of a scripture has to be sung; one must be familiar with the melody. The prose part is not easy either. One has to follow the beats given by the drum; those not familiar with the scripture cannot catch the rest when reading together. The first sutra for beginners is usually “Pumen pin” 普門品 from the *Lotus Sutra*; it is also the most frequently recited scripture, according to the scripture- reciting group.

The scripture for the first day was *Jin'gang chan* 金剛懺 (*Diamond Repentance*), three fat volumes. Those for the second and third days were the *Yaoshi chan* 藥師懺 (*Repentance of the Medicine Master*) and *Jin-gang jing* 金剛經 (*Diamond Sutra*). Before reading the sutra itself, they read a *shu* 疏 (announcement) and the names of the donors. A piece of yellow paper listing the donors' names was folded into a narrow strip and placed on the table for the announcement so the gods would take notice of the generosity.

They recited scriptures from nine to five o'clock. The program was divided into four sessions separated by a two-hour lunch-and-nap break at noon and a short break around 10:30 AM and 3:30 PM respectively. During the recitation, at least one temple member had to kneel in front of the altar. During the first session of the first day, it was Uncle Luzhu and his wife who knelt there.

On the second night, the temple had to present blood sacrifice – a pig and a goat, both donated by believers. I went with the Chairman, A-tuan, and a couple of other core members of the temple to a pig farm for the promised pig. On the way there, A-tuan told me the story of the pig-farm owner. The story began last year, when the daughter of the owner had problems with her husband. Somehow the old man heard about Master Lin and came to the Zhendong Gong for help. He vowed that if harmonious relations could be restored, he would present the gods with a pig. The young couple eventually reconciled, and the old man fulfilled his vow by donating a pig to the temple at last year's temple festival that weighed 1,000 *jin* (600 kilograms). This year, the family members had not undergone any crisis but their pigs were under a threat. Swine plague (foot-and-mouth disease) had broken out in Taiwan. In the story, it was thought miraculous that the pigs became healthy, an event they believed was certainly due to the protection of the Supreme Emperors of Dark Heaven. To show their gratitude, they donated another pig this year. The story was finished before we arrived at the pig farm, but the conversation had to continue to avoid awkward silence, so we went through all kinds of topics, government policy, Taiwan's future, Chinese religion, their life stories, my life story. The most important thing was to keep the conversation going. When we finally reached our destination, in the middle of a mountain, I was amazed at how far the fame of Master Lin had spread.

On the third and the final day of the temple festival, the caterer came in the morning to prepare the night's banquet. Around 5:00 PM, the scripture reciting finished. The offering table in front of the altar

by now was covered by the offerings brought to the temple during the past three days. Master Lin entered trance. His disciples appeared to expect this would happen: they already had the Jigong costume prepared and put it on Master Lin right away. In trance, Master Lin patrolled the offering table with a satisfied smile. Then he sat at the table and threw candies in the air that only a few children picked up unenthusiastically. At the end, the temple members had to clean up the sweets themselves.

After the scripture readers finished, Master Lin came out of the trance and the temple members were summoned together. We all stood outside the temple and bowed to the altar. Then the temple members started to remove the “bushels” and took apart the altar. They dumped out the rice from each bushel into plastic bags and marked each bag with the bushel-owner’s name. By the time all the rice and altar decorations were packed away, it was about seven o’clock, and every banquet table was filled.

In 1997, there were twelve tables at the banquet; roughly 120 people, averaging ten people a table. Though not especially extravagant, the banquet was hardly something that an ordinary family could enjoy everyday. In addition, those who purchased the bushel-lanterns had to come to collect the rice in their “bushels” anyway. As A-tuan said, many people whom he never saw during the entire year appeared at the banquet. The dinner continued for about two hours. After the meal, those who purchased the bushel-lanterns went to the temple to collect their portions of rice. The rice was blessed by gods and would bring blessing to those who consumed it. Tea was served at the temple. People, standing or sitting, chatted with each other as they were waiting for the rice; no one seemed in a hurry. The night was still young.

Major events like temple festivals have more functions than just the performance of rituals. It is an opportunity for temples to raise funds and an occasion for temple members to reinforce their bond with the temple. The preparation of the *fahui* requires teamwork. The core members sleep and eat in the temple during the period. They practically live together, and such close contact contributes to building a bond among them. During the preparation period, numerous trivial details need to be taken care of and this provides a good chance for would-be core members to demonstrate their sincerity to the temple community. In addition, during the scripture-reciting and other rituals, temple members must be present, or else, “it does not look good 不好看.” Temple members feel that they should come to the temple, even

if they are not obligated to. However, after coming to the temple and paying respect to the gods, there really is very little for them to do. There is no séance in which they could participate so all they could do was to sit down, drink tea, and chat. Yet, it is exactly this interaction that preserves the emotional ties among the members. The connection between the temple and its members is maintained not only by their beliefs but also by human companionship.

CONCLUSION

Master Lin started his religious career from an altar in his own household. This obscure private temple developed into a distinguished local temple, but he lost control over it and started again. He and his newly recruited followers plan to “recover” the glory of the Zhendong Gong, in other words, to build a big temple or “palace (*gongting*),” a term the temple members use to refer to temples in the traditional palace style. Since their gods are numinous, the worshippers are convinced that as long as they are loyal to the gods they will receive divine help in building a large temple in their honor. This is their goal. With the successful example in Yunlin, the members have every reason to believe they can make it again.

People come to a spirit-medium-led temple to attend the séance for consolation. They request advice about daily life, misfortunes, illness, nightmares, or when they face a turning point in their lives or careers. These are all suitable reasons to ask gods for advice. If the gods are responsive, they take their friends or relatives and come together. In the Zhendong Palace, all the members I talked with have either induced others to come or were persuaded by others to come or both. Friends and relatives may run into each other at the temple. In the case of the Uncle Luzhu’s mother-in-law who visits Taipei occasionally, visiting the spirit-medium is part of her “tourist route.” Séance can be another occasion, just like weddings, funerals, and traditional holidays, for friends, relatives, and neighbors to socialize. In this sense, going to séance is more than a religious activity; it is simply a way of life.

The Zhedong Gong, as well as other spirit-medium-led temples, relies on its head spirit-medium to attract believers. The attraction of the mediums relies on their ability to serve as spokesmen for the gods without concern to religious doctrine. Despite the fact that Master Lin uses retribution and the karma-of-three-generations to explain misfortune, his theology is not intellectually rigorous. As a matter of fact, Master Lin and other members emphasize fate 有緣; I heard from more

than one person at the Zhendong Gong that if you have the fate, you will come; if you come, you will understand what is going on (and believe it). This is actually similar to the missionary way of the New New Religion in Japan, which prospered after the Second World War.³⁶

To ensure the return of its members, the temple, in addition to producing miracles through routine séance, which everyone can hear about, also needs to create occasions that motivate the members to visit. Even a small temple like the Zhendong Gong, can have members who come from far away, thanks to cars, motorcycles, and other forms of transportation. Larger events, such as the annual temple fair, can function as a reunion. Temple fairs are traditionally a way to unite the community around the local temple. Private temple fairs like that of the Zhendong Gong also contribute to the cohesiveness of a community, but this community is not limited to within a certain neighborhood; it is beyond a geographical boundary. In urban areas, the neighborhood is no longer equivalent to the community anyway. Migrants attracted to big cities like Taipei do not necessarily identify with their neighbors, and vice versa. Temples like the Zhendong Gong help to form a new type of community whose bond is built primarily on religious devotion, while emotional bonds among members are created in temple activities. In addition, important activities like temple fairs are also an occasion for fund-raising. Therefore, by carrying out traditional community-temple functions, a spirit-medium-led private temple can accumulate spiritual and monetary capital, and grow.

A spirit-medium's temple can forge a community, create a sense of belonging, and produce attractions other than merely religious ones. People such as A-tuan and the chairman find self-fulfillment. Small temples like the Zhendong Gong can hardly provide as many resources to local politics as community temples do. Therefore, the committee board of a small temple is less likely to belong to the political arena of the local elite. Ordinary temple members, as long as they demonstrate their ability and enthusiasm, can easily become core members, sit on the committee board, take charge of the temple business, and believe that themselves are recognized by gods. In the meantime, the temple benefits from the talent of the faithful. Only by having talented executives can a temple enjoy stable growth.

³⁶ The New New Religion movement was first addressed by Ichiro Hori; see Hori, Joseph Kitagawa and Alan L. Miller, eds., *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P.), 1962. Wiston B. Davis once joined a sect of the New New Religion for the purpose of research and argues that "come and see" is the missionary method; see his *Dojo: Magic and Exorcism in Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1980).

Taiwan has been recognized for its development in modernization in recent decades and it continues to urbanize. The percentage of urban dwellers has maintained growth since 1920. In the 1980s, over half of the Taiwanese population lived in cities of over 100,000.³⁷ The Greater Taipei area (including Taipei county) is filled with migrants from afar who left behind homes and temples, places in which they grew up.³⁸ Life is rarely easy for new immigrants. When they encounter problems not serious enough to warrant traveling all the way back to their home-town temples, the temple next door takes on greater significance. In addition, the spirit-medium provides an immediate, direct divine response that they feel trustworthy. It should be no surprise that the spirit-medium temples can attract a good number of believers.

Spirit-medium cults have sufficient potential clients; popular religious tradition provides them with knowledge of the routine of manage a temple. Their loose structure is an advantage in attracting and maintaining the talent that voluntary religious groups need. There is no mystery as to why they have been growing and most likely will keep growing. They certainly deserve more scholarly attention.

³⁷ Alden Speare, Jr., Paul K. C. Liu, and Ching-lung Tsay, eds., *Urbanization and Development: The Rural-Urban Transition in Taiwan* (Boulder: Westview Press), 1988.

³⁸ Chen Zhendong 陳震東, "Taipei shi renkou zhi fenbu yu jiegou" 臺北市人口之分佈與結構, *Taipei wenxian* 臺北文獻 69 (1984), pp. 57-92.